

Humane Society of West Michigan Feline Foster Manual



Table of Contents

Contacts and Locations	3
Protocols and Procedures	
A. Foster Agreement	4
B. Medical/Emergency Protocol	5
C. Vacation/Going Out Of Town	7
D. Foster Supply Pickup	7
E. Foster Animal Quarantine	7
F. Bites	8
Preparing for your Foster Cat	
A. Supplies	9
B. Setting Up Space to Foster	10
C. Bringing your Foster(s) home	10
Daily Care	
A. Feeding	11
B. Cleaning	11
C. Monitoring	11
D. Playtime and Enrichment	12
Behavior	
A. Socialization How-To for Cats and Kittens	14
B. Scratching	17
C. Inappropriate Litter Box Usage	17
Neonatal Care	
A. Supplies	18
B. Set Up	18
C. Bottle Feeding	19
D. Stimulation	22
E. Weight Tracking and Daily Observations	22
F. Weaning	22
G. Fostering Moms and Kittens	23
Veterinary and Medical Care	
A. Routine Medical Care	26
B. Surgery Steps	27
C. Post-Operative Care	30
D. Common Non-Emergency Medical Concerns	32
Medical Informational Sheets	
a. Feline Panleukopenia, a.k.a “Panleuk”	33
b. Diarrhea in Shelter Animals	35
c. Upper Respiratory Infection in Shelter Animals	37
d. Conjunctivitis in Shelter Animals	39
e. Ear Infections vs Ear Mites	40
f. How to Administer Medications	42
Adoption Process from Foster to Forever Home	45

Contacts

Foster Coordinator

Aurora Lesert-Lewis

alewis@hswestmi.org

Contact for: Foster animal/supply pickups and drop offs, general foster or behavior questions, adoption questions

Foster Veterinary Technician

Sabrina Anderson

sanderson@hswestmi.org

Contact for: Medical questions/concerns, surgery scheduling, vaccine/medical appointment scheduling, medical supplies

Foster Facebook Group

Join our community of fellow fosters for a network of support, as well as a place to share your new foster pet and your fostering experience with other like-minded people!

facebook.com/groups/HSWMFoster

Locations

Foster Doors - When you arrive please pull around to the back of the HSWM facility, the parking lot is to the left. You will see the double set of foster doors (pictured here) with a designated parking space. These doors are to the right of our garage. You will also see our supply pick and return cabinets in front.



When to go here: Medical appointments (vaccines, exams, etc.) with the Foster Veterinary Technician,. Also foster animal pick up/drop off, and foster supply pick up/drop offs.

Admitting Doors - These doors are to the left of our Main Entrance, on the side of the building.

When to go here: Surgery drop off/pick ups, or medical appointments to see Vet Staff (this will be specified at the making of your appointment).

Protocols and Procedures

Foster Agreement

1. I understand that I am the primary caretaker. I will provide adequate food, water, social interaction, potty breaks, litter cleaning, and essential daily needs.
2. I agree that I will not relinquish custody of the foster pet to anyone except HSWM, even temporarily.
3. I understand that my foster pet may cry, whine, be fearful, be shy, be sick, be depressed, have had past trauma or abuse, not know commands, may chew or scratch my belongings, and needs my love and compassion.
4. I understand foster pets are only temporarily in my care and remain the property of HSWM and are subject to relinquishment at any time. Failure to return a Foster Pet will result in termination as a foster and a "do not adopt" status and/or legal action.
5. I agree to follow HSWM Emergency Contact Protocol immediately, when a foster pet is experiencing a medical/health emergency. I understand that my foster pet may need to be brought to HSWM for medical evaluation as soon as possible. I understand a decision will then be made by HSWM if the animal must stay at the shelter or return to the foster home.
6. I understand private veterinary costs incurred by the foster parent WILL NOT be reimbursed by HSWM.
7. I understand that HSWM WILL NOT reimburse me for any expenses related to food, toys, litter, medication, and daily care items associated with my foster pet.
8. If my foster pet escapes my home or becomes lost, I will immediately notify the HSWM Emergency Contact given to me as well as the HSWM Foster Coordinator.
9. I will not take my foster pet to a groomer
10. I will not take my foster dog to a dog park/beach without prior permission from the HSWM Foster Coordinator.
11. I agree to keep my foster dog on a 6ft. non-retractable leash when outside.
12. I agree that I will not allow my foster cat outdoors.
13. I will not give my foster cat or kitten a bath before speaking to the HSWM Foster Coordinator.
14. I will notify the HSWM Foster Coordinator immediately if my foster pet exhibits aggressive behavior.
15. I understand that my foster animal's health is not guaranteed and may break with illness while in my care.
16. I understand my personal companion animals could be exposed to illness and I understand that it is highly recommended to quarantine my foster animal for at least 10 days to prevent exposure to my household.
17. I understand that I am not allowed to administer ANY medication to my foster animal without permission from the HSWM Foster Veterinary Technician or HSWM Veterinarian.
18. I understand that it may be necessary for HSWM Medical Team to make a decision of euthanasia based on severe illness or behavior.
19. I understand HSWM is not responsible for damage to personal property and I waive my rights to make any claim of liability for any injury or damages.
20. I agree to return my foster kit containing supplies provided by HSWM. If I fail to return my supply kit, I may be charged a fee of \$10. I understand when I return my supply kit, this allows another shelter pet the opportunity for foster care.
21. I understand that I must communicate with the HSWM Foster Coordinator and Foster Veterinary Technician in a timely manner and keep my contact information up to date.
22. I agree to help build my foster's adoption profile by taking frequent pictures and sending them to the HSWM Foster Coordinator.

Foster Medical Concerns and Emergency Protocol

During business hours, Wednesday-Friday 8am-4pm, Saturday 8am-2pm:

Green section (Monitor) and Yellow section (urgent): Email
fostervettech@hswestmi.org

Red section (Emergency): Seek immediate medical attention for stabilization ONLY at shelter if we are in, ER if we are not

For after hours, weekends and holidays:

Yellow (Urgent) and Red (Emergency) sections: Submit a request through <https://form.jotform.com/HSWM/foster-emergencies> . Inquiries submitted via JotForm will be monitored throughout the day from 8am-8pm. It may take a couple of hours for you to receive a response. In the meantime, please follow the guidelines below.

Emergency - Submit a JotForm and go to ER immediately

Seek immediate medical attention for **STABILIZATION** at:

Animal Emergency Hospital: 3260 Plainfield Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49525

Animal Emergency and Specialty Hospital: 6820 Edgeview Ave SW. Byron Center MI 49315

******If you go to BluePearl, we are unable to reimburse any care******

Unresponsive/unable to wake - Crashing Kitten - Respiratory distress - Repetitive seizures - Severe laceration/life threatening wound - Toxin ingestion - Hit by car - Bloating abdomen and vomiting in large breed dog

Urgent - Submit a JotForm

Medical staff will respond to your JotForm request in a timely manner

Persistent or bloody vomiting - Minor wounds - Limping - Severe diarrhea - Decreased appetite - Male cats straining to urinate - Lost animal - Ingestion of foreign body

Monitor - Email Foster Vet Tech

The Foster Veterinary Technician will respond during regular business hours

Congestion - Nasal/Ocular discharge - Mild diarrhea - Infrequent vomiting - Coughing - Hair loss - Fleas - Medication refills - Eye injuries/issues - Frequent urination

If you must go to one of the Animal Emergency Hospitals:

Please let them know you are fostering through the Humane Society of West Michigan. The animal will be put under our HSWM profile and one of our staff members will be contacted in regards to their care.

Fosters cannot do the following:

- Make medical decisions (i.e., diagnostic testing or euthanasia) in regards to the animal
- Claim the animal as their own unless you are adopting them

If you are bringing an animal to the emergency hospital, it is for **stabilization only** or immediate care for the medical emergencies in the red section. Most diagnostic testing and/or medication dispensing we can do in house, alleviating work on the hospital staff as well as helping alleviate the cost of the hospital bill. **Any diagnostic testing or other medical decisions at the hospital MUST be approved by a STAFF member of HSWM.** We don't want our fosters burdened with hard decisions that may need to be made, so we ask that you just bring them to the hospital and let us handle the rest for you. If you decide to go home instead of waiting at the hospital, we can update you on their care if desired.

Most emergency hospitals require a deposit of a certain percentage of the estimated bill for treatment and possible hospitalization. You should not have to pay anything unless prior arrangements were made. The hospital should invoice HSWM directly.

If you receive hospital medical records of your foster animal and/or an itemized invoice, please bring this to HSWM when you are able. If you aren't able to bring them in, or don't have them on hand, we can call and have the file emailed to us.

Vacation/Going Out Of Town

When you have a trip planned or an out of town stay planned, your HSWM foster pet **cannot** be left home alone, travel with you, or be left with a different caregiver without first receiving approval from the Foster Coordinator.

If at any time you are leaving town for an extended period of time, you **MUST** contact the Foster Coordinator. This should not be done last minute. The Foster Coordinator will schedule your foster pets return or coordinate a transfer of foster care to another foster home. The Foster Caregiver, whose signature is on the Foster Agreement is the responsible party and at no time can that responsibility be transferred to another person without prior approval.

If you have an emergency that requires you to leave town suddenly, please contact the Emergency Contact as soon as possible to make arrangements for your shelter pet.

Short notice animal returns

If you need to return your foster animal(s) sooner than expected due to a personal emergency arising, or things just aren't working out as expected (i.e., animals not getting along), please contact our Foster Coordinator. Please note that response time will vary, especially during the holidays, but we will accommodate your request to return your foster on short notice the best we can!

Foster Supply Pickup

All food and supplies will be provided to you when you foster a HSWM shelter pet. If you are running low on food or supplies, please alert the Foster Coordinator and allow for 24-48 hour time for response. All food, supply, and medication pickups are scheduled. Please do not arrive unannounced to the HSWM facility for supplies. This is especially important during high-volume kitten season as there are numerous foster animals and foster parents requesting supply pickups. A pickup time and day will be scheduled with the Foster Coordinator. Supply pickups will be left outside of the Foster doors inside the blue box with your name on it.

If you are running low on **medical** supplies (medications, special diet food, etc.) please alert the Foster Veterinary Technician at least a week in advance to let her know you are running out. They may need to place an order for more of the supply or confirm with the doctor whether or not to continue a prescription. **Some medications cannot be stopped abruptly so it is very important to let us know you are running low before it is gone** so we can refill the prescription in time.

If you run out of supplies due to not alerting us soon enough and you buy your own supplies, please understand that we will not be able to reimburse you for your purchase and it will be treated like a donation.

Foster Animal Quarantine

We know it is super exciting to have a new animal in your home and we're excited you took them in! However, it is important for both their mental and physical health, as well as any other animals in the home, that they are kept separate from other animals for at least 10 days. We cannot guarantee that the animals going home with you won't become sick. It is not uncommon for the stress of environment change to cause your foster pet to break with an illness like diarrhea or an upper respiratory infection. Keeping them in a quarantine will make cleaning and disinfecting the affected area easier instead of allowing them to free roam in your house. It will also keep your personal pets safe.

Even while they are quarantined, it is recommended that your personal pets of the same species are up to date on vaccines. If your foster animals break with an illness in your home, even with the best cleaning precautions, it does not make it impossible for you to accidentally transmit an illness to your personal animals. Being up to date on vaccines decreases the chances of them contracting that disease or illness, and if they do come down with the same illness, it will not be as severe as if they weren't vaccinated.

Once those 10 days of quarantine are up, please contact the Foster Coordinator for approval to introduce them to the rest of the house and personal pets.

Please understand that if your personal animal becomes sick, we cannot treat them and you will need to go to your primary veterinarian for treatment.

Bites

If you or another person is bitten by your foster animal, you must report it to us. By law, we have to report every bite to Kent County Animal Shelter, no matter how small. If it is severe enough that you need to seek medical care right away, please call the emergency phone number to let the Shelter Manager know about the situation, and where you are seeking medical care.

Cat bites are serious, shallow or deep, they can easily become infected due to the high number of bacteria inside a cat's mouth. It is highly recommended to seek medical attention if you are bitten, have a doctor perform a thorough examination of the bite wound, and take any antibiotics that will be provided. If able, clean your bite out thoroughly with warm water and soap, and follow any recommendations for after-care provided by your doctor.

HSWM cannot provide medical coverage or treatment for bites received from foster pets. Please seek medical attention from your personal practitioner

Preparing For Your Foster Cat

THANK YOU FOR FOSTERING! We are incredibly grateful to you for opening your home and your heart for these cats and kittens in need and giving them a break from the shelter. Here are some important ways that you can help your fosters feel comfortable and stay safe while staying with you, as well as preparing yourself!

Keep your fosters separate from your personal animal companions. Quarantine period is 10 days, at minimum. Young kittens are not fully vaccinated and are particularly vulnerable to illness and parasite exposure. Exposing them to home companions is a major risk to them. Ensure that your animal companions are up to date on their vaccines, as well as flea and tick and heartworm prevention. This will protect your pets from any exposure to illness or parasites from your foster pet.

Prepare to commit to bringing your foster kittens back to HSWM for vaccine boosters every 2 weeks as well as keeping them socialized, enriched, and happy the entire time they are with you! Feed only the “diet appropriate” food, or formula, given by HSWM.

Also be prepared to commit assisting with your foster’s adoption by providing photos and personality information throughout the foster pet’s time with you. Please send these items to the Foster Coordinator, so you can help your fosters find the perfect forever homes! At the end of the manual there will be tips on how to best provide content!

Above all--enjoy all of the laughter and smiles your foster pet provides!

Supplies

You will be provided the following items at the time you pick up your foster, whether it’s a kitten or a cat:

- Blankets
- Bed
- Dry food
- Canned food
- Treats
- Toys - various textures
- Catnip
- Daily observation booklet
- Litter
- Litter box
- Litter scoop
- Something to scratch
- Cat dancer or a cat wand
- Medications, if any
- Food and Water Bowls - More for multiple cats
- Weight chart (kittens)

If you decide to buy your own supplies, we will not be able to reimburse your purchase. Rather, it is treated like a donation, which we appreciate!

Setting Up Your Space to Foster

Now that you are taking on a foster animal, you need to figure out where you can keep them separate from the rest of the house. This is especially important for shy cats as if you introduce them to too much space too quickly, they can become overwhelmed and their socialization progress can reverse. They also often find, and use, the smallest, hardest places to reach as hiding spots, which makes it difficult to monitor and socialize them.

Prepare a safe, warm space for your foster. A spare bedroom or bathroom will do well! This will help you clean up after them and disinfect the area as needed. Offer plenty of “nap nooks”, toys, and soft bedding. Remove any hazards such as cords, objects that can be knocked over, plants, garbage cans, etc...

Keep in mind that they may take their time warming up, especially if they are coming to your home due to being undersocialized. Accessible hiding options should always be provided. Allow them to interact on their own terms when they are ready, unless you are given a separate socialization plan.

Adding calming elements to their space is highly beneficial for decompression! These items include: Feliway, Relax My Cat Music on Youtube, classical music, decreased noise level, natural sunlight, and reading aloud to them at their level.

Bringing Your Foster(s) Home

Start slow and allow for decompression from the shelter. Moving is stressful for everyone, and moving into a new home with new people will likely cause even the most social cats a bit of stress. Go slowly on your first few days and let them explore at their own pace. If they are undersocial, remember to start small in the area you’re keeping them.

Chill out/Decompression time: Your new foster is going to need quiet time in your house before doing anything else, even kittens. Basically, they need to CHILL OUT, which we call “decompression time”. You should already have the quiet area for your new foster to decompress in set-up by the time they come home with you and get let out of their carrier. Make sure the foster is provided with lots of ways to be stimulated mentally (toys, treats, interactive toy games, etc). You can also have music playing 24/7 in the room, specifically the classical music listed above.

Daily Care

Whether they are completely adjusted to their new foster home or not, your foster pet needs daily care! Their level of comfort will determine what type of enrichment they receive, but all foster pets still need their basic needs met, regardless of their level of socialization.

Feeding

They need fresh food provided daily, both wet and dry if that is the food that was provided to you. Please only feed the appropriate diet that was given to you. Kittens should have dry food always available whereas adult cats may need to be limited if they are overweight or even a healthy weight. We don't want them getting too chunky and funky in your care! Kittens should get canned food offered at least twice a day, more if they are younger kittens or underweight. For kittens, offer multiple different bowls for multiple kittens to ensure they all have access to their food and aren't fighting over food with each other.

Cleaning

Their litter box needs to be scooped *at least* once a day. This may need to be done more often if you have a large litter of kittens, or they're having diarrhea. No one wants to get into a dirty, stinky box! Ensure they have easy access to the litter box at all times. Their box should be placed as far away from their food and water as possible.

Some cats, but especially kittens, can and will make messes. This can include spilling food everywhere, kicking litter and/or fecal matter out of the box, soiling their blankets with bodily fluids, or their water bowl if that's near their bedding.

Ensure their environment is also clean everyday, by washing their soiled bedding and sweeping up litter and food they've kicked around. If the litter box has fecal matter stuck up the walls, please let us know! We can do a litter box swap and give you a new, clean box and take the dirty one back to clean. If a box is too dirty, that can deter cats from using it and may cause them to go outside of their box in cleaner areas. Again, no one wants to use a dirty, stinky box!

Monitoring

During times of feeding, cleaning, and any other interactions with them, you should always be making mental notes about how your foster pet is doing. You need to monitor their wellbeing, whether they have any signs of illness, if they are eating enough, and what their general attitude is. You should have been provided a daily monitor chart and a weight chart if your foster is underweight, or you have kittens. Please make sure to fill this out daily and send weekly to the Foster Veterinary Technician!

Playtime and Enrichment

Your foster pet will need playtime and enrichment every day, especially while they are quarantined their first couple weeks! Some adults will have no desire to play, but still appreciate mental enrichment.

What exactly is enrichment? Enrichment are activities that provide stimulation to the brain and allow for species typical behavior (including foraging, scratching, using their nose, ect.), It provides relief and a distraction, adds quality to their space, and the opportunity for play if they want it.

Kittens naturally want to play, as most know! They want to run and sprint, tumble and wrestle with others, and explore. They can find entertainment by playing with each other, but it is still important to provide playtime with people. They should have at least two play sessions a day with you, especially while quarantined. Slither a wand toy around like a snake, roll noisy balls around, or toss or hide mice around the room for them to find. Most kittens will quickly engage in play with people, which helps continue to socialize them with us and build positive experiences with us.

Enrichment can go hand in hand with playtime, but there are some more mellow enrichments that adults may like more than playtime and should be offered. Enrichments can include all the senses: scent, sight, touch, hearing, and taste. It also can include foraging, which helps cats engage in natural behavior.

Scent Enrichment*

- Toys infused with various scents (like vanilla, valerian, lavender, catnip)
 - *Do not use essential oils*
- Silvervine chew sticks
- Scents placed on paper balls, soft toys, or cotton balls

Visual enrichment

- Bird feeders on windows
- Cat TV (10-15 minutes)
- Hanging mobiles
- Motion toys
- Feather wand toys

Touch enrichment

- Zoom Groom
- Brushes
- Toothbrushes as a brush
 - *This reminds kittens of a mother's tongue*
- Leaves in a cardboard box to play in
- Different textures
 - *Carpet remnants, cardboard, sticks, leaves, etc...*

Sound enrichment

- Music
 - *Relax My Cat music*
 - *David Teie music with purring*
 - *Calm, classical music*
- Bird sounds
- Reading aloud to a cat, especially a shy cat

Taste (food) enrichment**

- Tuna or wet food in a toilet paper roll
- Egg carton with a treat or food in each space
- Lickable treat sticks
- Chicken baby food on a spoon

Foraging enrichment***

- Treats hidden in a paper ball
- Treats in a treat egg
- Food puzzle
- Shallow tissue box with treats and small, different texture ball toys inside
- Cat grass
- Bottle caps with a dollop of tuna inside

Full list of appropriate scents: Valerian (can also have a lasting, calming effect), lavender, vanilla, coffee, silvertop, almond, catnip and some cats enjoy rosemary, oregano, and parsley. **Do not use essential oils, and check to make sure your valerian doesn't include essential oils if using a diffuser.*

***Lick mats are available upon request - these are used to put spreadable wet food or treats on so the cats can work on licking it off the mats*

****Snuffle mats and food puzzles are available upon request - you can use these to hide treats in and encourage their natural, foraging behavior.*

Feel free to mix up enrichments! If you do only one enrichment, it can quickly become boring and the cat can become disinterested. If you change what enrichment you do every day, it will continue to engage and stimulate them both mentally and physically. If you want a schedule similar to what we use in the shelter for enrichment, one can be provided! It's a long list so you're bound to find at least one thing that your foster may like. If they just want to sit and snuggle, especially when they can come out of their quarantined area, that's okay to provide as well!

Behavior

Socialization: How To for Cats and Kittens

The prime socialization time period for kittens is 2-7 weeks old. This isn't just socialization with human adults. This includes other cats, dogs, and children. Yes, children have their own category! They are their own species in a kitten's eyes. 2-7 weeks old is when they are starting to discover their world and learn "how to be a cat", which is why it is essential to socialize them. This is the time to handle them, let them learn how to play with each other as well as us, and make every new experience they have a positive one!

Start Small

Too much new territory is overwhelming for most cats so it's important to set them up in one small room in the beginning. A bathroom may be best because bedrooms are likely to have more hard to reach hiding spots. If using a bedroom, you may need to block off the area under the bed. While hiding spots can help your cat or kittens feel safe, you also need to be able to interact with them even when they're hiding. A cardboard box on it's side makes for an ideal hiding spot for your cat. A large dog crate mostly covered with a blanket and set up with their supplies inside also works. If you can keep the large dog crate off the ground and higher up, that would be the most ideal situation!

We always say "don't force interactions" or "allow them to approach at their own pace." However, confining them to a cage means forcing it a little bit at first. The more space you give undersocial kittens and cats, the longer it will take to socialize them - they will want to stay as far away from you as possible - so getting close enough to introduce play therapy or bring a spoonful of food to their face may be impossible.

Give them at least 24 hours to decompress when you first bring them home, and have food always available during this period. During daily care and cleaning, before you even start any play therapy and socialization, drop treats for them so they can start associating you with yummy food.

Be Patient

It may be hard to resist petting the cute little fluffs, but please do not touch them until they are comfortable playing with you and eating off a spoon. Too much stimulation too soon can "flood" the kitten or cat and cause adverse effects. Once your kitten or cat is confined and has had time to adjust to their new space, you can start introducing socialization techniques and therapies.

Eating in your presence

Starting to offer food only during these sessions can help in motivating them to eat in your presence. Offer the food to them and sit near them, but be aware of your own body language! You should sit on the floor at a distance they're comfortable with (across the room if you have to!), move slowly, have your body angled to the side with your elbows in and your voice quiet. Don't touch, stare, reach, or crowd them.

If they do not want to eat in your presence, even if you are across the room, they may not be ready for this step. Instead, to help them become more accustomed to your presence first with food, you can spend some time in the room with them by reading aloud in a soft voice. You may also gently toss them some treats (we've found that most cats enjoy the Temptations brand) during this time.

Additional notes

- *Do not use this method on growing young kittens that constantly need food available, kittens aged 5 months and younger.*

Play Therapy

Never force your foster out of hiding, simply get on their level and dangle a string toy or Cat Dancer from side to side or in front of them. They might just want to watch it move for the first few sessions and that's okay! A session of play therapy should last only a few minutes and aim for at least three sessions daily.

Follow interactive play sessions with a treat! Turkey or chicken flavored Gerber baby food seems to be the socialization tool of choice among kittens, but it can work with adult cats too. In the beginning, mix the baby food with a little warm water to enhance the smell and make it irresistible, then offer it on a spoon. In the cat world, reaching out with an appendage is usually done in aggression, so reaching out with a spoonful of really good food can help desensitize kittens and cats to human arms and hands. Give only a few spoonfuls per session.

Additional notes:

- *Do not fling the string toys or cat dancer at the cat! They may just want to watch it at first and that's okay!*

Introducing Touch

You can start introducing touch while spoon feeding as well so the kitten or cat is distracted. Rather than reaching over their head, sneak your hand up behind them and pet gently along their back. If they draw back, stop petting but continue feeding so the interaction ends on a positive note. Try again next time!

Another time you can introduce touch is during play therapy. If your cat engages with the toy, you can start using it to slowly "pet" the cat's cheeks from a safe distance. Once the cat learns that being "petted" by the toy feels good and they start leaning into it, slowly offer your closed hand. Extend your index finger and

allow them to sniff it. If they growl or hiss, they need more time. If they appear relaxed, go ahead and pet them slowly on the cheeks and chin.

A final training technique you can use once your foster pet starts to initiate contact with you, is by feeding them a treat every time they touch their nose to your finger. Sitting on the floor, offer food on your finger. Once they are eating off your finger, offer your finger without food. Every time they touch your foodless finger, give them a tiny reward of their favorite food or treat.

Additional notes:

- *Don't pet along their body until they start coming out of hiding or show relaxed, soft body posture during petting.*
- *Use the pads of your fingers on their cheeks and chin while petting, using short, light pressure strokes.*
- *Reward them every time they let you touch them!*
- *Always monitor their body language and stop what you are doing if they show signs of becoming uncomfortable.*
- *High value treats: Kong Liver Spray, whipped cream, baby food, canned tuna, and cooked chicken*

Picking up and Holding

Some cats don't like to be picked up or held and never will, no matter how much we work with them or how old they are. This is more common in adult cats. If they don't want to be picked up or have this skill worked on, don't push it! Please email us if you would like to work on them with being picked up and held.

Socializing with Others

The more friends and family who can help socialize, the better! If it's only you doing the socializing, the cat or kitten will warm up to you but may regress in new environments or around new people. When introducing a new person, put a Cat Dancer in their hand and have them start from square one like you did - don't let them go right to petting unless the kitten approaches them first! Please ask the Foster Coordinator about introducing them to other cats and dogs for additional socialization, especially when it comes to kittens.

Scratching

Scratching is part of a cat's nature, and their nails are part of their wellbeing! HSWM never recommends declawing as it is seen as inhumane. Cats play with their nails, regulate their mental wellbeing through their claws, and depend on them to move about normally. Cats *need* to be able to scratch something!

They should have multiple scratching options of different textures and sizes whenever possible. Without this, they will find things to scratch that you don't want them to scratch. It is important to put out the scratching items you have been provided in your foster supplies. They also need the ability to stretch while scratching. If you have a scratching post, that would be perfect! Otherwise, a scratching pad laid out on the floor that is large enough for them to stretch out onto with their nails is a great substitute.

Inappropriate Litter Box Usage

More often than not, inappropriate litter box usage (going outside the box) has a possible medical issue creating the desire to not use the box. The most common example is a urinary tract infection, which makes them associate pain with using the box so they stop using the box. If this is noticed, please contact the Foster Veterinary Technician.

Once medical issues are ruled out, this becomes a potential behavior issue. Here are some possible problems and solutions.

Issue	Possible Solution
Litter boxes are too dirty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Replace the whole box ● Replace the litter ● Scoop more than once a day
Too many cats/kittens and not enough boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add more litter boxes (rule of thumb is 1 per cat + 1)
Litter texture/smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use a fine grain litter ● Use unscented litter
Location of the litter box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Change where the litter box is placed

If you think your cat or kitten is not using your litter box due to a household stress (conflict with other animals in the home, kids in the house, too loud of a household, ect.), please email the Foster Coordinator as it may be best to find another foster home for them to stay in.

Neonatal Care

Neonates are young animals that are under 4 weeks old. This is an animal's most fragile stage of development. If a mother is present, it's going to be much easier for you to care for your foster babies as the mother will do most of the work! ! You will just need to monitor the kittens closely for any changes in health, and keep mom well fed, clean, happy and healthy. Without the mother, we have to provide all the care for raising the kittens ourselves. The following information listed in this section is based on care with no mother present.

There are three stages of kitten growth:

- Neonatal - 0-2 weeks old
 - *They are very vulnerable during this stage and must be kept warm at all times due to inability to regulate their own body heat. They also must be bottle fed at this stage.*
- Transitional - 2-4 weeks
 - *Becoming more mobile, eyes and ears opening, teeth coming in, can be introduced to a shallow litter box at 3-4 weeks old. Still being bottle fed but may start to wean at the end of this period.*
- Socialization - 4 weeks and up
 - *Learning social skills, learning to play, and will begin to wean*

If you are raising your kittens from the neonatal stage and up, you will experience all of these stages, and have the opportunity to watch them grow and teach them how to be social while you care for them!

Supplies

You will be provided with the following items in addition to normal kitten supplies:

- Kitten Replacement Milk
- Bottles and nipples
- Stimulation items
 - *Cotton balls or baby wipes*
- Extra blankets
- Warming device
- Carrier
- Scale

Set Up and Housing

Depending on the size of your litter of kittens, they can stay in the carrier provided up until they are moving and want to explore, typically when their eyes open. A warm, quiet area where you can avoid drafts is the best place to keep the carrier.

Kittens under 4 weeks old cannot regulate their temperature so it is **essential** to keep them warm. Make their space cozy with lots of blankets, but not so many that they can get lost in them! Place their warming devices under the blankets in the

area you are keeping them. Having them on the direct heat source risks burns if they can't move off of it when they get hot. Make sure that they can crawl away from the source of warmth if they get too warm, but can also get back to the warmth when they start to feel cold.

If their mother is present, a shallow, low lipped box or a carrier with the top removed is a good bed for the mother and babies. Mom can leave the babies when she needs a break, but the babies cannot crawl out of the box or carrier and get lost while she is gone.

Bottle Feeding

Bottle feeding is essential to help orphaned neonatal kittens live, grow, and thrive. You will be provided with appropriate kitten replacement milk, also known as KMR.

Do not use anything else to feed them! KMR is designed with the nutrients and supplements that kittens need to survive.

How to Prepare a Bottle

KMR comes in a powdered form. You will need to make it with a 2 to 1 ratio—for example, 2 tablespoons of water to 1 tablespoon of formula.

1. Mix appropriate amounts of formula to water and mix vigorously until all clumps are dissolved and gone.
2. Warm the formula and nipple. You can use hot water when making the KMR mixture, or warm up the formula in the bottle. The best way to warm up the formula is to heat up a pot or glass of hot water and set the bottle in the water. Check the formula's temperature every few minutes by dripping the formula on your wrist. It shouldn't be too hot or cold, but should be warm to the touch, slightly above your body temperature.
3. Store extra KMR powder in the fridge as well as any unused portion of the bottle. Remake the bottle every 24 hours if not every 12 hours.

Additional notes:

- *The nipple of your bottle should drip slowly when inverted. If it is not dripping, the hole may need to be pierced or made slightly larger. If it is dripping quickly, discard the nipple and use a different one. If formula comes out too fast, the kittens can aspirate.*
- *Always use clean bottles and nipples, and clean bottles daily!*

Feeding

1. Warm your kitten up first - slowly. They cannot digest properly if they or their formula are not warm. Never feed a cold kitten.

You can burrito them up in a towel or blanket with their front legs sticking out if they don't want to keep their paws in

2. Position them in the prone position, on their stomach, **NOT** on their back!

Positioning them on their back can cause them to aspirate. They aren't human babies!

3. Gently insert the nipple into their mouth. They should latch and suckle it on their own.

The first few times may be difficult to get them to latch onto the nipple as they learn how to drink from it.

4. Watch their little ears wiggle and feel their tummies grow as they eat!

Most kittens will stop eating when they are full. Keep track of how much formula they drink each feeding using the chart below. They may need to be syringe fed if they aren't eating enough in a day. Please email the Foster Veterinary Technician as soon as you notice they aren't eating enough.

Age in Weeks	Weight in grams	Amount fed in millimeters	Feedings in hours
0 - 1 weeks	100 - 150g	2 - 6ml	2 hours
1-2 weeks	150 - 250g	6 - 10ml	2 - 3 hours
2 - 3 hours	250 - 350g	10 - 14ml	3 - 4 hours
3 - 4 weeks	350g - 450g	14 - 18ml	4 - 5 hours
4 - 5 weeks	450 - 550g	18 - 22ml	5 - 6 hours
5 - 8 weeks	550 - 850g	Weaning	6 hours

Troubleshooting Why They May Not Be Eating

Referenced from *The National Kitten Coalition*

Issue	What to try
Formula/bottle/nipple too cold or hot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the temperature, it should be warm to the touch - not cold or hot
Formula doesn't taste good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the formula is fresh. • Try remaking the bottle • Smell the formula - sweet, not rancid
Nipple opening not the right size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use scissors, a needle, or blade to cut it slightly bigger
Not comfortable/too cold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give them some support! Place warm towels or rice socks on either side of your kitten • Place fingers gently on cheeks and chin to support their head • Burrito in a warm towel or blanket <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>Remember to warm kittens up slowly</i>
Unable to suckle with enough force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loosen the cap just slightly to let a small amount of air in and give the kitten suckling power
Need to burp or eliminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate to urinate or defecate and then try again • Gently pat back to help burp
Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you suspect or notice symptoms of illness, contact the FVT or Emergency Contact ASAP depending on symptoms
Doesn't know how to eat from bottle/nipple or know what it is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Squeeze the bottle very gently, enough to get a tiny drop of formula on their tongue

Please report ASAP to the Foster Veterinary Technician if:

- ★ Your kitten isn't eating the appropriate amount in 24 hours
- ★ Your kitten has **zero** intake of food in 12 hours.

Please call the emergency line if:

- ★ Above scenarios happens on the weekend (Fri-Sun)
- ★ They are lethargic/unresponsive
- ★ They aspirate their food

Stimulation

Once they have eaten, you have to stimulate them! Kittens do not go to the bathroom on their own until they are about 3-4 weeks old and need to be stimulated until then. This is usually done by the mother licking the genital area. Without a mother, we have to simulate this action ourselves.

Take a slightly damp cotton ball, toilet paper, or baby wipe and gently rub their genital area, wiping front to back a few times. This should be enough to stimulate them to urinate, which should happen after each meal, and they should defecate at least once a day. Their stool should be a toothpaste-like consistency and lighter in color, and their urine should be a pale, light yellow.

Please report ASAP to the Foster Veterinary Technician if:

- ★ They do not urinate in 12 hours (Emergency line if Fri-Sun)
- ★ They do not defecate in 24 hours (Emergency line if Fri-Sun)
- ★ The urine is dark in color
- ★ The stool is looser than a toothpaste consistency
- ★ The stool is discolored (yellow, red-tinged, black, green, ect.)
- ★ Either output has a strong, unpleasant odor to it

Weight Tracking and Daily Observations

A weight loss or plateau in neonate and growing kittens is usually the first indication that something is wrong. They should be constantly gaining weight every day. See chart under “Bottle Feeding” above for how much your kittens should weigh, based on their age. Because of this, it is **essential** that you weigh them every day, preferably around the same time every day as well. You have been provided a kitten weight tracking chart. Please fill this out every day and send it to the Foster Veterinary Technician every week. If you notice a weight loss or plateau, please send the chart to the Foster Veterinary Technician ASAP.

In addition to your daily weight tracking, please use your Daily Wellness Log to track feeding, signs of illness, and any other additional information related to your foster pet’s wellbeing.

Weaning

This is the second most fragile stage in a kitten’s life after being a little neonate baby!

With mother, she will teach them how to eat normal food and wean them herself. During this time, it’s important to monitor their weight and general health because if mom is not letting them eat enough from her and they aren’t ready to completely stop drinking her milk, they will begin to decline. An intervention with supplemental bottle feeding may be necessary. Without a mother, we have to teach our kittens how to eat solid food.

Start with a low, shallow bowl that they can easily get in and out of. Fill it with gruel:

a mixture of paté kitten food and prepared KMR. Offer the gruel during feeding times. They may not understand what it is at first, so you may have to put a small piece on your finger or directly in their mouth and guide them to eating from the bowl. Offer the gruel frequently, and the fresher the gruel the better! Offer the bottle as needed to make sure they are getting the full amount of nutrients and food that they need to continue to grow and thrive every day.

As they learn to eat the gruel, you can slowly start changing the ratio of KMR and wet food by increasing the amount of kitten wet food and decreasing the amount of KMR. Eventually, you will wean them onto kitten food entirely, and that will be all they want to eat! No more bottles, yay! While they are weaning, you should always have dry food out and available for them to eat, but they may not show much interest in it at first and that's okay. As long as they are eating enough and continuing to gain weight and thrive, we are happy!

Do not stop their bottle feeding abruptly if they are not ready to stop eating from it! You **must** follow the kitten's lead on how they want to wean. Sometimes it's a quick transition, sometimes others like to stick to the bottle longer. They're in charge here!

Fostering Moms and Kittens

Mother cats, also known as "queens," need to be in a calm environment so that they can be stress-free and feel like they are keeping their kittens safe. Sometimes, stress can cause a mother cat to become aggressive or to not care for her babies properly. With that in mind, choose a private and quiet area of your home, away from the daily activities of your family, in which to situate the mother cat and her kittens.

It's also important that they be kept away from other pets in the home. Other pets can be perceived as a threat by the mother cat and cause her to act aggressively to protect her young. If you have children and an active home, it may be best to foster when the kittens are four weeks or older. Sometimes mother cats will behave less defensively if their kittens are older.

Set Up and Housing for Moms and Kittens

Set up your fostering space before you bring the mother cat and her kittens home. You should put the litter box as far away from the mother cat's food and water bowls as possible, and provide a couple of different safe spaces where she can care for her kittens. A dark, quiet area equipped with a whelping box is ideal!

A whelping box is a box that is large enough for the mother cat to lie comfortably on her side, slightly away from her kittens, while all of the kittens are in the box with her. The box should have sides high enough to prevent the kittens from wandering away, but low enough so it's easy for the mother cat to come and go as she pleases. Lining the bottom of the box with blankets or towels will help absorb moisture and give the mother cat and kittens a soft place to lie on. **Please be careful to not use too many blankets as the kittens can get lost and trapped**

within them, and in worst cases, even suffocate and die! Make sure to also keep all of these materials clean and dry so that the kittens are not chilled by dampness.

When you bring your foster mom and kittens home, put them all in the fostering space and leave mom alone, allowing her time to explore on her own. Give her a couple of hours before you enter her room and don't be alarmed if it takes a few days for her to come out of hiding, she's had a stressful start to motherhood!

How Mom Will Care for her Kittens

If you've taken home a family of kittens to foster, you're in luck, momma cat will do most of the work for you! She should take care of her kittens by herself for at least 3 to 4 weeks before she starts the weaning process with her babies. Each momma cat that you foster will be slightly different in her level of attentiveness, but there are three basic stages of nursing (see below). If for any reason your momma cat is not performing one of the listed functions, please notify the Foster Veterinary Technician right away to evaluate whether the mom has a medical concern that we need to address!

Kittens are born blind, but they can feel their mother's heat and seek her out to begin nursing within two hours of being born. Mother cats should be lying on their sides to ensure that their kittens can find the nipples for nursing. The three stages of nursing are as follows:

- Neonatal - 0-2 weeks old
 - *The mother cat initiates nursing by licking her kittens to wake them up and curling her body around them. After she wakes all of her babies, the kittens search for a short period of time and then quickly latch onto a nipple.*
- Transitional - 2-4 weeks
 - *The kittens' eyes and ears begin to function and they start to explore beyond the nesting area. This is when the kittens start interacting and playing with their mother. At this age, the kittens start to initiate some of the nursing and momma should comply by lying on her side in the nursing position.*
- Socialization - 4 weeks and up
 - *The kittens begin weaning and, in turn, the mother cat no longer initiates any nursing. If the mother cat still allows the kittens to nurse, it will be initiated by the kittens, and can be either lateral or upright nursing.*

Occasionally, mom cats develop mastitis when their kittens stop nursing and begin to eat on their own. Mastitis occurs when the mammary glands inflame and harden, creating a very painful infection for the mother cat and causing symptoms such as a fever and listlessness. If you think your mother cat may have mastitis, contact the Foster Veterinary Technician, please note that this is a non-emergency medical concern.

The mother cat will groom and lick her babies frequently for the first 2 to 4 weeks. She will stimulate her kittens to pee and poop, and will generally consume the

fecal matter and urine. (Gross, but practical!) As the babies become more mobile, they will start to explore the area and will begin going to the bathroom on their own, which is a great time to start litter training by introducing a couple of low-sided litter boxes, disposable cardboard trays tend to work best.

Mom is doing a LOT of work to feed and take care of her babies, so ensure that she has enough to eat and give her free access to water and both wet and dry food at all times. Food intake for a nursing mother can be 2 to 4 times the amount eaten by a cat who's not nursing!

When fostering a momma cat, it is very important to observe her behavior daily and watch her interactions with her kittens to spot any problems. Unfortunately, 8% of kittens pass away because of inadequate maternal care. This can happen for many different reasons, some of which are beyond our control, but if caught early enough, we can intervene to help ensure the kitten's growth and success.

Additional notes:

- *The kittens' best chance at survival is to stay with their mom! Please do not separate your foster kittens from their mom for any reason, or attempt to supplement the mother's milk with formula, without first consulting the Foster Veterinary Technician.*

Veterinary and Medical Care

Whether your cat or kitten is healthy or sick, there will be routine medical care required. If you are fostering healthy kittens, you should expect to return every 2-3 weeks with your kittens for their booster vaccines and general wellness exams until they are fixed and adopted. If you are fostering a healthy adult cat, you may need to come back with them for a booster vaccine and then monthly for their flea and tick prevention. The monthly prevention does not require the cat to come in as long as you are comfortable applying a topical prevention at home.

We cannot guarantee your foster won't break with an illness after you take them home. This is why it is so important to follow the required quarantine protocol! Doing so helps to catch any illness that arises in those 14 days, and will keep any personal pets in the home safe. It is also just as important to notify us immediately when medical concerns arise. Please see the Common Non-Emergency Medical Concerns section for symptoms and illnesses to look for.

Never give medication to your shelter foster, at any time, that has not been prescribed by the HSWM Veterinarian!

Routine Medical Care

You will be contacted by the Foster Veterinary Technician when your foster animal(s) are to be due for routine medical care. We will try our best to limit trips to the shelter in the same or following week, but cannot guarantee you won't need to visit the shelter more than once in a week, depending on the needs of your pet.

Please be mindful about being on time, as you likely aren't the only appointment for the day! We try to avoid making appointments back to back, but sometimes it's unavoidable. To respect everyone's time and to prevent appointments running into each other, it is best to be early rather than late. If you are early, please be patient as the Foster Vet Tech may be in another appointment, helping the vet team with a procedure, or preparing for your appointment. Don't worry, we haven't forgotten about you! We will be out to see you at the appropriate doors at your scheduled time.

Kitten Medical Care Timeline

Kittens can receive their first vaccines when they reach 1 pound. It is then expected that they come back every 2-3 weeks for their booster vaccines until they have reached 20 weeks old.

Kitten Medical Timeline

- 0-4 weeks - Deworming, weight check, physical exam
- 4-8 weeks - FVRCP and Bordetella vaccine booster, deworming, flea prevention, weight check, physical exam
- 8-11 weeks - FVRCP vaccine booster, deworming, flea prevention (if due), weight check, physical exam.
 - *Starting at 8 weeks, if your foster kittens are a healthy 2 pounds, the Foster Vet Tech will schedule them for surgery.*
- 12-20 weeks - FVRCP vaccine booster, Rabies vaccine, flea prevention (if due), weight check, physical exam

Adult Cat Medical Timeline

Once cats have reached 20 weeks old, or 5 months, they are considered an adult in medical terms. They only need 1 follow up booster and then their vaccines are good for the year. Your adult foster animal may be sent home before that 2 week booster was given at the shelter. The Foster Veterinary Technician will reach out to schedule that vaccine if it needs to be boosted. Otherwise, you should only need to come back to pick up a monthly flea prevention, as long as your foster cat stays healthy and happy.

Surgery Steps for Cats and Kittens

Every animal must be spayed or neutered before they can become available for adoption. All adult animals are altered before they leave our building for either foster or adoption, unless they are too sick for surgery and need to recover in foster first.

Surgery Scheduling

Kittens can be fixed starting at 8 weeks of age and once they reach a healthy 2 pounds. Once they have reached that goal weight, or are anticipated to reach that goal within a given timeframe, the Foster Veterinary Technician will reach out with available dates for scheduling. Once a date is confirmed, the Foster Vet Tech will send you day-of instructions for surgery drop-off, as well as discussing what will be happening with your kittens afterwards--whether they will be staying at HSWM for adoption, or if they can go back with you after surgery. If they are returning to foster with you after surgery, you will be sent post-operative instructions as well.

Day of Surgery

The following instructions are what will be sent to you via email once a surgery date is confirmed. They are subject to change as we adjust protocols with COVID-19 to

keep you and our staff safe. Please carefully read what is sent to you directly, as that will be the most current instructions.

Kittens: No food/water restrictions are needed prior to surgery. You may offer food and water to your animals that morning.

Cats: Please refrain from feeding breakfast the morning of surgery. Water is okay.

If you have any questions or concerns please email the Foster Coordinator, Aurora, anytime at alewis@hswestmi.org or our Foster Veterinarian Technician, Sabrina at sanderson@hswestmi.org.

If you are running late, please email Sabrina and our Vet Staff at vetstaff@hswestmi.org.

Drop off:

1. Arrive between 8am - 8:15am at the **Admitting** doors. One of our Vet Techs will meet you at these doors to take your foster pet(s) for surgery.
2. If your foster is not returning home with you after surgery, you can bring back your supplies at this time and place them outside of our **Foster** doors. We will bring the supplies inside once everyone has been able to drop off their foster pets and supplies.
3. Please be patient as there may be others dropping off animals at the same time. **Please wear a mask** while at HSWM, for the safety of you and others, and allow for social distancing by taking turns while dropping off pets and talking to our staff.

Pick up:

1. If you are picking up your foster to be adopted from foster, or if you are adopting them yourself, the pickup time is between 4-4:30pm from the **Admitting** doors, unless a different pick up time was previously discussed. There should be someone in Admitting at your time of pick up. Let them know who you are picking up, and they or a vet staff member will bring out your foster animal(s). They will give you their post-operative pain medications at this time. The post-op medication is given once daily, starting the day after surgery as they already got their first dose prior to surgery that day.

2. Please be patient as there may be others picking up pets at the same time. **Please wear a mask** while at HSWM, for your safety and others, and allow for social distancing by taking turns while dropping off animals and talking to our staff.

Day After surgery

If your kittens are returning to foster with you after surgery, the Foster Coordinator will reach out the following day to check in on how your foster(s) are recovering. If they are doing well (eating and drinking well, and back to normal activity levels), they will be made available for adoption. Please see the next section for Post-Operative instructions.

Additional Notes:

- If the kittens are scheduled for surgery and have not yet reached their goal weight, or unexpectedly drop below 2 pounds, they will return to foster until they are big and healthy enough to be scheduled for surgery again later.
- If something comes up that complicates your ability to make the surgery date or scheduled time, please email the Foster Veterinary Technician ASAP to discuss rescheduling as needed.
- It is important to keep your animals as mellow and relaxed as possible, especially females, after surgery to avoid post-surgical complications.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns in regards to surgery or post-surgery!

Post Operative Instructions for Foster Cats and Kittens

The following is information regarding post-operative care for your foster animal. If you have any questions or concerns about the surgical procedure or recovery, please email the Foster Veterinary Technician, at sanderson@hswestmi.org.

Most cats will self limit their activity following this abdominal surgery. Some may also be slightly groggy due to the anesthetic/pain medication given for the rest of the day.

You are being sent home with oral pain medication to start the day after surgery.

Monitor appetite - some cats will have little or no appetite following surgery. Some may vomit as well. If either of these symptoms persist past 24 hours, please let us know.

Keep the incision dry - no bathing or swimming should be done for 10 days.

Monitor the incision - for any pain, heat, redness, drainage or excessive swelling for 7-10 days. If any of these symptoms are observed, please email the Foster Veterinary Technician a picture of the incision.

Discourage licking at the incision - If your foster is licking or chewing at the incision, they must be fitted with an E-collar (aka "cone"). This should remain in place at all times when they are not being directly supervised until the incision is completely healed. We can provide a collar, or you can get one at a pet store. For smaller animals, a paper plate can be crafted into a cone (please see next page for instructions).

Try to discourage running, jumping or strenuous activity - for 5-7 days post surgery for females, and 3-5 days post surgery for males. Increased activity may cause post-op complications and delayed healing. Keeping your foster pet confined to an area that limits strenuous activity post-op is highly recommended.

Do not give your cat Aspirin, Tylenol, Advil, or any other over the counter pain medication - these substances are very toxic to cats and can be fatal, especially when combined with the pain medication sent home with you. If your foster pet is in excessive pain, please let us know and we can prescribe additional pain relievers.



How to make an e-collar out of a paper plate



1. Cut from outside of the paper plate or paper bowl towards the middle.
2. Cut a circle out of the middle that is big enough to fit around the cat or kitten's neck.
3. Take both ends of the outside of the plate where you cut inwards, and fold them towards each other to form a cone shape around their head.
4. Once it is secure enough on their head and you can fit two fingers between the neck and cone, tape the sides of the plate together to finish securing it around their head.
5. Ensure they can eat and drink past the edge of the paper plate, but cannot lick or chew at their incision site, and there are no sharp edges poking or scratching them.



Common Non-Emergency Medical Concerns

When to let us know

We may not need to do anything right away, but we need to be made aware of these medical issues when they occur. Please email the Foster Veterinary Technician at sanderson@hswestmi.org if any of these things are observed within the respective time frame given.

	Neonate Puppies and Kittens	Puppies and Kittens under 5 months	Adult cats and dogs
URI Symptoms - sneezing, congestion, discharge	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of showing symptoms	After 48 hours of showing symptoms
Conjunctivitis/Eye swelling/redness	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 24 hours
Vomiting	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 48 hours, or 24 hours if frequent
Diarrhea - soft to liquid consistency	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours - As soon as it's observed if there is blood	After 48 hours - after 24 hours if blood is continually present
Constipation - zero stool output	After 24 hours	After 24 hours	After 48 hours
Decreased Appetite	As soon as it's observed	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours of decreased appetite OR after 12 hours for zero food intake
Weight loss or weight plateau (primarily kittens)	As soon as it's observed	After 24 hours	After 72 hours

The following items are less common non-emergency medical concerns:

- Frequent trips to the litter box, straining to urinate, difficulty eliminating
- Itchy skin or ears.
- Blood in stool
- Frequent and excessive water intake
- Decreased activity – not lethargy

If any of these are noted, please contact the Foster Vet Tech.

If you are experiencing an emergency with your foster pet, please follow the emergency protocol listed above!

Feline Panleukopenia, a.k.a “Panleuk”

What is Panleuk?

Feline Panleukopenia is an extremely hardy virus that is very contagious to unvaccinated or freshly vaccinated cats and kittens. Without early intervention it can be a devastating, as well as deadly virus as it enters into the environment from the animal before they even display symptoms. It is hard to kill, lives a long time in the environment, and is easily spread. Thankfully, this virus cannot go between species and affects only felines.

What are the symptoms of Panleuk?

If kittens stop eating or become less interested in eating, that is typically the first sign of Panleuk. Other symptoms include decreased activity to lethargy, diarrhea, diarrhea with blood, and vomiting. Sometimes symptoms are glaringly obvious, but sometimes they are more subtle.

Situational examples of symptoms:

1. **Attitude/Activity change:** They can go from running around your house to just meandering around, or simply just not running around as excitedly.
2. **Appetite loss:** They scarf down a bowl of food that morning or the night prior but their next meal they only eat half the bowl, if at all.
3. **Stool change:** Stool is even becoming softer and darker in texture, or they seem to be uncomfortable while going to the bathroom. Or, their stool suddenly becomes diarrhea with an odd, sweeter smell to it.

It's important to monitor your kitten's daily health, note any changes and report them as soon as they are noticed.

I have cats at home!

If your cats get their yearly distemper vaccine on time, which protects them from Panleukopenia, and have a good track record of their vaccines throughout their life, they will likely be fine! Regardless, everything should be cleaned appropriately, including any carpet or items with fabrics, like couches, that your kittens came in contact with.

If your own pet is not vaccinated, or is coming up on being due on their vaccine, please email the Foster Veterinary Technician and we can further discuss what to do to help your pets stay safe and how we can assist with that. If your animal were to test positive for Panleuk, you must seek treatment with your primary veterinarian, as we will not be able to provide treatment.

Indirect spread of Panleuk

You and your home can be a fomite for Panleuk. A fomite is an object or material that can carry infection. This includes clothes you wear and furniture the kittens have come in contact with. For example, if a panleuk kitten is shedding the virus but not showing symptoms yet, and you pet them and then go into another room and touch other items or sit on a couch, the virus can shed from you onto the couch or the other items you touched. If that happens, then there is a chance that the virus is now waiting on your couch or other objects for the next unvaccinated feline to come around, touch it, and get infected with it. This is why we recommend not having any unvaccinated felines in your home for at least 6 months after fostering a Panleuk positive feline.

Monitoring and Reporting

It is extremely important to report any symptoms of Panleuk you see in your fosters, especially kittens, including any changes in their attitude. We want to intervene as soon as possible! The sooner we are able to intervene, the better the outcome for all of the cats involved. We would rather check your foster pet and have it turn out to be nothing serious, versus holding off and seeing them when it is too late.

If you have been informed that another kitten in the same litter as your kitten tested positive, be on high alert for symptoms. If you notice the slightest change in attitude, appetite, or appearance in stool, please let the Foster Veterinary Technician know immediately. If it is the weekend, please follow the emergency protocol.

If your kittens have tested positive for Panleuk, they will stay at the shelter if possible (the only exception being neonates who need round-the-clock care) to start treatment until our veterinarian gives them the okay to go back to foster. Sometimes this is within a day, and sometimes it's a week later. It all depends on the severity of their illness and their response to treatments. The sooner we can catch it, the better and quicker the recovery in most cases. If you are willing to take your Panleuk kittens back, please know you may need to visit multiple times in a week if they decline different days of the week but are okay during others. They may need to come in for a night stay, or may just need a short visit to get a couple treatments, and then go back home with you.

Diarrhea in Shelter Animals

Diarrhea is one of the most common issues we see at the shelter. It can be uncomfortable for the animals, and possibly for you, but we have the resources to help resolve it! It is important to report when your foster animals are having diarrhea as, like with human babies, it can be dangerous in young animals. The younger the animal, the more at risk they are to have bodily complications and it can be fatal to neonate animals if treatment and support isn't started as soon as possible.

What causes diarrhea?

The most common causes of diarrhea in shelter animals are stress from their current environment, or from moving locations (i.e. going from the shelter to a foster home). The other primary causes of diarrhea in the shelter are parasites and food change.

Preventing diarrhea

All dogs and cats receive dewormer on intake to start killing common parasites. Cats also receive an injection of Penicillin on intake to help combat diarrhea.

My foster animal has diarrhea, what should I do?

Let us know! Follow these guidelines for notifying us if your foster has diarrhea:

- Neonates: Immediately if looser than toothpaste consistency, or if blood is present
- Puppies/Kittens older than 1 month: Within 24 hours, or immediately if blood is present
- Adult: within 48 hours, or within 24 hours if blood is present

If you notice severe diarrhea with significant blood, please follow the emergency protocol!

What information is helpful to staff

- Is there blood?
- Are you able to take a picture of the stool?
- When did it start?
- How is their activity level?
- Are they eating and drinking?
- What does it look like?
 - Consistency? Is there blood? What color is it?
- Can you bring a fecal sample in?
- It is possible they got into something that upset their stomach

I have been asked to bring a stool sample in, how do I do that?

We only need about a spoonful of fecal matter to run tests. If you have received a fecal sample tube, you can scoop the sample directly into the tube to bring in. If not, you can put it in a dog poop bag, sandwich bag, or another container you don't mind parting with. Litter or grass in the sample is okay! The obtained sample needs to be as "fresh" as

possible, less than 24 hours old. Please write the date and the name of the foster animal on whatever contains the stool to assist our staff!

What will happen if I report diarrhea?

After we have asked some questions, a couple of things may happen.

1. We may first prescribe a probiotic and possibly a bland diet for a few days.
2. We will ask for a fecal float to be brought to us to check for parasites
 - a. If positive, we will send home medications to kill the parasites. Another fecal sample will need to be taken 24-48 hours after completion of the medication to make sure that there are no lingering parasites.
 - b. If negative, we will send home medication to help resolve the diarrhea.
 - c. We may ask for the pet to come in if the diarrhea is persistent or worsens, for a wellness exam by our veterinary staff and appropriate medication.

What do the parasites look like? Do all parasites cause diarrhea?

There are many parasites that can cause diarrhea, but not all are visible to the naked eye and must be viewed under a microscope. The most common parasites you can see at a glance are roundworms (which resemble a spaghetti noodle) and tapeworms (which resemble a grain of rice).



Roundworms



Tapeworm segment

Can the parasites be passed onto me?

Technically, yes, but it is very hard to be passed onto people. As long as you aren't directly eating the fecal matter and taking the proper cleaning precautions when handling animal waste, (washing hands, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces the fecal matter touches, ect.) the risk is minimal.

Can my own animals get infected with parasites from my foster animal?

Yes. Like humans, they have to ingest the eggs of the parasite to become infected, so proper cleaning helps minimize the risk. Most diarrhea due to parasites will show up during the 10 day quarantine your foster animal(s) goes through. If your personal animal becomes infected and starts having diarrhea, you will need to go to your primary veterinarian for care and treatment.

Upper Respiratory Infections in Shelter Animals

What is an Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)?

Also known as URI, it is a common shelter illness that, while primarily affecting cats, can affect many different species. It is a viral or a bacterial infection that targets the upper airways (nose and throat) and is similar to a common cold. In most cases, a round of medication will address the illness, but in more severe cases your foster pet may need additional treatment. URIs are commonly passed through saliva and nasal discharge via direct contact (grooming, coming nose-to-nose with sick animals, ect) and indirectly (sneezing, eating from the same bowls, touching a surface that has discharge on it, ect).

What are the symptoms of URI?

The most common symptoms of URI are frequent sneezing and coughing, nasal congestion, and colored (yellow or green) nasal discharge. Conjunctivitis (inflammation of the membranes lining the eyelids) can also occur with colored ocular discharge. Depending on the severity of the URI, they may have bloody nasal discharge (though this is less common), drooling, nausea, mouth sores, decreased or total loss of appetite, and decreased activity levels.

My foster is showing signs of URI, what should I do?

The occasional sneeze here and there is perfectly normal and not cause for concern, as animals sneeze like humans do to expel foreign matter from the nasal passage. If you notice persistent or worsening symptoms, please notify us within 24 hours for animals under 5 months, and within 48 hours for adults. In order to avoid the added stress of coming back to the shelter, we may ask you to send us a video of their sneezing and/or breathing, or pictures of the eyes if ocular discharge, swelling, or squinting of the eyes is noted.

How is it treated?

We prescribe an oral antibiotic that is to be given once daily. If they also have conjunctivitis with their URI, we prescribe an eye ointment to be put onto the affected eyes every 12 hours for 7 days. If they still are sneezing and congested after their oral meds are finished, we will do another round of medication(s).

If their noses are raw or plugged up with nasal discharge, a warm, wet wash cloth can be used to gently wipe their noses and help them breathe better. You can also take them into a steamy bathroom to help clear up their sinuses.

How can I give the oral medication?

See your “How to Administer Medications” hand-out for more help. You can also email our Foster Veterinary Technician directly at sanderson@hswestmi.org, if you are still struggling with administering the medication.

My foster animal was healthy when I took them home, why are they getting sick now?

The virus can incubate in animals for 2-10 days before they develop symptoms. Stress, such as changes in the environment, the busy shelter, traveling in a car, or surgery, can cause them to be more susceptible to the URI, and we often see them break with illness after these events. If they had a recent visit to the shelter, like a vaccine booster appointment, it's also possible to be exposed during that appointment as well, despite our efforts to clean thoroughly between each animal.

I have my own animals at home. Are they at risk for getting sick too?

When you bring foster animals home, we ask you to quarantine them in a room away from your personal animals for 10 days. If the foster animal has an underlying illness, chances are they will show symptoms within those 10 days. If your animals are up-to-date on vaccines, it decreases their chances of getting sick, but does not make them completely immune to all strains of illnesses. As long as your animals are kept separate from foster animals and you practice good hygiene, sanitation, and hand washing, the risk of getting your personal animals sick is minimal. If your personal animal(s) get sick, you will need to go to your primary veterinarian for an exam and possible treatment.

Can I catch this illness?

No- it cannot be passed onto humans or between species!

Conjunctivitis in Shelter Animals

What is conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is inflammation of the conjunctiva, the mucous membrane lining an animal's eye. It commonly occurs along with upper respiratory infections, but can occur by itself as well. It is most common in cats, but can show up in all species.

What are the symptoms of it?

Redness/irritation of the eye(s), squinting, watery eye(s), swelling of the eye(s), colored (yellow/green/cloudy) ocular discharge, cloudy eye(s), and raising of the third eyelid.

What should I do?

Let us know! Email a picture to the Foster Veterinary Technician at sanderson@hswestmi.org to help us evaluate if it is conjunctivitis, or a different eye issue. Providing details of the symptoms you're seeing will be helpful and expedite the process. If you are unsure if you are also noticing URI symptoms, please refer to your "Upper Respiratory Infections in Shelter Animals" hand-out.

How is it treated?

Conjunctivitis is treated with an ointment that is applied to the affected eye(s) at least every 12 hours for 7 days. If the eye(s) clear up before the instructed time, it is important that you **do not** stop the medication. If symptoms persist after treatment, please email us so we may further evaluate your foster pet.

How do I apply the eye medication?

Please see your "How to Administer Medications" hand-out for help. You can also email our Foster Veterinary Technician at sanderson@hswestmi.org if you need further assistance with administering medication.



Ear Mites vs. Ear Infections

What are ear mites?

Ear mites are tiny mites that live in the ear canals of animals. While they can affect a variety of species, we typically see them appear more often in cats in a shelter environment. Ear mite debris appears dry and dirty, similar to a coffee ground consistency. Ear mites are confirmed via microscopic examination.

What are symptoms of ear mites?

The most common signs of ear mites are dirty ears and itching. These are usually accompanied by shaking of their head/ears, redness on their ear pinna/flap, and intense scratching of the ears.

How are ear mites treated?

All cats receive Revolution upon intake, which is a flea and tick prevention that is also effective against ear mites. Occasionally, some cats may need additional care or treatment.

What's the difference between mites and an ear infection?

An ear infection is the result of the overgrowth of yeast or bacteria in the ear. Similar to ear mites, symptoms of an ear infection include itching, redness, and shaking of the head. They may also have an odor or be painful depending on the type and severity of the infection. The main difference is what is in their ear. Ear infections present with a varying consistency of colored ear debris (light yellow to dark brown) but it usually is a softer, more waxy consistency.



Ear mites



Ear Infection

How are they diagnosed?

You will be asked to bring your foster in for an exam, or bring in a swab sample of the ear debris. We will look at the sample under a microscope looking for mites, bacteria,

or yeast. If any are present, they will be prescribed an ear medication for one or both of the ears.

How do I get a sample?

The easiest way to get a sample is to use a Q-tip. It is best to get a sample right before you plan to drop it off to prevent it from drying out. Be gentle while acquiring the sample and don't be too forceful with the Q-tip in the ear.

1. Gently hold their ear flap in your fingers and bend it towards the center of their head to open their ear up for easier access. Locate the ear canal.
2. Take one Q-tip and insert into the ear canal. Move the Q-tip around against the walls of the ear canal to pick up any debris inside the ear. Repeat for the other ear, using a new Q-tip.
3. Take the Q-tip used to acquire the **LEFT** ear sample and bend it into an L, or mark it another way to signify the sample is the left ear. This will help determine which ear needs medication, if necessary.
4. Put Q-tips in a sealed bag and bring in as directed by the Foster Veterinary Technician.

How are ears treated?

If your foster is diagnosed with an ear infection, they will be prescribed the appropriate ear ointment or dropper. Most commonly these are given for 7-10 days, depending on the severity of the infection. Approximately two weeks after the medication is started, another ear sample will need to be brought in to check if the infection is still present.

If you are comfortable doing so, you will be provided ear cleaning supplies to clean out your foster's ears if deemed necessary by the veterinarian. This process is similar to obtaining a sample (see above) with the addition of a medicated solution.

How do I give ear medications?

Please see your "How to Administer Medications" hand-out for help. You can also email our Foster Veterinary Technician directly at sanderson@hswestmi.org, if you have additional questions or concerns regarding administering the medication.

How to Administer Medications

In general, though particularly for cats, it's best to have two people helping to administer medications. However, you may be by yourself at some point and will need to medicate your foster pet on your own.

Always read the label of your medication for: method to administer, amount to administer, how often to administer, and for how long

NEVER give medication to your shelter foster, at any time, that has not been prescribed by the HSWM Veterinarian.

Please do not STOP or WEAN medications

Liquid medications

When giving a cat any medication, it is best to have their butt against something, whether it be your lap, or another object, so they can't back away. Some cats will let you place your hand on the side of their face to administer medications, others you may need to hold their head gently but more firmly to administer the medication.



1. Gently place your hand on top of their head with your fingers under their cheekbones.
2. Wiggle the syringe towards the back of their mouth. Most times they will open their mouths on their own.
3. Push plunger to administer medication into the mouth, being careful not to shoot it directly into their throat.
4. If they are a good eater, you can do the “meatball method” if you are confident they will eat all of it. Hide the medication in a small amount of wet food and give them more plain food without the medication after.

Pill and capsule medications

Hiding pills for cats can be trickier than it is for dogs, as they tend to eat around them. You can try hiding their pills in:

- Small meatball of wet food
- Pill pockets
- Deli turkey/ham
- Tuna/chicken

If they chew around it, you can crush the pills and hide them again in wet food or peanut butter to make it harder to spit out the pill. **Please ask for approval for this method, as some medications cannot be crushed!** Some pills have a bitter taste when crushed and can make it more difficult to mask the taste of the medication.

We recommend direct pilling as a last resort as it can be very stressful to the cat. If possible, use a pill pusher as pictured below:



1. Put the pill/capsule in the tip of the pill pusher.
2. Gently place your hand on the top of their head with your fingers by their cheekbones.
3. Lift their head up slightly and wiggle the pill pusher into the molar area. Most cats will open their mouths as there is a small gap in their molar area.
4. Push the pill pusher all the way to back of mouth, as far as the cat will allow
5. Push plunger to shoot pill down the cat's throat.
6. Watch for swallowing. If the cat spits the pill out, repeat the process.

Eye drops and ointment



Having your foster cat's butt against something like yourself or another object, will make eye drops and ointment easier to apply, as they cannot back away.

1. Place your thumb below the eye and pull down gently to lower the lid
2. Place the hand holding the medication on top of the head and pull up slightly to open the eye.
3. Squeeze bottle above eye, being careful not to touch the tip to the eye, to administer drops or ointment.

Ear drops and ointment



Having your foster cat's butt against something like yourself or another object, will make ear drops or ointment easier to apply, as they cannot back away. The goal is to get the medication **into the ear canal**, not on the surface of the ear flap.

1. Gently hold their ear flap in your fingers and bend it towards the center of their head to open their ear up for easier access.

2. Locate the ear canal.
3. Take your medication and place the tip into the ear canal. Squeeze the bottle to administer the medication.
4. Massage the base of the ear. Repeat for the other ear, if needed.

The label will tell you how many drops to administer in each ear canal. Prior to administering, you can practice without your foster pet by squeezing to see how much pressure you need to apply to administer the correct amount.

Additional tips and tricks:

If your cats are being very wiggly, or like to throw their paws around trying to get you to stop handling them, you can try the towel method and make them into a cozy “purrito”!



1. Place your cat on a towel or blanket
2. Take one side of the towel and wrap it around the top of their body, leaving their head exposed.
3. Pull the corner of the towel currently in your hand the rest of the way around the cat to wrap around their chest. It can be tucked under their chin and secured on the side of their head with your hand.
4. Now they are burritoed snugly in a towel and ready to be medicated, and you don't need to worry about their nails getting you!

Make it positive! Always give them treats after getting their medication!

Be patient! It can be frustrating medicating a difficult animal. If you have to come back to try again a bit later in the day, that's okay. We want to make the experience as positive as possible for the animal, and safe for you. If you are having difficulty medicating after trying the things suggested in this packet, please email the Foster Vet Tech at sanderson@hswestmi.org for more help and alternatives.

Adoption Process, From Foster to Forever Home

*Your animal is fixed, healthy, and ready to find their forever home!
CONGRATULATIONS!*

Building an Adoption Profile

The first step to getting your foster adopted is building their adoption profile! To do this you'll need pictures, pictures, and more pictures! Gathering photos and "About Me" information for your foster pets is both fun and extremely important in helping your pet find their loving forever home. The combination of quality photos and creative bios are essential to creating an appealing online profile, which in turn will encourage adopters to apply to adopt your foster pet! Nearly everything you send us will eventually be visible on their profile on our website, so the more you give us to work with, the better! Building a great profile for your foster pet could look like one of the examples at the end of this manual.

<p>Photography Provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Adoptions • Increased Engagement • Increased Awareness 	<p>A Good Photo:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is in focus • Uncomplicated, uncluttered • At the animal's level, ideally with the pet looking straight at you • Well lit • Dark fur, use light background
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Apps and Additional Resources

- Adoptimize – FREE app that fosters can use to edit & "transform" photos.
<https://foster.adoptimize.co/>
 - PhotoGrid – Free app on your phone
 - Snapseed – Free app on your phone

Writing a bio: A good story can be an invaluable tool for emotional connection. Stories can bring aspects of a pet's personality or their history into vivid detail. Qualities that potential adopters might be looking for, such as great social skills with other pets, or having an easygoing or affectionate purrsonality, are often illustrated in any number of small actions that a pet performs every day. Tell us all about what makes your foster pet special and what you love about them! If the content is funny or sweet and relatable--even better! When your foster pet does something positive that affects you emotionally, make a note of it so we can share that with adopters!

Take Multiple Photos: Some fosters tell us, "I am an awful photographer", but no one takes the perfect selfie on the first try! Take lots of rapid-fire photos all at once and

odds are you'll snap something you can work with! Whether you're an ace photographer or not, taking multiple photos increases the chances of getting something really great, and helps show off your adorable foster pet to potential adopters!

Use Photos to Showcase Personality: We want potential adopters to get a feel for our foster pet's personalities, so use photos in a way that does just that! Take photos that capture different aspects of your pet's personality. When viewed together, adopters get a much more accurate picture of who they are, and what makes your foster pet unique and loveable!

The Adoption Process from Home

Once they are cleared to go up for adoption, your foster pet will be made available in our adoption system, which makes them viewable on the HSWM website. **Since adopters can't view your pets by visiting our shelter, it is ESSENTIAL that we make them an appealing online bio, since it is their only way to get to know them!** This is why it is so important to help the Foster Coordinator build their profile with pictures, bios, and descriptions! These details will become visible on the website for interested adopters to see, along with their gender, age, sex. If they are interested in adopting the animal, they can put in an application for them directly from their online profile.

Once an application has been approved, the Foster Coordinator will reach out to both you and the potential adopter to coordinate a meeting via Zoom. Once an agreed date and time is coordinated, the meeting is set with you and the animal(s), the potential adopter, and the Foster Coordinator. Here, the adopter can meet the animal and ask any questions they may have about your foster pet. At this point, as the foster, you will know more about their personality than anyone!

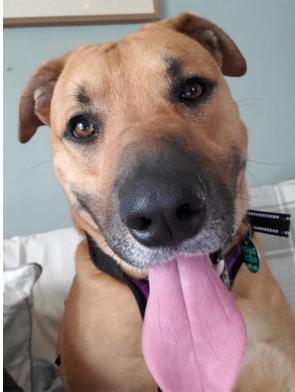
If they decide to go through with the adoption, a transfer of care is then coordinated at the shelter. Transfer of cares will not happen anywhere but the shelter. Once that date and time is set, all that's left is to wait for that date to arrive! Once that day comes, you will show up at the designated time and place with your adopted foster pet(s). You can either help facilitate the transfer and meet the adopter with a customer service member, or you can simply drop off the animal to the customer service team, and they can handle the transfer from there. If all your fosters have been adopted, your foster supplies can be brought back to us and be dropped off outside the foster doors at this time as well.

And you are officially done! Congratulations, you have gotten one more animal to their forever home!

Profile Examples

The bios and profiles provided here are examples only. Included on the last page are some photos of our HSWM foster pets, taken by HSWM foster caregivers!

Bio example: Sir Harley and Connecting with Humor



After some time with Harley in foster he has made it abundantly clear that he is a gentleman, and as such, will henceforth be known as Sir Harley.

Sir Harley has manners! We were worried he had an infection when he didn't pee during his first 24 hours with us, but as it turns out, he simply prefers not to urinate in the presence of a lady. We also learned he has a bladder of steel.

Sir Harley is grateful. He is so expressive in his gratitude; in fact, he has an injury called "happy tail." Breakfast? GRATEFUL. Pets? GRATEFUL. Walkies? GRATEFUL. Nap time? GRATEFUL. Eye contact? GRATEFUL.

Sir Harley makes everyone feel welcome! As a one-dog welcoming committee, there is no door greeter as wiggly as Sir Harley. If retail stores had Sir Harley mascots, the American economy would be repaired in a matter of days.

Sir Harley does not beg. He understands that "no means no" and he will not push the issue on that pint of Ben 'N Jerry's. Bonus: He won't shame you for eating it all in one sitting either. He knows you are beautiful at any size!

Sir Harley rolls with the flow. You wanna sleep all day? So does he. You wanna party outside? So does he. You wanna have an existential crisis because life is an illusion? Sir Harley knows you will calm down if you rub his belly, and he will offer it to you gladly. Sir Harley will make some man or woman very lucky when they welcome this class act gentle giant into their home! #adoptsirharley

Bio Example: Snoopy, Telling a Story about Personality

This is Snoopy, but you can call him Velcro Lite, Splooter (his sploots are unparalleled. Truly.) or Snoop Dogg (but that's kind of a given). I brought Snoopy home for an overnight foster and he instantly took to my boyfriend and me like a baby takes to his parents. His primary objective all day and night was to please, and he did. You could call him from any room in the house and he'd come running with that giant smile on that mammoth head of his to sit at your feet and



look up at you so adoringly you couldn't help but feel guilty for being loved this much.

Snoopy is the rare dog who wants to be by your side always, but also has a natural understanding of personal space. If you're on the couch, he is gonna climb right up on there and sploot (lay with his legs back, like a frog) next to you - close enough for scritches, but not so close that you're strapped in for a 12-hour Netflix marathon.

His two states of being are "overjoyed" and "asleep," and that goofy smile will follow him into both. He is a natural couch potato but is versatile in his ability to go from "sploot" to 60 and back again depending on what it is you wanna do.

Though people keep letting him down, Snoopy holds onto his spirit with a big, heart-melting grin. This boy loves with his whole body and the person who welcomes him into their family will have a lifelong best friend!

Bio Example: Ruby, The Gut-Puncher Story



In the shelter, Ruby can appear stoic due to her shyness and fear; this may be a reason she's been overlooked for so long. I hope someone takes a chance on her, because they will be greatly rewarded! My prediction is once someone earns her trust, Ruby will love them so completely that it will surprise them both!

On our overnight, I saw sure signs of her emerging trust in so many ways: the way she looked back at me while walking to make sure I was with her, how, by morning, she was so in tune with me that she needed only for me to quietly say, "this way" when walking to ensure she was turning or stopping right next to me. How, when something frightened her, she would walk closely behind me because she knew I would protect her. Initially, she was afraid to walk down the stairs - she stopped, wide-eyed, and after some coaxing she walked down so close to me that she was touching my heels. By the end of the trip she was going up and down the stairs with confidence.

The hardest part of my overnight with Ruby was seeing the stress return when I brought her back to the shelter. The second she heard the dogs barking in their kennels and realized where she was, I could literally see her steeling herself. Like a boxer trying to pump themselves up, she let out a series of huffs, and she began to scan her surroundings for threats. Putting her back in the kennel broke my heart.

Ruby was the perfect overnight guest. She followed directions immediately, was quiet in the room and had no accidents. She ate well, slept right next to me in the bed, and I'm pretty sure she would have slept in if I hadn't gotten her up early to take a walk and get breakfast. I took her into the kitchen and though I could tell the smells were tempting her, she didn't jump up on the counter or pull on the leash. She rode in the car like a dream. Someone is going to think they've won the lottery when they adopt her!

Bio Example: Gus, Telling a Story of Growth

Gus spent the last few months demonstrating for the shelter's staff what a complete emotional breakdown looks like in a cat who has lived much of his life outside. By all accounts, he was feral, so shelter life was terrifying for him.



When we took him into foster care, both my husband and I expected him to be a challenge. Looking at him the first night, unhappily crouched behind a laundry basket, my husband asked, "Did you ask for the hardest cat in the shelter or something?" We had no idea that less than 30 minutes later, he'd be in my lap, kneading and purring!

Gus clearly just needed a quiet home with a stable environment that we were able to help provide. Shyer cats often need time and patience to adjust to new sounds and smells, and after he had decided our home was safe, and we were here to help him, we saw Gus become a completely different cat! It may seem a bit intimidating at first to adopt a shy or undersocialized cat, but the moment you earn their trust and they open up and love you, it's one of the most rewarding things you'll ever experience! Give Gus a chance, and he'll remind you how grateful he is to have a warm, safe home every day of his life!

Here are some examples of great photos taken by our HSWM fosters!

Whether it's glamor shots, snuggle sessions, a full themed photoshoot, or just your foster(s) being cute, these photos, much like a dating profile, are essential for adopters to fall in love with them!



SKYE