Kitten Foster Care

Everything you need to know about fostering kittens for the Green County Humane Society
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Section 1: Welcome to the Green County Humane Society

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering felines for the Green County Humane Society. At times, Green County Humane Society (GCHS) has animals that require more individualized attention than the shelter can provide and by opening up your home to foster pets, you’re not only helping to save lives, you’re providing the individual attention and care these felines desperately need.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the cats, as well as transportation to and from veterinary appointments as needed, and transportation to the Best Friends Pet Adoption Center. Care for foster cats includes feeding according to size and needs, and lots of play time and positive socialization.

This handbook has been compiled to let interested individuals know the responsibilities, time commitments and skills that are required for particular foster situations. Inside you will find specifics about potential foster opportunities as well as a joint agreement that exists between GCHS and our Foster Caregivers.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping many different types of cats and kittens find the families they’ve been longing for.

About GCHS

Mission Statement, Core Values, Organizational Goals

- Mission Statement: To be a passionate advocate for the lives of companion animals by finding quality forever homes, providing community education, and promoting responsible animal ownership.
- Core Values: Compassion, Integrity, Stewardship, Protection, Education
- Organizational Goals
  - Promoting compassionate and appropriate treatment of animals throughout Green and Lafayette Counties.
  - Educating the general public in areas of animal care, especially the need for spaying and neutering of animals to prevent further overpopulation.
  - Diligently assisting law enforcement and the general public in the effort to end animal abuse.
  - Devoted to finding quality homes for every adoptable animal that comes into the shelter.

History of GCHS

The Green County Humane Society was founded on April 17, 1978 as the Green County Humane Society, Inc. Three weeks later, May 10, 1978 the first animal, a dog named Annie, was adopted and became our mascot. GCHS has saved 20,000 animals through adoption and redemption. In 1999, the shelter officially adopted a No-Kill policy.

Today the GCHS is comprised of over 500 members, 17 dedicated shelter staff, an 11 member board of directors, volunteers and a growing network of foster homes. Due to the commitment of these people, GCHS has gone from a 62% kill rate in 1999 to a No-Kill status. GCHS is dedicated to expanding the knowledge of and protection of animals with which we share our lives and world.

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Section 2: Foster Requirements and Opportunities

Requirements to Become a Foster Caregiver

– Foster Caregiver must be at least 21 years of age.
– Foster Caregiver must adhere to confidentiality of agency and client information.
– Foster Caregiver, unless appointed to do so, shall not make written or oral statements on behalf of GCHS without prior consultation with the Executive Director, Board President, or PR chairman.
– Foster Caregiver must have an area in the house to isolate the animal from other animals if needed.
– Foster Caregiver’s application will be reviewed annually to verify current information and to check with them if they would like to continue with the foster program.
– Foster Caregiver must complete an application and reference process.
– Foster Caregiver must schedule a home inspection to approve a site for fostering. An interview will also be done at that time so that both GCHS and the Foster Caregiver can ask/answer questions.
– Foster Caregiver must be and capable of providing the extra care, TLC, and attention needed by these animals.
– As a new Foster Caregiver, you will be mentored by an individual on GCHS’s Foster Committee who will be available for questions about the animal or any of the policies and procedures in this handbook.
– Foster Caregiver will be responsible for filling out a daily health assessment form that will be provided to them by GCHS for monitoring the animal’s health.
– Foster Caregiver needs to be able to transport animal to any required vet checks/medical appointments.

Items You Will Need to Provide

1. Bedding
2. Non-Clumping Litter and a Litter Box
3. At least one bowl for dry food and one for water. If you have a large litter, you will need to provide more than one bowl each for water and food.
4. A secure sleeping area: A cat carrier with the door removed or a box laid on its side work well.
5. Toys: Use kitten-safe toys that are easy to sanitize and clean. Kittens can play with them when you’re not home.
6. Scratching post: Kittens need to learn to scratch on them rather than the furniture.
7. Love & Attention

*We will try to utilize donated items for foster homes as much as possible.

Items Provided by GCHS

1. Food
2. All medications, including de-wormers
3. Daily Assessment Log for Foster Caregiver to fill out
4. Support from staff and veterinarian
5. Instructions for the care needed by your particular foster animal
6. Approved medical care for your foster animal, once GCHS has given approval for medical care, the Foster Caregiver may schedule a visit at either of the following clinics.

Pre-approved medical costs will be covered at either of the following clinics:

**GCHS Shelter Vet**

Wednesdays
608-325-9600

**Monroe Veterinary Service**

608-325-2106
1317 31st Ave.
Monroe, WI

**Argyle Veterinary Service**

608-543-3082
201 South St.
Argyle, WI

**Feline Foster Opportunities**

1. Mothers and their Litters
2. Un-weaned/Orphaned Kittens
3. Independent Orphaned Kittens
4. Cats/Kittens with Upper Respiratory Infections (colds)
5. Injured/Recovering Cats/Kittens
Mothers and Their Litters

Description: Cats that arrive at GCHS with young kittens or that give birth to their litters at GCHS.

Time Commitment: The Foster Caregiver provides a home for the cat and her kittens until the kittens are approximately 8 weeks old.

Care Requirements:
1. Mother and her kittens are de-wormed every two weeks with an oral liquid.
2. Kittens are monitored for appropriate weight gain; calorie supplementation may need to be provided via bottle feedings of milk replacer.
3. Upper respiratory infections (colds) or eye infections may need additional treatment such as topical eye ointment or oral medications.
4. Mother and kittens are socialized during this time so that they are adoptable when they return to GCHS.
5. Available for 1-2 home visits or trips to GCHS will be necessary during this foster period for initial kitten vaccinations.

Bottle-Baby Orphaned Kittens

Description: Kittens between 1 day and 21 days old that arrive at GCHS without a mother and require hourly bottle feedings.

Time Commitment: the Foster Caregiver provides a home for the kitten until it is eating, drinking and using a litter box on its own, and reaches 2 lbs in order to be spayed/neutered which typically requires 8 weeks of care.

Care Requirements:
1. A kitten is bottle-fed every 2-4 hours, both throughout the day and night.
2. A young kitten needs to be stimulation for urination and defecation (peeing and pooping) during the first several weeks after birth.
3. A young kitten also needs to be monitored for appropriate weight gain.
4. Kitten is de-wormed every two weeks with an oral liquid.
5. Cold symptoms or eye infections or failure to thrive may need additional treatment.
6. Appropriate socialization is taught to the kitten during this important time of development.

Weaning Orphaned Kittens

Description: Kittens between the ages of 21 and 40 days old that arrive at GCHS without a mother, and require care every few hours.

Time Commitment: the Foster Caregiver provides a home for the kitten until it is eating, drinking and using a litter box on its own, and reaches 2 lbs in order to be spayed/neutered which typically requires 8 weeks of care.

Care Requirements:
1. A weaning kitten is in the process of learning to eat on their own. They need to still be bottle-fed every 4-6 hours, and assisted with wet food feedings.
2. Some weaning kittens still need to be stimulated for urination and defecation (peeing and pooping) during the first several weeks after birth. They will also be in the process of learning how to use the litterbox, but may have frequent accidents.
3. A young kitten also needs to be monitored for appropriate weight gain.
4. Kitten is de-wormed every two weeks with an oral liquid.
5. Cold symptoms or eye infections or failure to thrive may need additional treatment.
6. Appropriate socialization is taught to the kitten during this important time of development.
**Independent Orphaned Kittens**

Description: Young kittens that arrive at GCHS without a mother, but are eating and using the litterbox on their own.

Time Commitment: The Foster Caregiver provides a home for the kitten until it is fully healthy and reaches 2 lbs, which typically requires 8 weeks of care.

Care Requirements:
1. Cleaning, feeding, and care at least twice a day
2. 2-4 hours of playtime a day as well as appropriate socialization is taught to the kitten during this important time of development.
3. A safe place to live away from dangers such as cords, outside elements, etc.
4. Every 2 weeks will need de-wormer and vaccinations.

**Injured/Recovering Cats/Kittens**

Description: Cats/kittens that arrive at GCHS with infections, wounds or other injuries that require close monitoring or frequent care.

Time Commitment: Variable depending on rapidity of healing/recovery.

Care Requirements:
1. Pain medications or antibiotics may need to be given daily.
2. Bandages may need to be changed.
3. Cat may need to wear a cone collar to prevent licking of the wound.
4. Weekly rechecks with a veterinarian may need to be scheduled.

**Cats/Kittens with Upper Respiratory Infections (URIs)**

Description: Cats/kittens that display symptoms of respiratory infections while at GCHS. Common symptoms include sneezing, decreased appetite, eye and nasal discharge.

Time Commitment: Variable, often 2–3 weeks, may be longer in chronic cases.

Care Requirements:
1. A nutritional supplement to decrease URI symptoms is given in canned food twice daily.
2. Sometimes antibiotics are given, either liquid or pill, often twice daily.
3. Eye medications may be necessary to treat.
4. The cat’s weight/appetite need to be monitored carefully.
5. Cat/Kitten needs to be isolated from other pets during this time, due to infectious potential.
Section 3: Caring for your Foster Kittens

General Care for 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 room 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.

Bringing Everyone Home
Set up your fostering room 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 places where she can care for her kittens. A dark area equipped with a whelping box is ideal.

A whelping box is a box that is large enough for the mother cat to lie on her side slightly away from her kittens with all of the kittens 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 needs to. Lining the bottom of the box with puppy pads topped with newspapers will help absorb moisture. You can place an easy-to-clean blanket on top of the absorbent materials to give the mother cat and kittens a soft place to lie on. Please keep all these materials dry so that the kittens are not chilled by dampness. Do not place straw, hay or shavings in the area where the mother and kittens are kept.

When you bring your foster kittens and their mom home, put them all in the fostering room and close the door, allowing the mom 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 stop hiding.

Mom’s Care of Her Kittens
The momma cat should take care of her kittens by herself for at least three to four weeks before she starts the weaning process for 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 GCHS 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. Here are three stages of nursing:

- One to two 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 time period and then quickly latch on.
- Two to three weeks old: 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 in the nursing position.
Maternal neglect. Sometimes a mother cat stops providing care to one or all of her kittens. The neglect may be because of a birth defect or weakness in the kitten; she may just be trying to follow nature’s course, focusing her attention on the stronger kittens. Neglect may also happen because she is inexperienced or she’s in a stressful environment. Either way, that’s why it’s so important to make daily observations to ensure that she is caring for her babies. If she will let you handle the kittens, you should weigh each kitten once a day to ensure that they are gaining weight. If you notice that she is spending all of her time away from the kittens, is not grooming or nursing them frequently, or doesn’t respond to their cries, please call GCHS right away.

Maternal aggression toward other animals.
Aggressive behavior directed at other animals is common and expected from mother cats because they have a maternal instinct to protect their young at all times. With that in mind, please do not try to introduce her to the other animals in your home. As mentioned above, the mom cat and her kittens should have a quiet room of their own away from all other pets so that she and her babies can always feel safe. If she has seen another animal and becomes stressed or aggressive, it is very important to leave her alone and not try to comfort her. Give her 20 minutes or so to calm down and then check on her.

Maternal aggression toward people. Sometimes mother cats will act aggressively toward people. These behaviors may include hissing, growling, swatting and biting. Again, the mother is merely trying to protect her young. We evaluate mom cats for these behaviors before sending them into foster homes, but sometimes the behaviors develop later. If you have a mother exhibiting these behaviors, do not try to “correct” the behavior with a spray bottle or any type of punishment. She is only acting out of instinct to protect her babies and you could cause her aggressive behavior to escalate.

Contact GCHS at the first sign of any of the above behaviors so we can assess the situation and decide on the safest option for momma and her babies.

Problem Behaviors in Momma Cats
Here are some details about problem behaviors in momma cats and what you can do about them.

- Four to five weeks old: 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 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, call GCHS the next business day. This is not an emergency condition.

The mother cat will groom and lick her babies frequently for the first two to four weeks. She will stimulate her kittens to pee and poop, and will generally consume the fecal matter and urine. As the babies become more mobile, they will start to leave the nest and deposit urine and feces nearby, which is a good time to start introducing a couple of low-sided litter boxes (disposable tend to work best).

To ensure that the mother cat has enough to eat, give her access to both wet and dry food at all times. Food intake for a nursing mother can be two to four 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 percent of kittens pass away because of inadequate maternal care. This can happen for many different reasons, some of which are beyond our control.

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Separating Kittens and Moms

If all of your foster animals, mom included, are healthy and friendly, we have no reason to separate mom from kittens before they are eight weeks old. But there are a few medical or behavioral reasons for separating them earlier than eight weeks:

As mentioned above, if the mother cat is showing signs of maternal neglect and is no longer caring for her kittens, the GCHS may decide to separate her from her kittens.

If the mother cat is semi-feral or very under-socialized, we may decide to separate the kittens once they are eating on their own consistently and no longer need to nurse (around four to five weeks old). Separating them would prevent the kittens from learning feral behaviors from their mother and help them to become socialized, which increases their chances of finding forever homes.

If there is a medical concern about the mom or babies, a veterinarian could make the decision to separate the kittens from the mother cat.

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 consulting GCHS.

General Care for Bottle-Fed Kittens

Bottle-feeding neonatal kittens requires an around-the-clock commitment. Thank you so much for offering your time and attention to these fragile babies. And please remember that we are here to support you. Here’s some general info about bottle-feeding.

Milk Preparation

You can pre-mix enough formula to last for 24 hours of feeding, but it must be refrigerated at all times. Discard all unused and mixed formula after 24 hours. Only heat enough formula for each feeding, and throw away any uneaten warmed formula after each feeding. Do not re-use warmed formula because harmful bacteria can develop in it.

Bottle-Feeding Tips

It is easier to feed your kittens when they are gently wrapped in a towel or blanket, instead of just using your hands.

The towel or blanket is softer and warmer than your hands, and being wrapped up makes the kittens feel safer as they eat. If the kitten allows it, the forelegs should be free to allow him to “knead” with his feet. This kneading activity is essential to the kitten’s muscle development and helps aid in digestion of the kitten’s food. Also, be careful to position the kitten so that his belly is toward the floor. To decrease the chance of formula being aspirated into the lungs, kittens should not be fed on their backs.

Latching On

It may take a couple tries for a kitten to latch on to the bottle nipple. Just be patient; sometimes kittens need some encouragement to eat. Make sure that the nipple you are using on the bottle has an adequate flow of milk. When the nipple tip is punctured with a sterile needle, formula should drip out (one drop at a time, not a stream) when the bottle is inverted 180 degrees. Do not hesitate to call the foster department if you need any help or assistance with feeding your kittens. We are always here for you, ready to answer any questions that you may have.

Aspiration

If liquid bubbles out through the kitten’s nose or he starts coughing, he may have gotten formula in his lungs. Pat the kitten very gently on the back to elicit a cough or sneeze, or hold him in an inverted position, tail over head, for a moment to remove the formula from his lungs. Please notify the foster department if this happens so we can determine if antibiotics or a vet visit is needed.

Peeing and Pooping

Bottle-fed kittens need help with elimination, so you’ll need to stimulate your kittens to pee and poop. After you feed them, wipe each kitten’s back end with a baby wipe or warm wet cotton ball. Remember to do this every time you feed them. Document the color and consistency in your journal. Kittens should urinate after every meal and should poop at least once a day. The normal color of kitten poop is various shades of mustard and the consistency is similar as well. When a kitten is first introduced to formula, it is normal for him or her not to poop for 48 hours.
Signs of Illness
Watch for signs of illness, including frequent crying, restlessness, weakness, coldness (hypothermia), diarrhea, dehydration, shallow or labored breathing, paleness or blueness in color. Notify the foster department immediately if a kitten is losing weight, is cold to the touch, or is having trouble breathing (either shallow or heavy breathing).

Keeping Kittens Warm
When kittens are infants (less than two weeks old), they can be kept in small carriers or playpens that can easily be covered by a blanket to maintain heat and reduce draftiness. As they grow and become more mobile, they will need more space to roam and play. Also, don’t forget that kittens cannot regulate their body temperatures, so please keep a SnuggleSafe disc warm and with them at all times. Because kittens’ skin is very sensitive and prone to thermal burns, the warming disc must be covered by a blanket and puppy pad that the kittens cannot burrow under.

Weighing
Please weigh the kittens before and after each feeding to ensure that they are growing, and record the weights in the journal.

How to Bottle-Feed Kittens
Kittens will bottle-feed every two to four hours, depending on their age. Steps for bottle-feeding a kitten:

1. Warm the formula: Place the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.

2. Ensure that your foster kitten is warm before offering food. Do not attempt to feed a kitten who is chilled* because it can have serious health consequences.

3. Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket and position him so that his belly is toward the floor. Kittens should not be fed on their backs or in an upright position.

4. Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Place the bottle nipple in the kitten’s mouth and gently move it back and forth, holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep air from getting into the kitten’s stomach. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating. If at first you don’t succeed, wait a few minutes and try again. Usually the kitten will latch on and begin to suckle. If the bottle appears to be collapsing, gently remove the nipple from the kitten’s mouth and let more air return to the bottle.

5. Weigh each kitten before and after feeding and record the weights in your journal.

* A kitten’s ideal body temperature is 100 to 102 degrees. If a kitten feels cold to the touch, contact GCHS immediately. A kitten who is cold and unresponsive should be warmed right away. Place the kitten on an approved heating pad safely wrapped in two or three layers of towels. Turn the kitten side to side every 5 minutes. To stimulate blood flow, you may, ever so gently, massage the kitten with hand-rubbing.
General Care for Weaning Kittens

Once your kittens are about four weeks old, it is time to start the weaning process. Your goal is to have the kittens eating on their own consistently by the time they’re adopted. So, beginning at four weeks, start offering warm gruel (two parts wet food, one part formula) at all times, along with dry kitten food and water. Every four to six hours, discard any uneaten gruel and provide a fresh batch.

You will still be supplementing the kittens with a bottle every six hours to ensure that they are getting all the nutrients they need, but encourage them to eat gruel before you offer a bottle. To get a kitten interested in trying the gruel, you may have to offer the gruel with a spoon or use your finger to place a small amount on the kitten’s tongue. Ideally, by the end of five weeks, your foster kittens will be happily eating dry and wet food on their own.

It is important to continue weighing your foster kittens every day, after each feeding, to ensure that they are always gaining weight. During the weaning stage, you should also begin introducing the kittens to the litter box because they should be able to eliminate on their own by about four weeks of age.

Making formula
Mix two parts water with one part formula. Mix the powder and water until all clumps are gone. Remember, mixed formula only lasts for 24 hours.

Making gruel
Mix 1/2 can of wet food with 1/4 can of formula per kitten. You can add a little water if the kittens seem to like a looser consistency. It’s OK make gruel in bulk and refrigerate it, but you’ll need to warm it before offering it to the kittens.

General Care for Independent Kittens

By five to seven weeks old, your kittens should be independent eaters. Dry food should be their primary source of food, but offer wet food frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish if needed.

During this stage, your daily responsibilities include socializing the kittens and exposing them to new situations and environments. It’s important to try and keep all experiences positive for the kittens, so give them lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places and faces.

As always, watch the behavior of your kittens and monitor their health daily. Continue to keep a journal detailing each foster kitten’s weight, appetite, energy level and overall health. Weigh the kittens once a day, preferably around the same time, to minimize the variables when tracking the kittens’ growth. Look over each kitten every day for physical changes or potential medical problems.

Now that the kittens are using a litter box, be sure to scoop the box at least two times daily. Every other day, dump the litter, clean the box with a mild detergent (such as dishwashing liquid) and put in fresh litter. You’ll want to monitor the kittens for diarrhea, and clean the litter box more frequently if diarrhea is apparent.

At this stage, play with the kittens several times a day with interactive toys. Play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster kittens like. Cat toys don’t have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag (remove the handles for safety) or a box with holes cut in the sides.

Don’t leave your foster kittens alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to them. Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe. Also, it may seem cute, but discourage your foster kittens from play-biting your hands and feet. This is something that adopters may not find desirable.
General Care for Adult Felines

Feeding
All foster cats should be fed a diet of dry cat food, unless otherwise specified by the GCHS. We provide Mounds cat food. Feed your foster cat once or twice daily; the amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster cat. Make sure the cat always has access to fresh, clean water.

You can give your foster cat treats of any kind (unless he/she has known allergies, of course); giving treats helps you and your foster cat to bond with each other. Keep in mind that some people food and house plants (which cats like to chew on) are poisonous for cats, so remove any plants or food from areas that your foster cat can access.

Daily Routine
When you first take your foster cat home, take care not to overwhelm her with too many new experiences all at once. Moving to a new environment is stressful in itself for many cats, so keep introductions to people and animals to a minimum during the first couple of weeks after you bring your foster cat home. It also helps to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings and play times.

In addition, on a daily basis, be aware of your foster cat’s appetite and energy level. If she’s not eating well or seems listless, something may be wrong medically. You might want to record your observations to make it easier to notice any health issues.

Litter Box Habits
You can help your foster cat be more adoptable by paying close attention to his litter box habits and making the litter box as inviting as possible. The litter box should be located in a place that the cat can access easily. If you have other cats, there should be one litter box for each cat in the house, plus one extra. The litter boxes should be placed in quiet, low-traffic spots so that the cats aren’t startled when trying to take care of business.

We advise against the use of covered litter boxes because some cats don’t like them, which can create litter box problems from the start. Covered litter boxes can trap odors inside the box, which is nice for you, but not for your cat. Cats are often quite fastidious; they are sensitive to the smell of urine and feces, as well as deodorizers.

You can also prevent litter box issues by keeping the litter box as clean as possible. Scoop out each litter box at least once daily, and empty it completely to clean it every two weeks. When you clean the litter box, use a mild soap (such as dishwashing soap), not strong-smelling detergents or ammonia.

If your foster cat is not using the litter box, please notify GCHS immediately so you can work on resolving the issue before not using the box becomes a habit. Keep in mind that a cat may miss the litter box if she has a medical issue like diarrhea or she may avoid the box if she has a urinary tract infection, which causes pain when urinating.

If your foster cat has an accident, don’t discipline or punish her. It will only teach her to fear and mistrust you. Clean up all accidents with an enzymatic cleaner. Nature’s Miracle and Simple Solution are two products containing natural enzymes that tackle tough stains and odors and remove them permanently.

Grooming
A clean and well-groomed cat has a better chance of getting adopted, so brush your foster cat regularly, especially if he has longer hair. Contact GCHS if you feel that your foster cat needs to see a professional groomer. If you are comfortable with it, you can trim his nails. But please be careful because you can cause pain and bleeding if you trim the nails too short.

Cats don’t generally like being bathed, so please don’t give your foster cat any baths.
Mental Stimulation and Exercise

Because play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy, provide your foster cat with at least one or two play sessions per day. The length of the play sessions will vary, depending on the cat’s age and health. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster cat prefers. Cat toys don’t have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag (remove the handles for safety) or a box with holes cut in the sides.

Don’t leave your foster cat alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to the cat. Examples are string toys, yarn and Da Bird (feathers dangling from a string and wand). Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe. Discourage your foster cat from play-biting your hands and feet. This is something that adopters may not find desirable.

Section 4: Medical Care

Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster animal to a veterinarian without authorization from the foster coordinator or adoptions manager.

Approved veterinary clinics

Green County Humane Society Shelter Vet
Phone: 608-325-9600

Monroe Veterinary Service
Phone: 608-325-2106
Address: 1317 31st Avenue, Monroe

Argyle Veterinary Service
Phone: 608-543-3082
Address: 201 South Street, Argyle

Please note: If you wish to take your foster pet to a veterinarian who’s not on this list, you must first have approval from the foster coordinator or risk having to cover the costs yourself.

Signs of illness and what to do next

Cats generally do a good job of masking when they don’t feel well, so determining if your foster cat is under the weather will require diligent observation of the cat’s daily activity and appetite levels. It’s a good idea to keep track of these levels in a journal. You’ll also want to record any of the following symptoms, which could be signs of illness.

- **Eye discharge.** It is normal for cats to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if your foster cat has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, you need to contact GCHS to schedule a vet appointment.

- **Sneezing and nasal discharge.** Sneezing can be common in a cat recovering from an upper respiratory infection. If the sneezing becomes more frequent, watch for discharge coming from the nose. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be necessary. You can try nebulizing the cat to relieve her discomfort. Nebulizing can be done in two ways: (1) place the cat in the bathroom with a hot shower running (do not place the cat in the shower); (2) put the cat in a carrier, cover it with a towel, and place a nebulizer or humidifier under the towel. If the discharge becomes colored, contact GCHS to schedule a vet appointment because the cat may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the cat’s breathing. If the cat starts to breathe with an open mouth or wheeze, call GCHS immediately and follow the emergency contact protocol. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the cat’s eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating.

- **Loss of appetite.** Your foster cat may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. But if the cat hasn’t eaten after 24 hours, or kittens after 8 hours, please notify the Green County Humane Society. Also, if the cat has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, call the Humane Society to set up a vet appointment.
• **Lethargy.** The activity level of your foster cat will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log and journal will help you notice whether your foster cat is less active than he normally is. If the cat cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it’s an emergency, so start the emergency contact protocol.

• **Dehydration.** Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the cat’s skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the cat is dehydrated. Please call GCHS the next business day to schedule a medical appointment.

• **Vomiting.** Sometimes cats will vomit up a thick tubular hairball with bile or other liquids. This is normal, but please call the GCHS if the cat has out-of-the-ordinary vomiting that does not occur in conjunction with a hairball. Don’t worry about one or two vomiting episodes as long as the cat is acting normally otherwise: eating, active, no diarrhea.

• **Pain or strain while urinating.** When a cat first goes into a foster home, he or she may not urinate due to stress. If the cat hasn’t urinated in more than 24 hours, or kittens after 8 hours, however, please contact GCHS. Also, if you notice the cat straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact GCHS immediately because it may be indicative of an infection or a urethral obstruction, which can be life-threatening.

• **Diarrhea.** It is important to monitor your foster cat’s pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking a cat home, most likely caused by stress and a change in food. If your foster cat has liquid stool, however, please contact the GCHS so that an appointment can be scheduled to ensure that the cat doesn’t need medications. Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the cat, so be proactive about contacting GCHS. If your foster cat has bloody or mucoid diarrhea, please contact the GCHS immediately and start the emergency contact protocol.

• **Frequent ear scratching.** Your foster cat may have ear mites if she scratches her ears often and/or shakes her head frequently, or if you see a dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds when you look in her ears. Ear mites can be treated by a medical staff, so please call or email GCHS for a medical appointment.

• **Swollen, irritated ears.** If your foster cat has irritated, swollen or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, he may have an ear infection called otitis. It’s more common in dogs, but some cats do get it. If you see these signs, please contact GCHS.

• **Hair loss.** Please contact GCHS if you notice any hair loss on your foster cat. It is normal for cats to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm or dermatitis. It is important to check your foster cat’s coat every day.

### Parasite Prevention

**Fleas:** Foster animals that are old enough receive flea prevention before being placed into foster care. Certain kittens or puppies may be too young for flea treatment when they are placed into foster care. It is the Foster Caregiver’s responsibility (and strongly recommended by GCHS) to treat all of their own pets with a monthly flea preventative. Additional monthly flea preventative will be provided for the fostered animal by GCHS if needed.

**Intestinal Worms:** Appropriate intestinal deworming medication will be provided for the Foster Caregiver by GCHS with a schedule to guide appropriate dosing. It is the Foster Caregiver’s responsibility to use this medication as directed. Periodic fecal testing may be requested by GCHS.

**Heartworm:** GCHS dogs are not tested for heartworm disease, nor are they placed on any heartworm preventative. If a GCHS dog has heartworm disease, it can be transmitted via mosquitoes to other animals in the family. It is strongly recommended by GCHS that other dogs in the family be kept on a monthly heartworm preventative throughout the foster period.
Common Ailments in Animals from Shelters

Shelter cats may suffer from upper respiratory infection, giardia or intestinal parasites. Symptoms of upper respiratory infection include sneezing (often with colored discharge), discharge from the nose and/or eyes, decrease in appetite, dehydration and slight lethargy. Symptoms of giardia or intestinal parasites include vomiting, diarrhea (often with a pungent odor) and/or dehydration.

If your foster cat is displaying one or more of these signs, please contact GCHS. These ailments can worsen if left untreated.

Criteria for Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a cat? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn’t stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours

*If your foster cat displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency phone protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to get help.

Section 5: Feline Behavior

One of your goals as a foster parent is to help prepare your foster cat for living successfully in a home. So, we ask that you help your foster cat to develop good habits and skills through the use of positive reinforcement, which builds a bond of trust between you and your foster pet. The basic idea is to reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.

You must not punish a cat for a behavior that you find undesirable because punishment is ineffective at eliminating the behavior. If the cat is doing something undesirable, distract him or her before the behavior occurs. It is also important for every human in the foster home to stick to the rules established for your foster cats, which will help them to learn faster.
Some foster cats will have behavioral issues, which we are aware of at the time of their rescue. Some of these behavior challenges are fearfulness, house soiling or aggression toward other animals. We will only place cats with behavioral issues with a person who feels comfortable working with the cat on his/her particular issues. We will provide that person with all the necessary information so that proper care and training can be given to the foster cat.

If you feel unable to manage any behavior that your foster cat is exhibiting, please contact GCHS during business hours to discuss the issue. We will guide you and help in every way that we can.

Aggression

Please call GCHS if your foster animal shows any signs of aggression towards another animal or a human. This includes any growling, snapping, biting, scratching, lunging, etc.

Section 6: Expectations of Foster Caregivers & GCHS

All Foster Caregivers voluntarily enter into an agreement with the Green County Humane Society (GCHS) to provide temporary care and custody of the animal they agree to foster. The following expectations are conditions of the Foster Home Agreement which is signed at the time the animal is put into foster care:

- The Foster Caregiver is over 21 years of age and is able to provide foster care for up to 60 days.
- The Foster Caregiver agrees to provide GCHS access to their home for a home inspection as a part of the application process.
- The Foster Caregiver understands that their foster home is temporary and agrees to return the animal or make reasonable arrangements to do so within 48 hours of receiving a request from GCHS.
- The animal remains the property of GCHS while in the Foster Caregivers possession. GCHS has the right to examine the animal at any time. If living or physical conditions are not satisfactory to GCHS, GCHS may immediately reclaim the animal.
- The Foster Caregiver provides humane care which includes adequate food, water, shelter, activity and kind treatment at all times as well as any transportation to and from vet appointments. The Foster Caregiver understands that they are responsible for the cost of food and supplies and will purchase from the recommended list as provided by GCHS. In addition, the Foster Caregiver agrees to follow any written instructions from GCHS. GCHS agrees to provide any needed medications, flea & tick preventative medication, prescription food or health care.
- The Foster Caregiver agrees NOT to use the animal for breeding, experimental, inhumane or illegal purposes.
- The Foster Caregiver agrees not to alter in any way the appearance of the animal being fostered which includes declawing, removing dew claws and/or cropping/docking of ears or tails.
- The Foster Caregiver has been fully informed of the animal’s known background and medical history. GCHS provides no guarantee as to the health of the foster animal, and the foster animal may have significant medical needs, socialization problems, and/or may not be housebroken. The Foster Caregiver also understands that they must administer, as recommended by the shelter veterinarian, any prescribed medications.
- The Foster Caregiver agrees to notify GCHS of any behavioral or health changes and provide regular updates to the shelter as to the status of the foster animal. GCHS reserves the right to determine the proper course of action upon notification.
- The Foster Caregiver agrees that before taking the animal for veterinary treatment permission must be obtained from GCHS.
The Foster Caregiver understands that accidental animal bites or other injuries to humans and other animals do occur, and agree to hold harmless and indemnify, and protect GCHS, from any claim or suit filed by anyone as a result of such an incident. In addition, GCHS will not be responsible if the animal should damage or destroy property belonging to the Foster Caregiver.

The Foster Caregiver will not transfer possession or custody of the foster animal to any other person at any time, except for temporary, short-term possession for the purpose of vet care or grooming.

The Foster Caregiver agrees to contact the GCHS (608-325-9600 or 608-558-9151) immediately if the animal is lost, stolen or dies while in their care and supervision.

The Foster Caregiver understands that if the foster animal is the subject of a court case, they agree to bring the animal to the shelter as needed.

If the animal is not reclaimed or adopted, and the Foster Caregiver wishes to adopt the animal, they understand that they must go through GCHS adoption screening process. GCHS reserves the right to determine final disposition of the animal.

The Foster Caregiver understands that there is no claim, now or in the future, to any type of compensation or reimbursement for caring for a foster animal. If the Foster Caregiver can no longer, or does not want to continue to provide care for the foster animal, they agree to contact GCHS and arrange for the return of the animal. GCHS has the right to terminate the agreement and also has the right to the immediate return of the foster animal and any other animals for whom the Foster Caregiver is providing foster care.