

SAN FRANCISCO SPCA

WWW.SFSPCA.ORG

FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

V O L U N T E E R M A N U A L



Make sure to join the SF SPCA Foster eGroup—<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/spcafostercare>



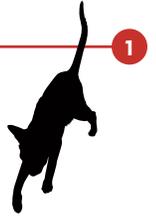


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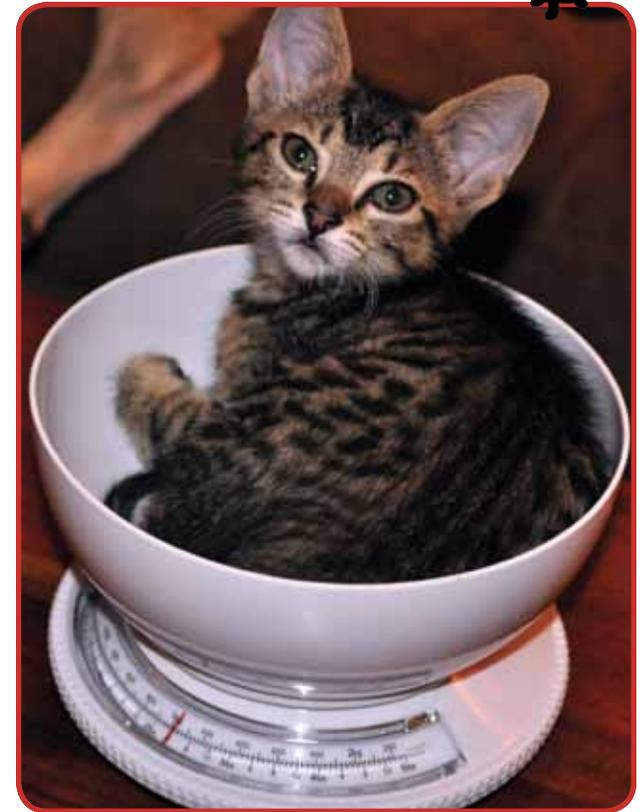
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Important Questions to Ask Yourself

Before you decide to foster for the SF SPCA...

- **Are you able to get to us quickly in an emergency?**
- **Will you be able to spend quality time with the animals?**
 On average, it is best to spend **at least 2 hours** a day with your foster animals. Socialization can be as important as feeding them and keeping them clean.
- **Will you be able to commit to appointments ranging from once a week to every three weeks whether or not they are ill?**
- **Are you aware that there is a great deal of clean-up and even possible damage to your home when you take a foster home?**
 Foster animals can ruin new drapes, carpeting, clothing and the SF SPCA will not be held responsible for any damage incurred while fostering an animal.
- **Are you willing to work with our veterinary care system?**
 Please understand that only our vets can treat foster animals free of charge.
- **Are you able to separate our animals from your own?**
 Foster animals must remain isolated from your resident pets. Can you keep them in an enclosed area away from your animals?
- **Can you commit to spending the entire foster period with the animal?**
 If something unexpected happens, you will need to call **415-522-3542** to inform us of an early foster return.
- **Do you feel comfortable explaining to friends that these animals are not yours to adopt out and that they must go through the regular adoption process at the SF SPCA?**
- **Will you be able to bring the animal back at the end of the foster period?**
 It can be difficult to let go once you have become emotionally attached.
- **Are you emotionally prepared to handle the death of one of your foster animals?**
 This can be very difficult, but the sad truth is that it sometimes happens. In this event, the SPCA should be contacted immediately.



Frequently Asked Questions

Can I let the kittens play with my resident pets?

NO! You are required to separate your foster kittens from your resident pets. Not only could your pets introduce diseases to the foster kittens, but the kittens could also introduce deadly diseases to your pets. It is best to consider the health of all the animals under your care. The SF SPCA cannot be responsible for the health of your resident pets.

What if I have to leave town and the kittens aren't ready?

Occasionally things come up that require you to leave town before your foster kittens are ready to be returned. If this happens, call the Foster Coordinator (415-522-3542) to arrange for the kittens' care. You cannot hire someone to baby-sit. You alone are responsible for the care of the kittens and we cannot work with someone who is not associated with the SF SPCA.

Can I foster kittens if I have a full-time job?

It depends on the flexibility of your job and your schedule. Most of our foster parents do work full-time, but are able to spend time with their foster kittens before they leave for work and when they come home. They are also able to accommodate their schedule if a kitten is seriously ill and needs to be seen by our medical staff right away.

How much time do I need to spend with the kittens?

As much time as you possibly can! The more time you spend with your fosters, the more you will help with their socialization. You'll also spot symptoms that your kittens are not feeling well—with kittens this young that could be critical. Besides, it's a lot of fun to play with kittens!

As noted above, it's not that you have to be home with the kittens all the time, but you do need to make a commitment to their well-being. You are responsible for these little lives!

How many kittens will I be fostering?

At least two kittens go out on foster at a time so that they can teach each other kitty manners. In special circumstances, a kitten may go on foster alone but that is usually for behavior reasons.

How long will the kittens need to be in foster?

Kittens need to be fostered until they reach two pounds of weight. Remember, "It's the weight, not the date!"





Frequently Asked Questions (cont.)

What if I get overwhelmed and can't take care of the kittens?

If you feel that you are unable to give adequate care to the kittens, contact the Foster Coordinator right away and make arrangements to bring the kittens back. We appreciate the effort; fostering is not right for everyone all the time.

Will I need to give medications?

Almost every kitten will need medication for something. The medical technician will be happy to show you how to give medication to a kitten. It is not difficult and is very important that you are able to give a kitten the medication it needs.

When a kitten is two pounds is it automatically ready to come back?

The kitten is ready if it is two pounds and not on any medication for an upper respiratory infection. At that time, please call the Foster Coordinator and make an appointment to return the kitten.

If one of the kittens is at two pounds but the other is not, do I return just that one?

It's usually better to return kittens together, but only if they are fairly close in weight. If there is a kitten that is much larger than its sibling, it might be better to return that one rather than wait for the smaller one to catch up. Sometimes the larger kitten will also play more roughly or be more aggressive about eating, which can overwhelm the smaller kitten. It would be best to call the Foster Coordinator and discuss what's best for all the kittens.

Will any of my foster kittens die?

Sadly, not all foster kittens survive, even with all the care they receive in a foster home. If any of your kittens die, call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line (415-740-1646) immediately and you will receive further instruction. Kittens are very fragile, and nature did not intend for them all to survive. Happily, it is a very small percentage of kittens who don't make it compared to the number of kittens who do get a second chance and find happy homes through the dedication and care of the foster parents here at the SF SPCA.



Welcome & Introduction



Welcome to the San Francisco SPCA Foster Care Program!

The Foster Care Program allows the SF SPCA to take in about 1000 more kittens per year than could be housed in the shelter due to limitations of space and resources. Your help will save the lives of many kittens who would be euthanized at another shelter.

Generally, kittens in the Foster Care Program are those who have not yet reached the 2-pound minimum weight required to undergo the spay/neuter surgery. These kittens are very small, and often require more individual care than they can receive in a shelter environment. It takes a lot of work and a lot of patience to care for kittens.

In order to foster kittens, you will need some supplies. The SF SPCA provides a carrier, food, a scale, and medical care for the kittens. Foster parents are required to have a litter box with an approved type of litter (see page 22); bowls for food and water; toys; and a safe, clean space for the kittens to live in.

Fostering requires a flexible schedule and a personal commitment to the kittens. In a typical day, you can expect to give food and water to the kittens at least twice. The litter box(es) will also need scooping at least twice a day. Don't forget to allow for a little playtime and snuggling! Daily weigh-ins are required to keep track of your kittens' progress toward their weight goals. If the kittens you are fostering are sick, you will have to medicate the kittens as well. Additionally, you are required to keep appointments for regular revaccinations or medical care. The expected **minimum** time commitment is about 2 hours per day caring for your kittens, and a vaccination appointment every few weeks.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. You get to help kittens grow from helpless little beings into confident, well-adjusted family pets. You also get the fun of raising a kitten without the responsibility of lifetime care. Most importantly, you are saving lives.



MAKE SURE TO JOIN THE SF SPCA FOSTER eGROUP

This group is to support foster parents who are volunteering with the SF SPCA and provides a forum for you to share photos and to receive important information about fostering

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/spcafostercare>



SHOPPING LIST

- Litter box
- Scooper
- Appropriate litter (see page 22)
- Food bowls (2—one for wet food, one for dry food)
- Water bowl (one that won't tip over)
- Cardboard scratching post
- Towels for bedding
- Toys (see page 23)



SF SPCA Foster Parent Agreement & Waiver (Volunteer Copy)



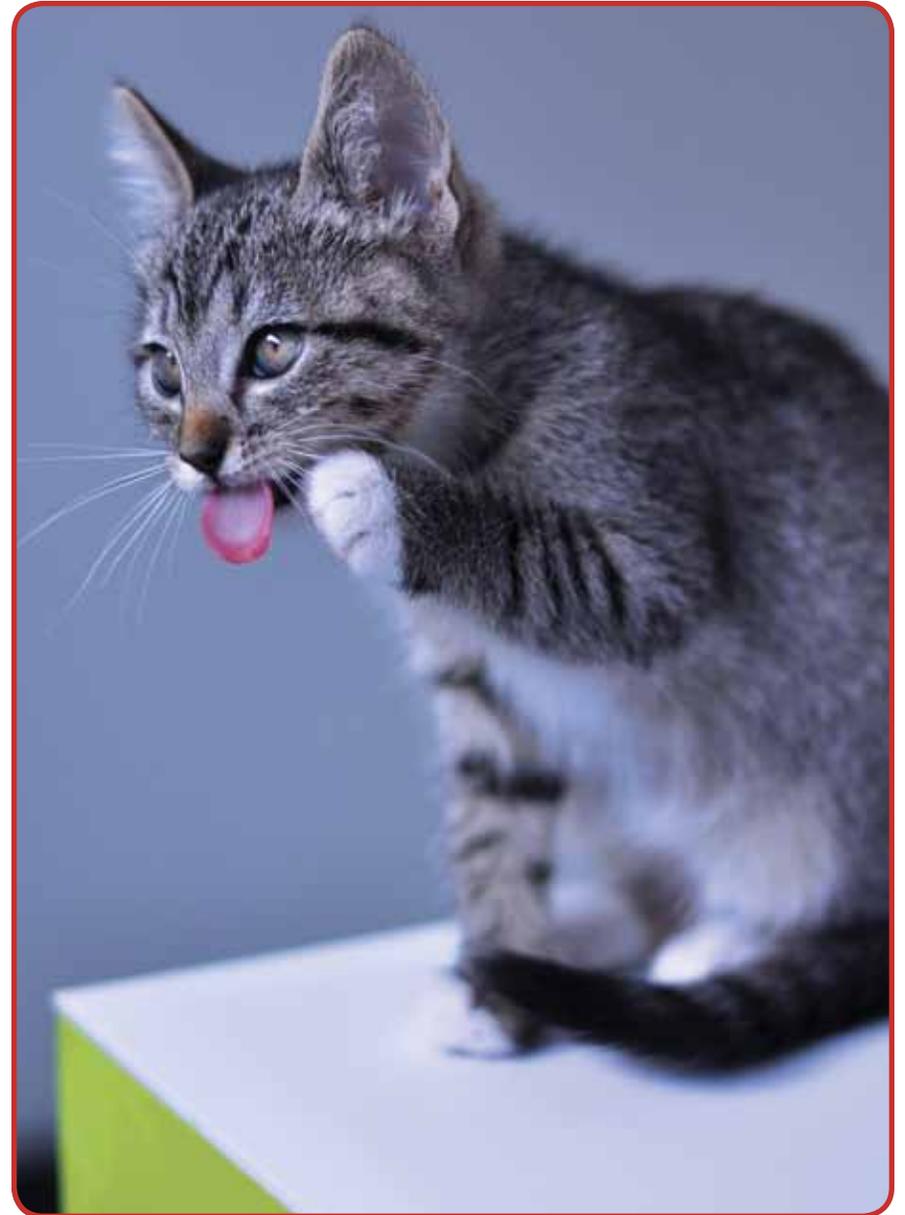
I understand The San Francisco SPCA runs a Foster Care Program for an animal(s) that is not adoptable because of age, medical condition or behavior. I fully understand that this animal(s) is only temporarily in my care and belongs exclusively to The San Francisco SPCA. I further

understand that the purpose of this foster relationship is solely to provide care for this animal(s). I understand that the designated foster supervisor must approve any determination made concerning this animal(s).

I understand and agree that I will return the animal(s) on the scheduled date or on demand whichever is sooner. I understand that any and all placements will only be made through Maddie's Adoption Center and are subject to the same guidelines as any other adoption.

I hereby acknowledge that I have read, fully understood and fully agreed to all parts of The San Francisco SPCA Foster Parent Agreement in addition to the above, and that the Agreement form shall serve as a binding addendum to this Foster Parent agreement.

Volunteer Copy



SF SPCA Foster Parent Agreement: Cat/Kitten (Volunteer Copy)

As a foster parent for the SF SPCA, I agree to the following:

- To keep my foster cat/kittens current on their vaccinations.
- To give my foster cat/kittens only medications prescribed by the SF SPCA Medical Department.
- To feed ONLY the food given to me or approved by the SF SPCA Foster Care Program.
- To keep my foster cat/ kittens separate from any resident pets.
- To keep my foster cat/kittens confined to a kitten-proofed space and indoors at all times.
- To use an approved carrier to transport my foster cat/kittens to and from the SF SPCA.
- That I will not give the care of my foster cat/kittens to anyone else at any time.
- To notify the SF SPCA Foster Care Program and/or the Cat Behavior Department if my foster cat/kittens are not consistently using the litter box in an appropriate fashion.
- To notify the SF SPCA Foster Care Program or the SF SPCA Medical Department if my foster cat/kittens are not eating for more than 24 hours.
- To notify the SF SPCA Foster Care Program or the SF SPCA Medical Department if my foster cat/kittens are having diarrhea for more than 24 hours.
- To clean out and disinfect all supplies used by my foster cat/kittens before using them with a new group of fosters.
- To clean out and disinfect my designated cat/kitten space before introducing a new group of fosters.



I hereby acknowledge that I have read, fully understood and fully agree to all parts of the San Francisco SPCA Foster Parent Agreement.

If I am unable to comply with this agreement, I understand that it may lead to a termination of my fostering with the SF SPCA.

Volunteer Copy





Providing a Safe Home Environment

The Safe Room

Choose a space that is free of things that can hurt a kitten. You must be able to control the temperature of the room—be sure there are no drafts. The kittens should be isolated from your own pets, as some kitten illnesses are transmittable and occasionally fatal, even to grown cats. The room your foster kittens are living in should be able to withstand litter box accidents, vomit, and spilled medicine. A bathroom is often a good choice for fostering (just don't forget to close the toilet lid and hide the toilet paper!).

Kitten-Proofing

Remember that kittens are babies, and consequently they will try to get into everything! Block any electrical outlets and put away anything that a kitten could swallow or get tangled in. Hide any breakable items. Block any small holes where a kitten might hide and become inaccessible to you. It helps to lie down on the floor on your stomach so that you can see the room from the kittens' point of view and identify potential hazards. Any windows in the room should be kept closed or securely screened.

Inside the Kitten Room

The kitten room should contain everything the kittens will need to eat, drink, eliminate, sleep and play:

- Have at least one bowl for water, one for wet food, and one for dry food. It is best to provide more bowls if you have several kittens so no one has to compete for access to food.
- Put the litter boxes as far away as possible from food, water and bedding.
- Be sure to provide enough boxes so that each kitten has a clean place to eliminate.
- Old towels tend to work well as bedding. A secure sleeping area, such as a cat carrier with the door removed or a box on its side, will help the kittens feel safe—this is especially important for shy kittens.
- Provide safe, disposable or easily sanitized toys to entertain the kittens when you are not with them, such as ping pong balls and wine corks.
- Finally, some type of scratching post or cardboard scratch pad will be necessary.



Pickup and Return Procedures

Picking Up Kittens

Picking up and returning foster kittens is an easy process, but it requires a little scheduling.

- First, you will fill out a short questionnaire so the Foster Coordinator knows what kinds of kittens would be best for your situation. *You will only have to fill out this form once a year.*
- You will then be placed on the spcafostercare e-group.
- As soon as kittens come in, the Foster Coordinator will send a message to the e-group informing everyone that there are kittens in need of a foster home. If you have no email access, you may receive a phone call when your services are required.
- When you respond, the foster coordinator will help you schedule a convenient time to pick up your fresh group of kittens! Pickup must occur during the SF SPCA's business hours.

Returning Kittens

Returning foster kittens is a very similar process.

- As soon as your kittens begin reaching the 2-pound goal, contact the Foster Coordinator. She will advise you on the best plan for getting the kittens in. **It's best to return the kittens in the morning between 8:00am–9:45am so the kittens can get their spay/neuter surgery that same day.**
- Before you return the kittens, fill out the foster return sheet so we have extra information to give the potential adopters and facilitate the adoption process. *Please note that we can only accept a limited number of kittens for return in one day so make an appointment early enough to get them in on the date you need.*
- Make sure kittens have their ID collars on.
- When you return kittens, they are not immediately available for adoption. First they must undergo a health check. During the health check, the SF SPCA examines the kittens to see if they look healthy and have made the 2-pound minimum weight required for the spay/neuter surgery. They will receive any vaccines that may be due.



A-NUMBERS

Each kitten is assigned an **A-number**. You'll see this A-number on the collar and on your foster paperwork. Refer to the kitten's A-number whenever you call the SF SPCA—it's easier to find information on the computer using the A-number.



Daily Care

Health Monitoring

It is important to monitor a kitten's health and weight daily. You will be given a "daily foster journal form" where you should record each kitten's weight, eating habits and overall health. You will also be given a scale so you can measure each kitten's weight.

Weighing Your Kittens

You should weigh your kittens at the same time every day and keep track of their weight gain/loss in your daily foster journal. Keep this log current, as it will be the easiest way to tell when you have a serious problem and need to seek help for the kittens! Ideally, your foster kittens should be gaining 10–15 grams (1/4 oz–1/2 oz) a day. **If your kittens are not eating and are losing weight you must contact the SF SPCA Foster Program (415-522-3542 or 415-740-1226) and you may need to bring the kittens in right away. If you are unable to contact the Foster Program and you feel that it is an emergency, please call 415-740-1646.**

Feeding

Please feed your foster kittens only what is provided to you by the SF SPCA. These kittens will generally be given one brand of food in the adoption center. Also, the kittens have brand new digestive systems that can be irritated by introducing too many food choices. Some human foods can be toxic to cats, so it is best not to experiment

If your foster kittens refuse to eat the food you were given, contact the foster coordinator or the tech line. The person you talk to will help you determine whether this is a medical problem or a preference issue, and will advise you of the next step to take. Do not attempt to make this decision yourself.



NOT EATING!

Not eating can become an emergency quickly, so please call if your kitten has not eaten for 12 hours.



Daily Routine

Feeding

- Kittens should be fed at least 2 times a day.
- Pick up dirty wet food dishes.
- Monitor appetites.

Cleaning Schedule

- Scoop litterbox at least 2 times daily.
- Monitor for diarrhea.
- Clay litter should be dumped and changed every other day for 2 kittens, daily for more than 2 kittens or if kittens have diarrhea.

Health Check

- Look over your kitten everyday for any changes or potential medical problems.
- Check body and fur.
- Look closely at eyes, in mouth and ears.
- Check collars.
- Weigh kittens.
- Check energy levels.

Playtime & Mental Stimulation

- Kittens should receive one to two play sessions daily with interactive toys (or more!).
- Remember to discourage play with hands.
- Interactive toys should not be left unattended with kittens.
- Safe solo toys such as ping pong balls should be left out at all times.
- Change up the environment in small ways.
 - Cardboard boxes.
 - Move things around in the kittens' room.

Socialization

- Socialize kittens a minimum of 2-3 20-minute visits daily.
- Undersocialized kittens 3-4 20-minute visits daily.
- Encourage affectionate behavior.
- Kittens should meet new people a few times weekly if possible.

Handling & Gentling

- Medium or long-haired kittens especially may benefit from daily exposure to brushing in very small amounts.
- Gently handling paws in preparation for nail trimming.
- Exposure to being picked up.



NOT EATING!

Not eating can become an emergency quickly, so please call if your kitten has not eaten for 12 hours.



Revaccinations

Kittens will need routine visits to the doctor regardless of their health. Kittens are vaccinated every two weeks. Please check with the Foster Coordinator to find out what the current revaccination schedule is, and please be sure to keep your kittens on this schedule. You are responsible for remembering to make the appointments — no one will call and remind you.

Only give kittens medications which are prescribed specifically for them by the SF SPCA veterinarians. You may be asked to try several different medicines before finding one that works. Just be patient! It may take some time, but with care and attention, kittens will usually rebound from illness and be up and about in no time.

When you come in for medical appointments, please make sure to have identifying collars on the kittens.

Cleaning Up Between Litters

When you return the foster kittens, you will need to sanitize the fostering room before putting new kittens in. Start by removing everything the kittens slept on, ate from, played with and eliminated in. Scrub everything the kittens could reach (don't forget the walls) with a weak bleach solution (1 part bleach to 32 parts **cold water**, or 1 ounce per quart—you should always mix the bleach with **cold water** to reduce any harmful vapors). Food and water bowls can be washed in the dishwasher; the heat will disinfect the bowls. If you don't have a dishwasher, then soak the bowls in the bleach solution for approximately 10 minutes. Clean the litter box and any reusable toys with the bleach solution as well. Wash all bedding using bleach and hot water. Throw away any toys made of cardboard or other non-cleanable materials. This should prevent any new litters from catching anything that the previous kittens contracted.



REVACCINATIONS

Kittens are vaccinated every two weeks. You are responsible to make appointments — no one will call you to remind you. To schedule a revaccination appointment, call the Medical Appointments line:

(415) 554-3084

(Monday–Saturday: 8:30am–5:00pm)

Fostering Mom Cats with Kittens

Fostering a mom cat with kittens is a very exciting and rewarding job. You will get to see intimately how a mom cat cares for her kittens as well as the stages of development in their relationship. This appendix will help you be the supportive foster parent and will address what to expect, normal behavior, and problem behavior and troubleshooting.

What Type of Setting Do Mom Cats Need?

In one word: **CALM**. Instinct tells mom cats to keep their kittens safe and, in order to feel safe, they need privacy, quiet, and minimal activity. Stress can cause cats to become aggressive, to not take care of their babies properly, and, in some instances, even causes extreme behaviors such as cannibalism. Your role is to give the mom cat the type of environment where she can feel comfortable raising her young.

Every household that intends to foster a mom cat with kittens should have a separate room away from the hub of daily activity. A home with no other pets is ideal but, if you do have pets, you should be able to prevent your pet from going up to the door of the fostering room. Mom cat fosters are not recommended if you have a dog unless it is a very mellow and quiet dog. If your home environment is loud and/or active, such as with young children, you may want to consider a different type of foster.

Home Introduction — You will need to set up the room for your foster mom and babies before you let any of them out of the carrier. Ideally, you should do this before you get the mom and litter from the SPCA. The room should have one or two larger “safe spaces” or nests, boxes on their sides, or an empty litterbox lined with towels, etc. Mom will want to choose somewhere to keep her kittens. The SPCA may also provide you with a vari-kennel which, once you take the door off, can make a nice cubby for mom and babies.

When you first let mom out, do not pet her or make too many advances. Leave her alone with the kittens to explore her new home. Adult cats can take a while to adjust to new places and mom cats are no exception. They may take a few days or more to come out of hiding.

Litterbox — Ideally, the litterbox will be as far away from the food and water as possible. It should have regular, unscented clay litter in it, be scooped 2 times a day, and be dumped out once weekly. Once the kittens start using the litterbox, you will likely need to add low-sided boxes that are easy for the kittens to get in and out of, and/or clean more frequently.

Handling & Socialization — Proceed slowly with any adult cat you do not know—let her come to you, pet her only as much as she is comfortable with, and stop petting at the first signs of discomfort. These signs may include: swishing tail, ears laid back or to the sides, head jerk towards your hand or the area where you were petting her, tensing up, cranky overdrawn meow, moving away, hissing, or growling.

Even a momma cat needs playtime. Make sure to have solo-play toys as well as interactive play sessions with mom. After kittens are 2-3 weeks old, she may show more interest in play. Please refer to the section, “Playing” (see page 23), for more info on the importance and the how-to’s of playtime.



Mom's Care of the Kittens

For the first few weeks of life, mom should do everything necessary for the kittens. After that, you can start sharing some of the kitten care duties with her, if she is willing! Below is an explanation of the normal care a mom cat gives to her kittens, with an approximate timeline, so you will know what behaviors to expect. All cats are slightly different, with some being more attentive moms than others, but if a mom cat fails to care for her babies in any of these important functions, let us know as soon as possible so they can all be evaluated by medical staff.

Nursing — Kittens begin to nurse 1-2 hours after birth. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side.

The nursing/suckling relationship occurs over 3 stages.

- In the beginning, mom initiates each nursing episode, waking the kittens by licking them and then encircling them with her body. After a little searching, kittens quickly latch on.
- The second stage occurs after the second or third week, when the kitten's eyes and ears are functioning and they can interact with the mother both inside and outside the nest. At this stage, the kittens also initiate some of the nursing episodes. The mother generally cooperates by lying down and taking up the nursing position.
- In the third stage, starting at about 5 weeks postpartum, the kittens initiate virtually all nursing. The mother becomes gradually more evasive and uncooperative. Near the end of this stage, the mother begins to wean her kittens by becoming less and less available. In wild cats, this is the time when the mom would begin to provide them with fresh killed prey. You can help in the weaning process by encouraging the babies to eat canned and, later, dry food.

Grooming — Kittens receive a lot of grooming and licking from their mothers during their first 2-4 weeks. This anogenital grooming stimulates elimination, and the fecal matter and urine are consumed by the mom. This is effective in keeping the nest and babies clean. Later, as the young are able to leave the nest area, the anogenital licking subsides, and the young deposit feces and urine nearby. At this point, providing low-sided litterboxes nearby will teach them to use the litterbox. You generally do not need to intervene at this point, though there is more cleaning as things certainly get messier!

When to Separate Kittens & Mom

If all members of your feline family are healthy and well-socialized, there may be no reason to separate babies from mother before 8 weeks, or when they are returned to the SPCA. However, sometimes there are medical or behavioral reasons to separate mom from kittens earlier. These include:

- 1 Mom is not taking care of the babies. Work closely with foster and medical staff to determine this; warning signs include not nursing, not responding to the kittens' crying, staying away from the babies that are under 5 weeks, and not grooming the babies.
- 2 Mom is undersocialized or has other behavior concerns, and is not readily handleable by people. Mom may also prevent kittens from being handled if she has maternal aggression, or if the foster parent is scared to approach. We do not want kittens picking up on this behavior pattern (imprinting) so we will want the babies separated from the mom as soon as medically advisable, usually when the kittens are eating on their own, at 4 to 5 weeks of age. We also may want to get the mom back to the SPCA earlier so cat behavior staff can work with her behavior issues.
- 3 Mom is taking care of the babies, but there are medical concerns for the mom, or the babies, which warrant separation. This is not very common; our medical staff will alert you to this if it is necessary.

Problem Behaviors in Mom Cats

Maternal Neglect — About 8% of kittens die from inadequate maternal care. The deaths are usually due to hypothermia if the kitten strays away and is not retrieved, or improper/inadequate nursing at birth and after. Maternal neglect has several causes—some cats seem to lack maternal instincts. In some cases, it is nature's way: if kittens have birth defects or are otherwise weak at birth, the mom may ignore them, or as discussed below, cannibalize them. In many cases, it seems that environmental stress plays a role, and thus it is very important that the environment be kept quiet, calm and with few visits. Cats should primarily be left alone the first 2 weeks postpartum except to feed, clean, and check in on the babies a few brief times a day.

You will need to watch daily for signs that a mother is neglecting her young, especially in the first few weeks. Call us if:

- The mother spends all her time away from the kittens.
- She does not groom or nurse them frequently.
- The kittens cry and she seems not to respond.

Maternal Aggression towards other animals — Aggressive behavior towards cats or dogs is very common in mom cats, as they are trying to protect their young. Please do not try to introduce your foster cats to other animals. This can be very stressful and offers no advantages. Please block any avenues they may have for seeing other cats or dogs, and strictly enforce separation from your resident pets.

If, for some reason, the mom cat sees another animal and is upset, quickly remove the source of anxiety (cover up window, etc.) and leave the room. Do not attempt to comfort or reassure the mom cat or babies. Come back in 20 minutes or so to check on them.

Maternal Aggression towards people — Occasionally, mother cats have strong protective instincts against humans as well. They may hiss, growl, or strike out if you approach the kittens. At the SF SPCA, we try to screen for these behaviors but sometimes they will develop down the line. If faced with this situation, move very slowly around the mom cat and the nest. Wear a long sleeved sweatshirt to protect yourself as you clean around her. Try to bribe her with tasty treats such as chicken baby food. Speak in a soft, reassuring voice, and try not to react if the mom cat hisses or growls. DO NOT correct the cat by spraying her with water or undertaking other types of correction. Remember, she is acting out of a natural instinct to protect her young, and if you act in a threatening manner, her behavior may escalate.

Call the **Foster Program Coordinator (415-522-3542)** at the first sign of maternal aggression for individual advice and evaluation of your situation. In some cases, we may advise the return of mom and kittens, or just the mom, depending on the age and health of the kittens.





Procedure for Emergencies

If your foster is having a medical emergency:

	Foster Tech & Emergency Line: 415-740-1646
1	Call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line at 415-740-1646 .
2	Speak to a tech (make sure to get their name). Describe what's happening and they will let you know if you need to bring the animal in to the SF SPCA infirmary right away or, if it is after hours, to San Francisco Veterinary Specialists (SFVS) , the emergency clinic.
3	If it is after hours and the tech gives you authorization, bring your foster animal, the pink foster form and the "Requisition for Pro Bono Services" form with you to San Francisco Veterinary Specialists (SFVS) .
4	Make sure to tell SFVS that you are an SF SPCA Foster Parent and give them the "Requisition for Pro Bono Services" form that you should have received when you picked up your fosters. This way you should not be billed for the visit.
5	Before leaving SFVS , always ask for a copy of the treatment sheet. Information on this sheet is important for future follow up treatment at the SF SPCA Infirmary.
6	Call Alison Lane, Laura Mullen, or one of the SF SPCA Techs the next morning and let them know what happened. The foster animal will probably need to come in to the SF SPCA for a recheck.



EMERGENCY CLINIC FOR SF SPCA FOSTERS

San Francisco Veterinary Specialist

600 Alabama (at 18th Street)

San Francisco, CA 94110

Phone: 415-401-9200

It is essential to notify the SF SPCA the day after the emergency. The shelter must know of any emergency the following day.





General Criteria for Emergencies

Emergency situations include:

- Continuous weight loss
- Continuous diarrhea
- Continuous vomiting
- Bleeding of any kind—nose, urine, stool
- Any trauma—hit by a car, dropped, limp, stepped on, unconscious
- Difficulty in breathing/blocked airway
- Lethargy
- Dehydration
- If the animal has vomiting or diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, it can probably wait until the next day to receive help. **However, if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, it is wise to seek emergency help at the time.**
- Coughing or sneezing should pose no immediate problems unless accompanied by blood or symptoms such as lethargy or dehydration.



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Signs of Sick Kittens and What You Should Do About Them

Due to the shelter environment and the fact that these kittens have very fragile immune systems, kittens are prone to catching colds and other sicknesses. These illnesses range from mild to life-threatening in nature. The SF SPCA provides treatment for any illnesses that occur.

How Do I Know if the Kittens are Sick?

Healthy kittens have a lot of energy when they are awake. They are playful and will only spend a short time in your lap. The eyes and nose should be generally free of any discharge. The stool will be firm and well-shaped. Kittens eat a lot, but the amount they drink depends on how much wet food they consume (the more wet food, the less water). Kittens may sneeze occasionally. They may also scratch a little. These are normal kitten behaviors.

It is not always obvious when the kittens are sick. In nature, cats will hide any sickness so they don't appear vulnerable.

Diarrhea — There are 3 types of cat stool: normal, soft, and diarrhea. Normal stool will be firm and well-shaped. When you first notice soft stool, you should drop off a fecal sample. If it continues or gets worse, make a medical appointment and bring a fecal sample with you to the appointment. Diarrhea is completely liquid. It may appear that the kitten is excreting plain water or there may be some color to it. Either way, make a medical appointment (415-554-3084) and take a fecal sample (get what you can) with you. **Monitor the kitten, as diarrhea can lead to dehydration and become serious rather quickly.** You should always have a fecalyzer handy when fostering. Follow the directions on how to take a fecal sample on the next page. **Make sure to label the fecalyzer with the A-number of the kitten.** To drop off a sample, bring it to the Spay/Neuter front desk at 201 Alabama Street between the hours of 9:00am and 5:00pm. It's better to drop the sample off earlier in the day so that the technician can run a fecal test. If the test is positive, a technician will call you.

Coccidia — Coccidia is a parasite most prevalent in kittens, but occasionally found in adults. When a fecal test is positive for Coccidia, you must make an appointment to bring your kittens in so the doctor can prescribe medications for them. Coccidia often causes diarrhea in kittens and they can get dehydrated very quickly. **Dehydration is a serious medical issue and can be fatal to underage kittens.**



STOOL EXAMPLES



Normal Stool



Soft Stool



Diarrhea



Signs of Sick Kittens and What You Should Do About Them

Worms (roundworms & tapeworms) — Worms are common in kittens. Generally, kittens are dewormed with their vaccinations when they first come in to the SF SPCA. Roundworms look like spaghetti, and will come out in the litter box or in vomit. Tapeworms are white and segmented. Occasionally you will see the whole worm, but more often you will see what looks like dried rice stuck to the kittens' hindquarters. If you see any worms, please call to make an appointment (415-554-3084).

Vomiting — Vomiting is not serious unless it happens more than once. If your kittens keep vomiting, call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line (415-740-1646) right away. If the kittens ingested something poisonous, the faster it is treated, the better the outcome.

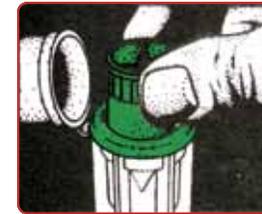
Eye Discharge — It is normal for kittens to wake up with a little dark crust in their eyes. If you notice that the kittens have yellow or green discharge coming from their eyes all the time, make a medical appointment (415-554-3084). You can treat the symptoms of the eye infection by wiping the eyes with a warm, wet towel until it is time for your appointment.

Sneezing/Nasal Discharge — Occasional sneezing is quite common in small kittens. If the sneezing becomes frequent, examine the discharge coming from the sneeze. If it is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed but it is important to monitor the kittens in case the problem gets worse. If the discharge becomes colored (e.g. green or yellow), it is time to make a medical appointment (415-554-3084) because the kitten may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the kittens' breathing as well. If the kittens seem to be struggling to breathe or are breathing with their mouths open, call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line immediately (415-740-1646) for advice. Also, be sure that the kittens are still eating, as a kitten won't eat what he or she can't smell.

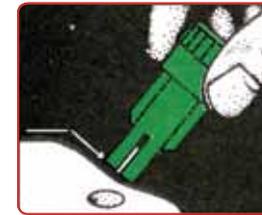
Lethargy — Healthy kittens are normally active when they are awake. Sick kittens may have low energy and want to just sit in your lap. Each kitten is different, depending on their socialization level, but if you notice a drop in the kitten's individual energy level, it is best to make a medical appointment (415-554-3084). Some undersocialized kittens will have a tendency to move less because they are frightened, so it may be difficult to monitor their energy level. If you are not sure whether your kitten is lethargic or just being quiet and still, please call the Foster Coordinator (415-522-3542) or a technician (415-740-1646). If a kitten can't be roused or seems weak, this is an emergency! Call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line (415-740-1646).



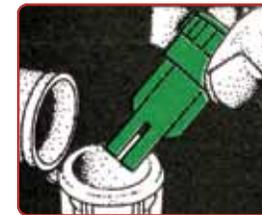
TAKING A FECAL SAMPLE



1 Remove green insert.



2 Insert the small end of the green insert into the fecal sample.



3 Replace green insert, close cap and bring the sample to the Spay/Neuter desk at **201 Alabama Street** between the hours of **9:00am and 5:00pm.***

*Make sure to label the fecalyzer with the kitten's **A-number**.

ALWAYS bring a fecal sample to any medical appointment involving diarrhea. If you are unable to bring the sample in immediately, you can place it in the refrigerator for a few hours before dropping it off.



Signs of Sick Kittens and What You Should Do About Them

Fleas, lice, & ear mites — Many of the kittens we receive in the foster care system were born outdoors so they may come to us with fleas. Also, fleas are just a fact of the shelter environment. Kittens with fleas will scratch themselves a lot. Daily brushing with the flea comb and daily bedding changes will reduce and maybe even eliminate the fleas. If you see lots of fleas despite these efforts, contact the Foster Coordinator (415-522-3542) to decide the next step. You may be able to use the flea shampoo the SF SPCA provides (do NOT use store-bought flea products on the kittens as they are not safe for kittens) or the techs may want to apply a topical flea treatment.

Lice are a different matter. You will not see the actual adult lice. Instead, you will see white dots on the kittens' fur. If you can brush the dots off, it is dandruff. If you cannot remove the dots, then it is probably lice. Make a medical appointment and the techs will treat the lice. Lice are species-specific, and you cannot catch them.

Kittens with ear mites will scratch their ears and shake their heads a lot. Inside the ears you will see a dark discharge resembling coffee grounds. Make a medical appointment (415-554-3084) to get the kitten treated.

Ringworm — Normally the fur around the lips, on the eyelids, and on the ears is a little thin. This is nothing to worry about. However, if you notice hair thinning or completely coming out in patches, please make a medical appointment (415-554-3084). Fur loss is the first indicator of ringworm, which is a fungus that can be spread to humans and other household pets. The young, the elderly, and people and animals with suppressed immune systems are most susceptible. While it is not fatal, ringworm is itchy to people and very hard to get out of your home. Wash your hands and any clothing that you wear in the fostering room with the kittens before touching your pets. If you are treating kittens with ringworm at home, you can ask the Foster Coordinator (415-522-3542) for protective gowns, gloves, and/or booties. You also have the option to return the kittens to the SF SPCA for treatment (which takes 6 weeks to complete).



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Foster Kitten Pawes

Pointers:

Appetite

Weight

Energy

Stool

Kitten Cheat Sheet

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO
Kittens are losing weight, not very energetic and/or are having diarrhea	Make a medical appointment to have the kittens seen AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Kittens are so small that any weight loss is significant. **You should also talk to the Foster Coordinator or a tech on the Foster Tech & Emergency line to determine if this is an emergency.
Kittens are having liquid diarrhea for more than 12 hours	Make a medical appointment to have the kittens seen right away. Bring a stool sample (see page 19). Diarrhea can cause dehydration which can kill your kittens. If the kittens are having liquid diarrhea, are not eating well and are not energetic, this could be an emergency and you should call the Foster Coordinator or the Foster Tech & Emergency Line.
Kittens are not eating, don't seem interested in food but are energetic	Try adding Gerber's baby food and call the Foster Coordinator. Do not give kittens any food that is not supplied by the SF SPCA Foster Program.
Kittens are having very soft stool but are eating and energetic	Collect a fecal sample (see page 19) and drop it off at the spay/neuter desk. The fresher the sample, the better, and if you are unable to bring the sample in immediately, please place it in the refrigerator. If there are any parasites, a tech will call you and have you come in for medication. If you don't hear from anyone but the kitten continues to have soft stool, make a medical appointment and bring in a fecal sample.
Kittens are not losing weight, but are not gaining weight	If the kittens are energetic, eating well and not having diarrhea, keep monitoring the kittens and if they do not gain weight in 24 hours or if their appetite or energy level drops, call the Foster Coordinator or the Foster Tech & Emergency Line.
Kittens are sneezing and having thick or yellow/green discharge	Make a medical appointment. Warm up the wet food, if kittens can't smell the food they don't eat.
Kittens eyes look weepy and are red or having green/yellow discharge	Make a medical appointment. In the meantime, use a cotton ball or soft cloth to gently clean the eyes (don't rub!) of any discharge and apply a warm compress for a few minutes once or twice a day.
Kittens are due for vaccinations	Make a revaccination appointment. You can make the appointment for up to two days after the due date, but no later. If kittens are late on their vaccinations they are susceptible to diseases which can be lethal.

Foster Care Phone Numbers	Foster Coordinator (415) 522-3542 (Tuesdays–Saturdays)	Foster Tech & Emergency Line (415) 740-1646 (every day, 24 hours a day)	Medical/Revaccination Line (415) 554-3084 (Please specify if you need a medical appointment and need a doctor to take a look at your kittens or if it's a revaccination appointment which is only with a technician)

Establishing Good Household Behaviors

Litterbox — The litter box you provide for your kittens should have low sides so that it is easy for the kittens to get in and out. Plastic boxes are usually the most cost effective and easy to use because they can be sanitized often. Some foster parents prefer disposable litter boxes.

Litter boxes should be kept clean all the time. Scooping the box twice a day is a good guideline, unless you have lots of kittens or the kittens are sick, in which case, you may need to clean it more often. If you're using a plastic litterbox, make sure to dump all litter out regularly, and wash with hot soapy water. This should be done weekly if using a clumping litter like World's Best, or every 2-3 days if using clay litter. Consider this a rough guideline since your cleaning routine will depend on how many kittens you are fostering, how many litterboxes you have, and whether the kittens have normal stools. A clean box will encourage good litter box habits and will limit the kittens' exposure to germs.

You should only use litters on the SF SPCA's list of approved cat litters:

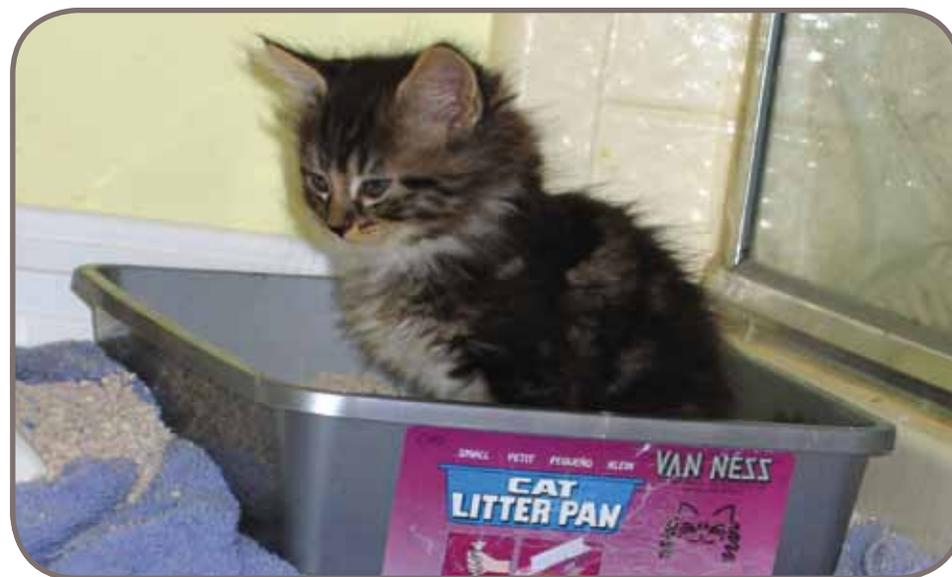
- S'Wheat Scoop
- World's Best Cat Litter
- Jonny Cat or other unscented clay litter

Many kittens experience some litterbox problems. This can be from a medical concern (usually diarrhea) or due to the fact that the kitten is still being housetrained. Another possibility is that the kitten has too much territory, and cannot get back to the litterbox in time to eliminate there.

The first thing you should do if your foster kittens miss the litter box is check to see if the kittens have diarrhea or soft stool. In that case, take a fecal sample using the provided fecalyzer (see page 19) and make a medical appointment for the kittens.

A few tips:

- Keep the kittens confined to a small territory. The younger the kittens, the smaller the space should be. If they are allowed to have more space, there should be at least one litterbox in each room.
- Return the kitten to its litterbox regularly. Do not force the kitten to stay in the litterbox, just gently place her near or in the box every 15-20 minutes as a reminder.
- Clean all "accidents" well with enzyme cleaners (such as Nature's Miracle).
- Never yell at or otherwise punish a kitten for urinating or defecating outside the box.
- One or two litterbox misses are acceptable, but if a kitten is having repeated problems with litterbox usage, please contact the Cat Behavior Office (415-554-3525).



Establishing Good Household Behaviors



Discipline — The best way to handle most undesirable feline behaviors is to prevent them.

Kittens are at the most playful and curious stages of their lives. They are likely to explore and test the environment in ways that an adult cat may not. Many kittens will grow out of this tendency as they get older, so it's best to allow them to enact their natural kitten curiosity while trying to establish good habits.

In most cases, it's better to distract a kitten from an inappropriate behavior and direct them to something more positive. Distracting a kitten beforehand is even better because it lowers the risk that a kitten may view the distraction as a reward. You can do this by getting their attention with noise, toys or treats.

Another way to address inappropriate behavior is to modify the environment. This may involve such things as putting plants out of reach, or using double sided tape on off-limit surfaces.

Any type of physical punishment, such as nose tapping or scruffing, is recognized by leading cat behavior experts as detrimental and counterproductive. Additionally, water bottles should not be used to correct kitten misbehaviors.

Playtime — Playtime is a very important part of kitten development. Kittens will need toys to play with so that they can occupy their minds as well as get exercise. It is crucial for young kittens to have other kittens to wrestle with in order to develop appropriate play skills and be properly socialized with other kittens. As long as it is medically feasible, we will be sending out kittens in pairs at a minimum. If you have only one kitten that is becoming increasingly active or starting to nip, you will want to contact the Foster Coordinator to see if the kitten can get a playmate.

There are two types of toys you should provide for the kittens: solo toys and interactive toys



- **Solo toys** should be easy to clean and impossible for the kittens to consume. Ping-pong balls, toilet paper tubes and wine corks are great examples of solo toys. These toys can be left for the kittens to play with even when you aren't there.



- On the contrary, **interactive toys** should never be left with an unsupervised kitten. These toys are great for encouraging the kittens to exercise and to enact their natural hunting skills, but if you aren't looking, a kitten could eat parts of the toy or get tangled in them. Also, kittens have been known to chew off pieces of rubber (like from the ends of the noodle toy the SF SPCA sells) and get them

caught in their intestines, so just watch them closely! Interactive toys include anything with string or parts (like buttons or feathers) that can come off and cause harm to the kitten.

Always have toys available to play with when you are visiting with your kittens. Discourage kittens from biting hands or feet and/or using body parts as toys.

Claw Sharpening — Encourage good habits by providing your kittens with a cardboard scratching pad. Encourage use of it by dragging toys across or up the post. Never "make" the kitten scratch by holding their paws and doing the scratching motion. Cardboard scratchers should be changed in between your foster litters (there may be some more permanent options as long as you are able to sanitize them between litters). Discourage kittens from scratching furniture by distracting them when they start, or covering the surface with a loose cloth or double sided tape ("Sticky Paws").

Socialization & Handling



New People — Many times foster kittens only get exposed to their foster parents, but ideally, they would be exposed to various people. Control the interactions so that it is a good experience for the kittens- make sure the petting is gentle, and that people use interactive toys for play.

Interacting with respectful children is also helpful. Children should always be supervised when handling kittens and should be old enough to understand how to handle kittens gently. If a kitten seems hesitant or fearful, it's best and safest to give the child other ways to interact with the kitten that are positive and safe, such as using interactive toys or hand-feeding treats.

New Environments — If your kittens are comfortable in the safe room and you have the ability to kitten-proof other spaces in your home, you can expose them to other rooms. Allowing the kitten to explore new spaces while having treats and interactive play available will create a positive association with these novel experiences. Keep the sessions brief and return the kitten to the safe room if they seem overwhelmed. A large dog crate or kitten playpen is another way to expose the kitten to other rooms in a safe manner. Not all kittens will be ready for these adventures, but many will benefit. You must disinfect any areas your kittens have had access to, so keep that in mind before you let them into a new space (see page 12).

New Noises — It is beneficial to expose kittens to normal household noises as much as possible. The trick is to do it without traumatizing them. For example, start out with the TV or radio at a very low volume; if the kitten is fine with that, increase it gradually over a period of days to a normal volume. You can run the vacuum briefly on the other side of the CLOSED door to the safe room and, once the kitten is acclimated to that over time, crack the door open. This process can be repeated with other household appliances.

Grooming & Body Handling — It is important for young kittens to get handled frequently, so that they become accustomed to it. This will make them less defensive about different areas of their body being touched in the future and also helps prepare them for vet visits and general grooming in the future. Typically sensitive areas include toes/paws, chest and belly, and the mouth. Touch these areas in a gentle way, as part of your petting sessions.

- **Nail clipping** — Get your kittens used to having their nails trimmed at a young age (you can have this demonstrated if you are unsure how to do this). Pet and hold their paws gently as part of their daily handling. This can be paired with a treat to help them build more positive associations.
- **Being picked up** — Make sure your kitten is picked up a few times a day or more. Try to make it a positive experience by petting the kitten and encouraging purring and affectionate behavior when holding him/her.

Car Trips & Carriers — It is helpful to acclimate your foster kittens to the cat carrier when they are young. Make the carrier a pleasant place, not only something that comes out when it's time for shots! Wedge the door open, or remove it for safety, and keep a blanket in there, adding treats and toys on occasion.

You can help acclimate kittens to car rides and travel by making short trips with the kittens in the carrier. These should be separate from their veterinary check-ups, and can be as simple as a trip around the block.

Be sure to **ALWAYS** keep your foster kittens in their carrier when outside or traveling in a car. Even if you think you are holding the kittens securely, they can be startled and dash away if they are not enclosed.



Socialization & Handling

Introduction to Other Foster Kittens — Most of the time, it is easy at this young age to integrate foster kittens. Ideally, you would do a gradual introduction. You will want to see that both kittens are initiating the wrestling and that neither kitten seems intimidated for long. Kittens who are getting along normally are generally distractible with toys if hissing or batting starts to escalate. The kittens should also be able to eat and use the litter box normally around the other kitten. Occasionally, kittens may have negative reactions to a new kitten. The following are normal reactions that will usually pass within a few days if you leave the kittens together to work it out:

- Small hisses, especially when the kitten gets close
- Batting at the other kitten when approach
- Rough play, including some vocalizing

Signs of serious problems include persistent “bullying” by one kitten, where the other kitten is never the one initiating the rough play, and seems scared of the aggressor, hiding and trying to get away.

Other signs of a serious problem are:

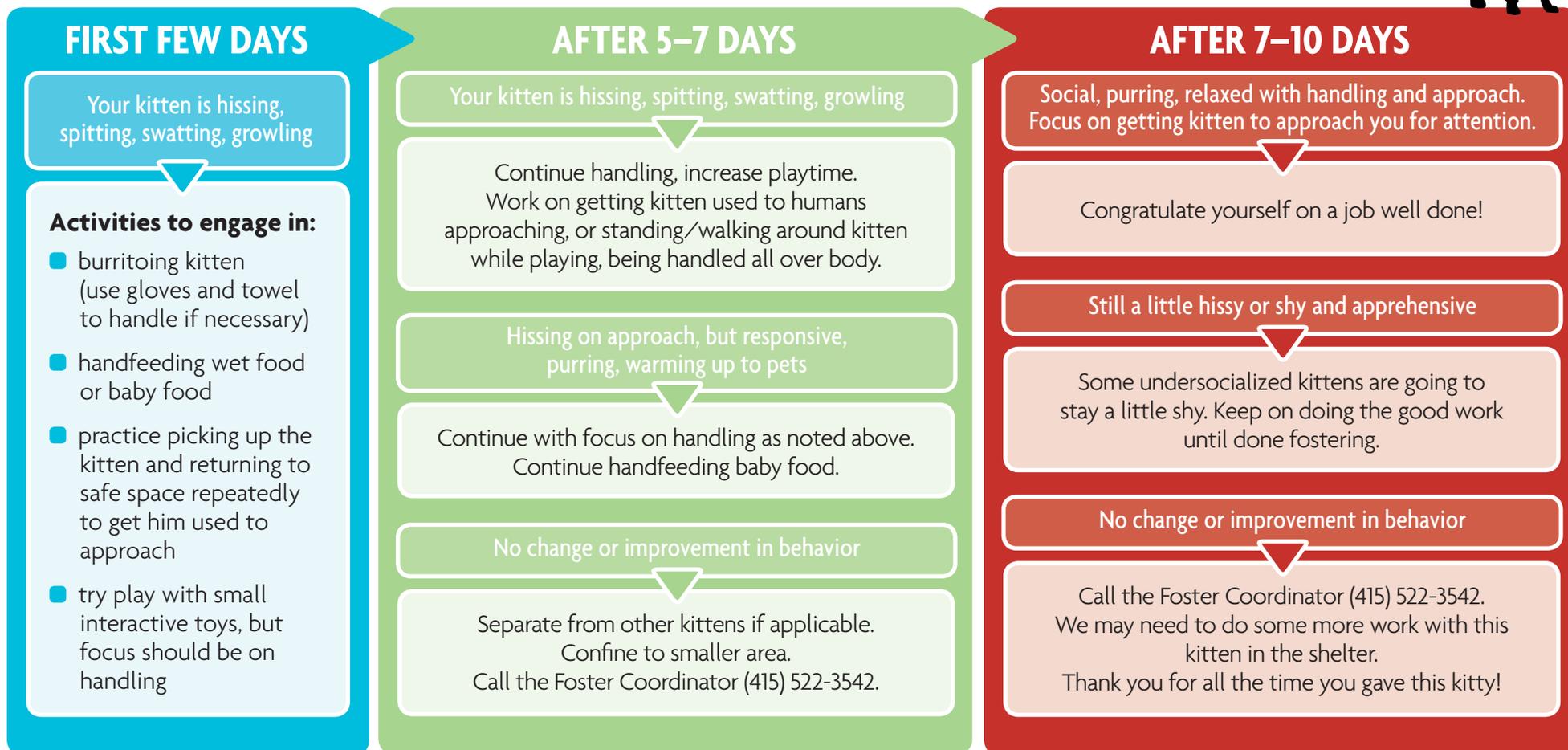
- The aggressor is difficult to distract away with toys.
- There is a serious mismatch in size.
- One kitten keeps the other kittens from using the litterbox or eating food.
- One kitten is sicker/weaker and seems unable to keep up with the play.

When in doubt, separate the kittens temporarily by setting up a carrier with a disposable litterbox, towel, and food/water and keeping one kitten in there. Contact the Foster Coordinator or Cat Behavior staff for more guidance.



Undersocialized Foster Kitten Flowchart

This chart is meant to help you see the progress in your foster kittens' behavior and know when to contact the Cat Behavior Program for more assistance.



Foster Care Phone Numbers

Foster Coordinator (415) 522-3542

Tuesday–Saturday: 8:30am–4:30pm

Schedule pick-ups and drop offs and for all other questions. Leave a message if you get no answer and if it is not an emergency. The Foster Coordinator is not locked into these hours and may be able to help you at other times as well.

Medical Appointments (415) 554-3084

Monday–Sunday: 8:30am–5:00pm

To make medical appointments (including revaccinations). Please be sure to specify if you need a doctor present at your foster appointment.

Foster Tech & Emergency Line (415) 740-1646

24 Hours/Day, 7 Days/Week

To get advice about the urgency of a situation and/or to obtain permission to go to the emergency vet if necessary.

- Get the name of the person you speak to and inform the foster coordinator the next morning.



Procedure for Emergencies

If your foster is having a medical emergency:



Foster Tech & Emergency Line: 415-740-1646

1

Call the Foster Tech & Emergency Line at **415-740-1646**.

2

Speak to a tech (**make sure to get their name**). Describe what's happening and they will let you know if you need to bring the animal in to the SF SPCA infirmary right away or, if it is after hours, to **San Francisco Veterinary Specialists (SFVS)**, the emergency clinic.

3

If it is after hours and the tech gives you authorization, bring your foster animal, the pink foster form and the "Requisition for Pro Bono Services" form with you to **San Francisco Veterinary Specialists (SFVS)**.

4

Make sure to tell **SFVS** that you are an SF SPCA Foster Parent and give them the "Requisition for Pro Bono Services" form that you should have received when you picked up your fosters. This way you should not be billed for the visit.

5

Before leaving **SFVS**, always ask for a copy of the treatment sheet. Information on this sheet is important for future follow up treatment at the SF SPCA Infirmary.

6

Call Alison Lane, Laura Mullen, or one of the SF SPCA Techs the next morning and let them know what happened. The foster animal will probably need to come in to the SF SPCA for a recheck.



EMERGENCY CLINIC FOR SF SPCA FOSTERS

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Phone: 415-401-9200