



Foster Parent Orientation

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About SPCA Florida

SPCA Florida is a no-kill non-profit organization located in Lakeland, Florida.

We were created in 1979 and have gradually expanded over those years, now taking in over 6,000 animals per year and adding a full-service medical center treating owned pets

The foster department is a part of the Adoption Center, which houses our animals who are available for adoption, our surrender department and a dedicated team of veterinary staff to work with onsite and foster animals.

We take in animals from our community and local Animal Control, and our mission is to end the plight of homeless animals in Polk County.

We are here!

You park here!



What is Fostering?

To foster an animal means taking them into your home and providing them with the necessary care.

SPCA Florida can provide its foster parents with all the necessary supplies to care for their foster animal. All you need to provide is shelter, transportation, care, and love!

Every animal in our foster program is unable to be adopted for one reason or another.

These animals may:

- Be too young to be spayed/neutered and adopted
- Be recovering from an illness or injury for an extended amount of time
- Need time to develop socialization skills inside a home setting

Going to a foster home allows these animals to spend the time needed in a loving home, rather than at a shelter.





How Does Fostering Help?

- **Fostering creates shelter space for new animals in need.**

For example, a four-week-old kitten needs at least four weeks in a foster home before they can be neutered. If the kitten goes into foster care for that time, their cage space can be utilized for another kitten who is waiting on space or is recovering from illness.

- **Foster animals get individualized attention.**

Our foster parents act as our eyes and ears, allowing each animal to be closely monitored and given specialized care based on their needs.

- **Being in a foster home allows animals to learn what adopted life will be like.**

In a foster home, animals will be exposed to new people, different animals, unfamiliar sounds and smells, and lots of love and attention. This exposure helps prepare the animals for life in their forever home.

- **Foster parents can help their foster animals get adopted.**

Foster parents learn their foster animals' personalities better than anyone. This information is very valuable to future adopters and can help prevent animals from being returned to the shelter. Additionally, foster parents will sometimes find adopters on their own, which keeps animals from sitting around in the shelter.



Who Can Foster?

Anyone can foster!

There are just a few requirements:

1. You must be over the age of 18 to be the primary foster parent, but older children and teens are encouraged to help
 2. You must have access to reliable transportation to visit SPCA Florida for vaccines and medical appointments
 3. You must have email access to be able to communicate effectively with the foster department
- Teaching children about the care of animals helps teach them responsibility and is a great way to connect as a family.
 - Fostering is great for people who travel frequently or are not in a place to take on an animal full time – you can take care of animals in need on your schedule, and only sign up to take on fosters when it suits you!
 - Fostering can be for any household set up – couples, families and solo adults can all find joy in becoming foster parents.



Fostering with SPCA Florida

SPCA Florida's foster team acts as your guide throughout your fostering experience, offering advice, medical care and support. Your primary contact is with the foster department, who triage all questions and concerns with the onsite veterinarian.

Our foster team is available every day of the week, making it easy to schedule appointments and communicate any questions or concerns.

For after hours emergencies, we have an emergency line that is always being monitored.

SPCA Florida covers all medication and vaccines for your foster animal and can provide additional supplies when requested.



Common Misconceptions of Foster



False: Foster is a way to “trial” an animal!

True: Whilst some foster parents do adopt, most foster to save as many lives as they are able. The foster animal you take may not be the right match for your household long-term, but that’s okay!

False: I’ll be bringing home a “perfect” animal!

True: The animal you take home will require some extra work – that is why it needs foster! Be it medication, socialization or monitoring as it grows, you will need to commit time to your foster

False: Fostering is easy!

True: Fostering takes patience and dedication, and can be challenging at times. It takes a special person to be a foster parent!

Fostering Kittens

Kittens are our most common foster need, due to the many, many unaltered felines in Polk County. They are usually between the ages of 4 and 8 weeks old and may or may not have momma cat with them. We work with local Animal Control and members of the public to take these kitties in, help them get healthy and strong, and eventually find adoptive homes for them.

Kittens can vary in the amount of care they need dependent on their age and whether momma is with them or not. Our foster requests will outline what type of care they need, but older kittens or those with moms are fine to be left alone throughout the day whilst their foster parents go to work.



Some kittens may come home with medication or need additional care, or you may find that an illness develops after they enter your home. SPCA are here to support you if that is the case

Once the kittens are big enough for surgery, they return to the shelter to be altered and find their forever home. If your kittens have a mom with them, she may return with them or a little before, and will be spayed and placed up for adoption just like her babies.

Fostering Kittens: Supplies Needed

- Litterbox and non-clumping clay litter
- Food and water bowls
- Dye-free kibble and pate-style wet food
- Blankets, bedding, etc.
- Toys and enrichment

Disposable or easy to clean items are best for your foster setup!



Be sure to give your kittens safe hiding spots and block access to dangerous areas!

Kittens, or moms with kittens, should always be transported in a carrier – SPCA will loan this to you when you collect!

SPCA may be able to help with some of these other items, but our ability to help is dependent on donations

Fostering Kittens: First Two Weeks

These first weeks are the most critical time with your foster kittens – if they are harboring any illness, this is when you are most likely to see it. We recommend monitoring their weight, eating habits, and development, and keeping them segregated from your pets until this period is done. If mom is present a segregated room is especially important so she can feel safe whilst she raises her babies.



When ready, slowly introduce to the rest of the home. Remember, kittens will always find trouble, so don't forget to kitten-proof your home!

Friends, neighbors, children, and kitty-friendly pets are all welcome to meet your kittens! The more they experience at a young age, the better, as it will make them well rounded adults.

Fostering Kittens: Development

“Teeny Tinies” and early “Teeny Weanies” need to be with mom or are “bottle babies”, needing to be fed every 3 hours.

TEENY TINIES The tiniest, most vulnerable kittens require gentle and frequent care.

<p>NEWBORN</p> 	<p>1 WEEK</p> 	<p>2 WEEKS</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • umbilical cord attached, eyes closed, ears folded • can't regulate body temp. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eyes closed, ears folded, no umbilical cord • eyes open at 8-12 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eyes completely open, blue color • wobbly on their feet

TEENY WEANIES As kittens age, you'll help them reach important developmental milestones.

<p>3 WEEKS</p> 	<p>4 WEEKS</p> 	<p>5 WEEKS</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incisors emerging, ears unfolded • discovering litterbox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canines emerging • vision improving; walking confidently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • premolars emerging • weaning slowly onto wet kitten food

At 4-5 weeks, kittens start to eat on their own

BIG KIDS CLUB These social, independent, and coordinated kittens are almost ready for adoption.

<p>6 WEEKS</p> 	<p>7 WEEKS</p> 	<p>8 WEEKS</p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all milk (deciduous) teeth have emerged • eating confidently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transitioning to adult eye color • coordinated and playful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • once 2 pounds, kittens can be spayed/neutered and placed in their forever home!

By 6 weeks kittens can be separated from mom if needed.

At 8+ weeks (and 2lbs) they are ready for surgery and adoption

Fostering Puppies

Puppies enter SPCA less frequently than kittens, and the young pups are more likely to have moms with them. Puppies are adorable to watch grow and learn but will require more hands-on time and a dedicated space in your home.

Just like kittens, puppies will need to be with you until they are at least 8 weeks old and ready to come back for surgery and adoption

Some mommas may stay with their puppies until they return for surgery; others may feel ready to come back sooner. Regardless, mom will be spayed and placed up for adoption onsite just like her puppies!



Fostering Puppies: Supplies Needed

- Food and water bowls
- Dye-free kibble and pate-style wet food
- Blankets, bedding, etc.
- Toys and enrichment
- Pop up crate or playpen
- Puppy pads



SPCA may be able to help with some of these items (especially the crate/playpen), but our ability to help is dependent on donations

Fostering Puppies: First Two Weeks



Again, we recommend that puppies go into their own space when they arrive at your home. This is especially important if mom is present so she has a safe space to raise her babies.

Remember, puppies are messy! Make sure you can easily clean their living area.

Once ready, puppies can be introduced to the rest of the home. Puppies are only allowed in fully-fenced yards as they are not fully vaccinated and susceptible to illness that may be in the outside world. You may not walk your puppy outside of your home, but you can begin to work on potty or pee-pad training.



Just like kittens, exposing puppies to friends, family and daily household life helps them to adapt easier once they get older.

Fostering Puppies: First Two Weeks



DOG DEVELOPMENT STAGES

Puppies less than 4 weeks old will need bottle feeding, and less than 2 weeks have limited mobility or autonomy.

Puppies must be 8 weeks to have their spay/neuter surgery, as this is when it is safe to anesthetize them.

STAGE	DEVELOPMENT
 Birth To 2 Weeks	Dependent Stage: Puppies have touch and taste only, and they are completely dependent on their mothers.
 2-4 Weeks	Hello World Stage: Puppies begin to open their eyes, develop hearing, and start teething. They become aware of their environment and siblings.
 4-6 Weeks	Learning Life Skills: Puppies begin walking, going to the bathroom on their own, and develop more independence. They begin to learn social skills from one another.
 6-8 Weeks	Socialization And Training: Pups begin learning bite inhibition and establishing a place in social structures. Training "sit", "come" and basic commands are now possible.

4+ weeks is the fun, playful puppy stage!



Kittens and Puppies: Symptoms

We count on foster parents to be our eyes and ears. It is important to monitor your foster animals' needs daily!

Weight: Weighing your kitten/puppy regularly will help us catch any concerning weight loss. Weight loss is one of the first signs that something is wrong.

Gum Color: Moist pink gums are a sign of a healthy animals. If your foster animal has pale tacky gums, contact your foster team right away.

Temperature: A puppy or kitten should never feel cold to the touch. A hot animal can also be concerning, though they can sometimes feel warm after sleeping or cuddling.

Lethargy: A lethargic animal does not show its usual energy levels. It may not want to eat or drink, and it will not engage with other animals or people.

Lack of appetite: A lack of appetite is usually caused by an underlying issue. An animal that will not eat is likely to lose weight.

Dehydration: A kitten is most likely to become dehydrated when experiencing loose stool or not wanting to eat. It is important to notify your foster team right away if your kitten appears dehydrated.

Stool: Loose stool is very common in kittens and can result in several issues such as weight loss and dehydration. It is not uncommon to see evidence of parasites in your foster's stool.

Ocular and Nasal Discharge: Upper respiratory infections are common in shelter animals. Signs of a URI are sneezing, congestion, colored ocular or nasal discharge. This is so important because when a kitten is congested, they can't smell and often will lose their appetite.

Kittens and Puppies: Weight

Weight loss in a kitten or puppy is one of the first signs that something is wrong. It is important to weigh your foster animal daily!

Kittens must be 2.3 pounds (or 2 pounds and 5 ounces) to be eligible for spay/neuter (which they will typically reach by eight or nine weeks of age), while puppies must be only eight weeks old.



Causes:

- Intestinal parasites
- Lack of appetite
- Loose stool/diarrhea
- Competition at the food bowl

Solutions:

- Dewormers
- Food variety (wet and dry)
- Calorie supplements/Karo syrup
- Multiple bowls and food access 24/7

Kittens and Puppies: Stool

Your foster animal's stool can tell a lot about their health.

Soft or loose stool can be caused by several things, including:

- Intestinal parasites
- An imbalance of gut bacteria
- A sudden change in diet
- Stress

Most commonly, your kitten or puppy will leave their check-up appointment with de-worming medication and/or probiotics.



Kittens and Puppies: URI

Sneezing, wheezing, congestion, and ocular or nasal discharge are all signs that your kitten may be getting sick.

The most common cause of these symptoms is an upper respiratory infection (URI).

Symptoms:

- Sneezing →
- Congestion →
- Ocular irritation/discharge →
- Nasal discharge →

Solutions:

- Sweep/dust, change air conditioning filters, change litter type
- Keep kittens in a steamy bathroom for 10-15 minutes, gentle back pats, nebulizer
- Wipe eyes with a clean cloth, warm compresses
- Keep nostrils clean with a gentle wipe



Be sure to always notify your foster team if any of these symptoms occur so they can get treated with medication if necessary.

Bottle Babies

Bottle babies are puppies or kittens who are less than 4 weeks old who enter SPCA Florida without a mom.

Their teeth are not yet developed and they are unable to hold on to calories for long periods of time, so, like human babies, they require a bottle every 3-4 hours, 24 hours a day

Foster parents for bottle babies are highly valued, but not many people are able to commit to feeding throughout the day and waking in the night. For those who are, foster staff are more than happy to train and guide through the experience, as well as provide supplies!

We have a list of fosters who are willing to receive calls about bottle babies that we are urgently looking to place. If you are interested, please let us know!



Bottle baby fostering is tough, as kittens' mortality rate is significantly higher without mom. Wherever possible kittens always have a better chance at survival with mom to feed them, and keeping them together is always preferable

Behavioral Fosters

An unsocialized animal will go into foster care because their fearful demeanor will prevent them from finding a forever home. Foster care allows these animals to learn to trust and what home life will be like.

Cats are the most common socialization cases.



Tips for fostering an unsocialized foster animal:

- Allow the animal to acclimate to their new environment without being disturbed. Your presence is going to play a big part in their development, but first the environment that your foster animal is in must be determined not to be a threat.
- Start small. Giving a scared animal a whole house to roam will only encourage them to find a tricky (and potentially dangerous) hiding spot. A bathroom, spare bedroom, or pop-up crate are great places to start!
- Offer snacks and be present during mealtime. This will work as positive reinforcement for your foster animal.
- Start slow with touching. Unsocialized animals have not learned to feel comfortable around people yet, so being touched and held can be scary at first. It is best to allow fearful animals some time to adjust before handling them.

Medical Fosters

An animal will be a “medical foster” if they need to undergo some sort of treatment or recovery before being adopted out. These conditions and the animal’s needs vary case by case.

Most medical fosters are dogs.



Common medical reasons for fostering include:

- Weight loss/weight gain
- Recovery from surgery
- Skin conditions that require medicated baths
- Trialing new medications/treatments for persistent issues (ex. an autoimmune disease)
- Hospice

Fostering Dogs

Dogs usually enter foster for medical reasons, such as recovering from surgery, allergies or illness. They are usually in foster for a couple of weeks and need medication and check ups with the veterinarian.

We do not place dogs in foster homes unless it is determined by staff that they need to be fostered prior to adoption. If you are looking to adopt a specific breed or type of dog, we recommend going down the route of adoption.

Before going home, we like the whole family to meet with the canine – this ensures that everyone is comfortable with each other before they enter the house.

Our canines may have restrictions around what type of home they would do best in. We do this to ensure that everyone is happy and has the best chance of success.



Dillon

Fostering Dogs (cont.)

If you have resident canines:

- It is essential that all the dogs meet at the shelter before you take your foster dog home. This is to ensure everyone gets along
- If it's a good meet, the dog can come home same day. Be sure to remove anything that the dogs may argue over (such as toys, food, or beds)
- The dogs should not be left alone together unsupervised. SPCA can provide crates!

SPCA only supports Positive Reinforcement training. More information on how to train your foster dog using positive reinforcement can be provided.

Remember – it can take time for dogs to settle in, so be patient!



A close-up photograph of a very fluffy white kitten with striking blue eyes. The kitten is sitting on a light-colored windowsill, looking directly at the camera with a curious expression. Its fur is thick and soft, and its ears are large and pointed. The background shows the frame of a window, with light coming from the right side. The image is framed by a teal border on the left and right sides.

How Fostering with SPCA Florida Works

Animal Selection

Being a foster parent with SPCA Florida give you access to our “Foster Hub”, where you can view all the animals who are waiting for a foster home.

Listing our animals on the Foster Hub allows you to decide when you are ready to start fostering and lets you chose the animal that best fits your household.

Once it is determined that an animal needs foster, an email is sent to foster parents outlining the animals needs and skill level required

Foster parents are encouraged to email back if the animal described feels like a good fit for their home, skills and time commitment.



We will arrange a good time/day for you to come in and meet your foster – usually, the sooner the better!

SPCA will NEVER ask you to take an animal that you are not comfortable with – we want everyone to be happy!

In addition to the Foster Hub, our foster parents will receive the occasional email from the foster team.

Booster Vaccines

Kittens and Puppies will need boosters every 2-3 weeks

- Boosters are important to keep your animal healthy and build immunity
- This also gives us the opportunity to check in and see how things are going with your foster animals

We utilize an online scheduling system for booking your appointment. Pick a time that works for you!



SPCA FLORIDA
Network of Hope

Megan Allan

Kitten Vaccinations

30 min

SPCA Florida Foster Office

Your kittens are due for vaccinations! Please use this link to schedule a time that works for you, between two and three weeks since their last vaccines. If you have additional concerns, please email Megan ahead of time on foster@spcaflorida.org

Select a Date & Time

October 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Eastern Time - US & Canada (11:50am)

Medication

Your foster animal may be on medication when they go home, or issues may arise after you take your foster animal home.

If the medication prescribed does not solve the issue, or if new symptoms present whilst your foster is with you, you are encouraged to email details, photos and/or videos to the foster department.

We will triage your case and make an appointment with our shelter veterinarian should it be necessary.

There is no cost to you for any medical care provided at or by SPCA Florida!

Remember, your foster team is available every day of the week, and you will be provided with an after-hours emergency line should your foster require critical care outside of office hours.



Spay/Neuter

The aim of fostering kittens and puppies is to get them big and healthy enough to be altered so they can be adopted!

- Kittens need to be 2.3 pounds (or 2 pounds and 5 ounces) in weight and at least 8 weeks old
- Puppies should be at least eight weeks old

Your foster animal must also be healthy and symptom-free to be eligible for surgery.



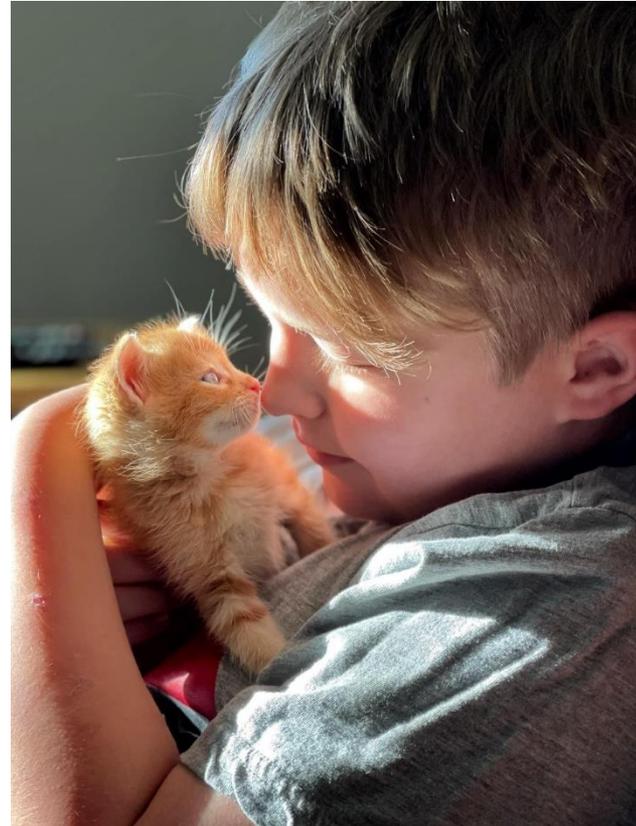
Once they are healthy and of age, you will work with the foster department to arrange a good day to drop your foster animals off prior to their spay/neuter surgeries.

Returning to the Shelter/Adoption

Once animals are altered and healthy, they are ready for adoption! They will stay onsite to meet their new families in our Adoption Center

If you, or a friend or family member, are interested in adopting one or more of your foster babies you will receive a call from our Adoption team to arrange pick up following their surgery. Adoption fees do still apply, and all adopters must still meet the regular adoption conditions, but we will ensure that no member of the public has the opportunity to adopt your reserved kittens.

Once your foster animal has returned, your work as a foster parent is done! As your babies go to their adoptive homes, clean your space and get ready for the next group that you can save!





Resources and Contacts

The Foster Department will always be your primary point of contact. We are here to help with medical or behavioral questions, as well scheduling your pick ups, appointments and returns.

Once you collect your first fosters, you will be provided with the 24-hour emergency number should you ever need it.

Maddie's Pet Assistant is a wonderful app which helps you track your foster's progress and sends you hints and tips. Download it when you take your first foster home!



MADDIE'S®
Pet Assistant

Download today!



What's Next?

Thank you for completing your foster orientation! If you're up for joining our team, please follow this link to complete our application along with a little quiz to check you were paying attention (don't worry, it's easy!).

Once you have completed your application, you will be sent a welcome email that talks you through your next steps and you will be added to our email list!



If you have any questions between now and then please feel welcomed to reach out via email on foster@spcaflorida.org

We are honored to have you onboard!