



## THE RUTHERFORD COUNTY ANIMAL PROTECTION ALLIANCE

Fostering a homeless animal is one of the most certain and direct ways to save its life. Often, because there is no place for it to go, a highly adoptable dog or cat is put to death. We have a continual need for foster homes. The more foster homes we have the more health, adoptable animals we can save and get into approved forever homes.

Foster homes have a number of functions. Through our foster homes we are able to learn the needs of the animals, who they are and what they need in a home situation. This allows us to find just the right home for the dog or cat which greatly enhances the chance that it will remain with its new family throughout its life. Foster homes work at identifying problem areas in their charges and start working with them to correct them (such as providing re-assurance and security to a dog or cat who has been frightened by a particular situation or handling experience. Some of the puppies need to learn basic housebreaking and how to walk on a leash. Foster homes work at socializing the dogs, exposing them to as many different people as possible to assess temperament. Most of all, foster homes provide a loving and safe environment for these dogs until we can find them permanent homes.

New volunteers are welcome to participate in all phases of the adoption process including: office duty, computer and data input/clerical tasks, facilitating adoptions, animal transport, fostering, conducting home visits to monitor new homes or potential new homes as well as for fundraising and special events.

A copy of RCAPA's Foster Care Volunteer Manual is available in the volunteers' office at:

Rutherford County Animal Control  
Laurel Hill Drive  
Rutherfordton, NC

Please don't hesitate to come to the office to review the manual or to ask any questions you might have about fostering an animal.

Once you decide to become a foster parent, a copy of the manual will be provided free of charge.

*Also, please ask to see our file on Happy Endings.*

Best wishes and happy fostering!!!



# THE RUTHERFORD COUNTY ANIMAL PROTECTION ALLIANCE

## FOSTER CARE VOLUNTEER MANUAL

***Pets Are Worth Saving!***

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## 1. Introduction and History

The mission of RCAPA is to insure the best possible quality of life for animals and to promote respect and reverence for life, to prevent cruelty to animals, to stop pet overpopulation and to strive for the humane care, treatment, and well-being of all animals through education, information, investigation and action. This mission is accomplished through programs such as sheltering, adoptions, spay/neuter, education presentations, literature, special events, and many other programs to include the foster home program.

RCAPA began as a grassroots organization in 1970. Its purpose was to help lost pets find their owners, to place animals into foster homes and to serve as a watchdog and fundraising organization for local animal welfare. In spring, 2005 RCAPA took over management of the Rutherford County Animal Shelter Adoption Program. The purpose of RCAPA is to promote the education of responsible pet ownership, while striving to reduce the destruction rate of kittens, cats, puppies and dogs in Rutherford County. In 2004, the Animal Shelter took in 4351 animals. 3226 of them were destroyed and 561 were adopted. By raising the awareness of the pet over-population crisis, it is the group's intent to encourage spay/neuter policies, promote adoptions from our local animal control facility and educate the public regarding the responsible and loving treatment of all creatures.

### *The Goals of RCAPA*

- ❖ To promote the reduction of the number of cats and dogs destroyed in Rutherford County through the support of a countywide spay/neuter program and pet tag identification.
- ❖ To promote and support the construction of a new animal shelter facility in Rutherford County.
- ❖ To promote responsible pet ownership through education of citizens in Rutherford County.

RCAPA assists in re-homing between 3, 000 - 5,000 animals annually at the Animal Control facility (RCAC). Some animals are too young, sick, injured, need socialization/training, or are just at risk because of limited space in the shelter. The goal of RCAPA foster home program is to provide opportunities to these animals to find permanent, loving homes. RCAPA strives to rehabilitate and save as many animals as reasonably possible. However, it is important to note, that the foster home program is not intended to warehouse animals, or to be a means of a trial adoption period.

As a foster home volunteer you will be providing an essential service to animals in need, and you will also have a direct affect on the number of animals who are given a second chance at finding that special permanent, loving home.

## **2. So You Want To Be A Foster Parent...**

Well, now you've attended an RCAPA new volunteer orientation. You've heard about the many opportunities for your volunteer services, and you think you would like to provide a foster home for animals in need. That's great!

Of course, you probably want to know how much time and effort are involved in fostering. Let's talk!

Animals are selected by the foster coordinator and shelter manager for foster care for many reasons. A litter of puppies or kittens may need to be fostered because they are too young to be placed up for immediate adoption. Many times young animals need a few weeks of "socialization" before going to a new home. Sometimes an animal may have an injury or an illness that will respond well to a few weeks of foster home care.

Occasionally, animals are brought to Animal Control by a previous owner, or they are picked up by Animal Control Officers so malnourished that they need to gain weight before adoption. That's when a foster parent enacts a "Weight Gain" program.

The duties of an animal foster parent are quite similar to those of being an actual parent. These responsibilities may require anywhere from one to several hours a day of your time and effort. You have to prepare a safe and suitable environment in your home for the foster animal(s). You have to provide the appropriate food at the appropriate times and administer prescribed medications and/or other treatments as directed. Additionally, you must set aside adequate time each day for socialization and or interactive play and exercise. And, did I forget to mention the poop patrol? By the end of your foster experience, you will certainly qualify for a degree in waste management! Finally, during the course of each foster experience, you may need to bring the foster animals in your care, back to the shelter one or more times for worming, vaccinations or other health checks. .

The length of time required for a foster situation varies with each case and may change during the course of fostering. Animals fostered for age, weight gain, or socialization may require anywhere from a few days, to two or three weeks of foster care. Often, however, young animals may be sent home in apparent good health and then display signs of illness after a few days. Frequently, they have contracted some type of upper respiratory infection and can be successfully treated with medication. In such a case, the length of foster care changes significantly. Once the animals have begun medication and no longer show visible signs of illness (such as sneezing, coughing, scratching, runny noses, eye discharge or diarrhea), they must be brought back to shelter for a check up to make sure no further treatment is needed. Thus, an entire foster experience may last a few days, or could eventually last from 6 to 8 weeks in duration or possibly longer. Any animal in a foster home for 3 months must be re-evaluated.

A potential foster parent should also be aware of the effects of fostering on their own animals. If you own dogs and choose to foster other dogs or puppies, you may be exposing your own animals to disease such as DRI. The same holds true for cats and kittens. RCAPA provides medication and/or treatments for the foster animals as needed. You are however responsible for any treatments and costs related to your own pets. Therefore, before you begin fostering shelter animals, you should ensure that your own animals are current on their vaccinations. You may wish to discuss the situation with your own veterinarian to see if they might suggest any additional vaccinations (for example, bordatella for dogs). You should also realize that your pet may become jealous of the time you spend with the animals you foster. You may see changes in eating habits, newly destructive behavior, mood swings, and even retaliatory elimination strategies (there's that poop again). These things are not the norm, but it's better to be prepared just in case!

So, do you still desire to be a foster parent? If so, welcome to the sometimes exhausting exhilarating and rewarding world of foster care!

### 3. PREPARING YOUR HOME

Now that you've decided to participate in the foster care program, your first task is to prepare a suitable environment for your new guest(s). Like the real estate market, the most important things are location, location, location. Whether you foster dogs, cats, puppies or kittens, you will need to designate an enclosed space for the foster animals inside your home. You may choose to set aside a small room or to acquire a few adequately sized cages for fostering. This approach not only makes it easier to handle the foster animals, but it also protects your home from unnecessary damage and controls unwanted contact between foster animals and your own.

If you are caring for an adult dog, a crate may be most useful. The cage or crate must be large enough to allow the dog to lie down and stand comfortably. The dog will need to spend a good deal of time outside the crate under your supervision. It is never a good idea to allow a foster dog free run of your home unless you are prepared to deal with "accidents." Crates should be placed near a high traffic area of your home so the dog can feel part of the family while their movements are controlled.

If you are fostering puppies, a playpen is a useful enclosure since it usually provides more room for them to exercise and interact. The cage or pen should be located in a draft free area that has the appropriate temperature (low to mid 70's). Since young puppies sleep a great deal of the time, they can be situated away from a high-traffic area. Their enclosure should be placed on a floor or surface that can be easily cleaned and sterilized. Puppies should also be confined for their own safety and for your peace of mind. Remember, with a puppy there are no accidents, only inevitabilities! If you live with your own dogs and you agree to foster a litter of young puppies with their mother, it is even more important to keep the adult animals separated from them. New mothers can be very intent on protecting their young from any perceived threat.

When fostering cats and kittens, you must also determine how you will control their environment. When cats are stressed, they often find very inaccessible places to hide, so you will want to limit their access to open closets and basements with exposed ceilings. While cats are generally willing to use a litter box properly, kittens are somewhat more directionally challenged. They may play and dig in their litter, but they don't always "hit the target" so to speak. It is also helpful to line the area around the litter box with newspaper to aid in clean up. Kittens will take advantage of their living space to run, jump and climb, so you will want to remove any valuable or breakable items from their reach.

Once you have chosen an area where you will care for your foster guests, you should take time to Pet-proof the area. Pay particular attention to small or dangerous objects such as pins, needles, paper clips, nails, staples, thread, string, rubber bands, caustic/toxic chemicals, moth balls, plants and any other items that are potentially dangerous. Animals are also attracted to electrical cords, TV cords, telephone cords and curtains. These items should be covered or blocked so they can't get at them. A good rule of thumb is: "If you don't want to lose it, put it away."

A variety of supplies are needed to insure a successful foster experience. The following is a list of recommended items:

Cage/Crate or play pen	Food-based on age, health, species
Newspaper	Toys- based on age, health, species
Towels	Leash (for dogs) and collar
Food Bowl	Identification Tag(s)
Water Bowl	Sanitizer (bleach and detergent)
Nail Clippers	Pill cutter
Brush and Comb	Litter box (for cats)
Carrier (for transport)	13" x 9" x 2" cake pan (for kittens litter box)
Baby gates (optional)	Plastic Grocery Bags (poop patrol)
Baby scale (optional)	Camera (for those special memories)

\*\*\* Patience, patience, and more patience

Any necessary items can be borrowed from the shelter however there is no guarantee the shelter will have all of the items on hand each time you foster. Besides it can be tiresome lugging supplies back and forth between the shelter and your home. We recommend you develop your own supply at home, so you will always be prepared for a new foster. Of course, all medications are supplied by RCAPA. You should tell the foster coordinator when they contact you exactly which items you will need, and there will be a sign out sheet for crates, bowls, etc. If you decide to put together your own foster supplies, there are pet supply catalogs that offer low prices if items are purchased in quantity. A list of these catalogs and local stores are included in the back of this handbook.

Finally, it's helpful to have a few first-aid supplies available in your home. If you are fostering puppies or kittens, it's best to be prepared! These babies have teeth and claws that are fine and dagger-sharp. They sometimes don't know how to retract their claws or keep their teeth away from your hands or ankles. You may wish to keep on hand some hydrogen peroxide and an antiseptic cream or spray for any scratches or punctures. If you or someone else is bitten by a foster animal you are responsible for reporting this bite to the foster home coordinator, who will then take any necessary actions, and advise you of what to do next. In some cases it may be necessary for the animal to return to the shelter for quarantine, and/or euthanasia, this is dependant on the circumstances and severity of the bite. Again the foster coordinator will assist in determining the necessary actions after a bite.

*A helpful tip:*

*Washing your hands, or using a hand sanitizer soap or lotion after you handle sick animals will minimize transmission to your own pets.*

#### 4. BRINGING THE FOSTER HOME

Well, here it is- the phone call you've been waiting for! The foster coordinator has called and offered you a foster opportunity. The coordinator will tell you who needs to be fostered, how long the foster may last, and what special concerns need to be addressed. You will be asked to make your decision quickly to accept or refuse the foster assignment. Because of the limited space available at the shelter, animals need to be moved out of the shelter quickly, sometimes within 24 hours.

If you decide to accept the foster animal(s), you must pick them up from Animal Control as soon as possible. You will need to speak to the foster coordinator, who will give you specific information and directions for the care of the animals to be fostered. You will be given a copy of the medical sheet, which will describe the animal's physical condition, what procedures and medications have been administered, and when the next round of medical treatment (if any) is scheduled. Be sure to ask for careful directions regarding how to apply or administer any medication. You will be required to sign the *Foster Care Agreement* and you will be supplied with the following items:

1. Medical sheet
2. Medical directions, syringes and medicines (as needed)
3. Prescription food (if needed)
4. Appropriate dry food (if needed)
5. RCAPA ID tag and a Rabies tag (as needed)
6. Any other supplies you may need (upon availability)

If you are transporting dogs, puppies, cats or kittens you should keep them in their carriers until you arrive at home. An adult dog or large puppy can be confined to the back seat if preferred. When you arrive home with the adult dog or large puppy, keep them on a leash and give them a chance to eliminate outside. When you bring them inside, put them in their cage/crate after removing their collar with tags on it. Give them 15 minutes or so to calm down and get accustomed to their new environment, then you may give them a bowl of fresh cool water. After the animal has settled down, you may give them a small portion of food (if not restricted) or wait until the next scheduled feeding time.

The procedure for introducing young puppies to their new home is similar. They must not be taken outside; they should be placed together in their pen or cage/crate on a bed of clean towels or blankets. If the mother dog is with her pups, you should follow the steps already described above. Remember that mother dogs are very protective of their pups, particularly if they are still nursing. If she seems reluctant to go outside at first, try to coax her and be patient; never try to force her. When she decides that her pups are safe in their new home, she will relax and begin to adjust to your schedule.

Cats and kittens are handled in the same manner. Bring them to their enclosure and release them carefully. If the kittens are walking, place them in their (13"x 9"x 2" cake pan) litter box so they can begin to recognize its location. Show the adult or mother cat where the larger litter is located as well to get them orientated. Again, the initial feeding and watering should wait until the cats seem comfortable in their new surroundings.

A cautionary note is necessary at this point. *If you are fostering a mother dog or cat and her babies, she should not be introduced to any of your animals at this time. She will be extremely protective of her babies and may perceive other animals as a direct threat. Remember, no matter how friendly you know your own pet to be, you don't know how this new mother handles stress or fear. It's always better to be safe rather than sorry. Wait a few days before arranging a controlled introduction between the adult animals.*

*If you have children in your family, they need to be advised about how to act with the new visitor(s). Adult dogs and cats should not be approached quickly or loudly. You do not want them to feel overwhelmed and fearful of their new environment. You should let them observe you and your family from their enclosure for awhile before they meet everyone "up close and personal." It is also important to remember that, just like your own babies, puppies and kittens spend a great deal of their time sleeping. They should be allowed to rest undisturbed at these times and can be played with when they awaken on their own. Older children should be taught the proper manner to pick up and hold a puppy or kitten. Always place one hand under the animal's hind quarters and the other hand under their chest. Very young children should always be supervised when they are with an animal.*

*Finally, in the midst of all the excitement and activity surrounding the new arrivals, don't forget your own pets. They should never be forced to meet the foster animals. Allow them to become acquainted at their own pace. You will want to give your pets some extra attention so they don't become jealous of the foster animal(s). It's amazing how much a few extra treats will convince your pet that you still love them!*

## 5. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Someone once asked, "What's in a name?" Well, for you and your foster animals, a name has many benefits. If you are caring for a litter of puppies or kittens, it is very important that you are able to identify each individual animal. You should make a list of their names and any distinguishing markings so you can keep a record of their progress.

If they are sick and require medicine, you can check off their names on the list each time they receive a dose. This will insure no animal is accidentally missed. You can also keep a daily record of any signs of illness, such as coughing, sneezing, nasal or eye discharge, diarrhea, listlessness, or failure to eat. If you have a baby scale available, you may also weigh each puppy or kitten every two or three days to be sure that they are thriving on the diet they are being fed. These records are valuable tools for shelter staff who will be working with you on the animal's health care, rechecks and adoptions.

When trying to place animals for adoption, or putting them on the website and picture boards, names become very important. If you have not named your foster animals, then the shelter staff and volunteers must do so. Since they deal with hundreds of animals each month, their creativity tends to be exhausted. You know they have run out of ideas when they begin to name animals after other shelter staff and volunteers!

Names provide a potential adopter with a distinct and personal way to identify a particular animal. They can reflect the animal's personality or appearance or just be one of your favorite "people or places" names. Some adopters even choose to keep the names that they first associate with their animals. If you are fostering an adult dog or cat, it is often best to keep the name the animal is familiar with. If however, the former owner happened to name the animal something with a very negative connotation, e.g., Destructo, Stupid, Ivan the Terrible etc., you might consider giving your foster a new name.

So, what's in a name? A lot! Have fun!

## 6. "MOM, DAD, I'M HUNGRY!"

Whether you are fostering a stray dog or cat that has been without food for awhile, a starving animal rescued from a cruelty situation, or a litter of kittens or puppies just starting out in life, food is a big deal! Appropriate amounts of good quality food help young animals grow properly and prosper. Emaciated animals may be rehabilitated and adopted to a permanent home after a successful nutritional program.

The first question is "What kind of food do I feed my foster animals?" Generally, the food must be age, weight and species appropriate. Dogs one year of age or older are fed canine maintenance (adult) formulas, and cats at this age level are fed feline maintenance formulas. Puppies under a year of age are fed a puppy growth formula and kittens are given a kitten formula.

As a general practice, you should provide **dry** food in the appropriate formula for your foster dogs with fresh cool water always available. Healthy puppies are usually so eager to eat that a good quality dry puppy food is very successful with them. Adult dogs already have a food history and may have some preferences that need to be accommodated. If they are unwilling to eat plain dry food, you may mix it with some warm water to release the aroma. If necessary, you can mix a small amount of canned puppy or dog food with the dry formula to encourage them to eat. Dogs and puppies should never be allowed to consume chocolate of any kind as it contains a substance that is toxic to them. They should never be given bones because splinters may damage their throats, stomach walls or intestinal tracts.

Now let's discuss the important questions of "how much" and "how often" to feed your foster. Again age, weight, health and species will dictate these choices. Adult dogs should be fed twice daily and at the same times every day. Very young puppies may be presented with small amounts of dry dog food mixed with warm water four times a day, and they can be switched to larger amounts three times daily at 8 weeks of age. It's helpful to use a measuring cup so that you can be sure to feed the correct amount at each meal. As the puppy gets older, you can gradually decrease the amount of water until they are accustomed to eating dry food. A general rule of thumb says that a dog's or puppy's skull is about the same size as their stomach. You should select an amount of food based on that approximate measurement and give the dog 15-20 minutes to eat. After that time remove the remaining food if any. It is difficult to maintain a proper eating pattern and to housebreak them if food is always available. Overeating is a problem for all ages of dogs since it can cause stomach upsets and diarrhea that may appear to be a result of illness. Another way to decide how much to feed, is to feel the animal's stomach after they have eaten. If the stomach is visibly enlarged and extremely firm to the touch, or if their stomach protrudes when you look at them from above, they have probably eaten too much food at one time. Give them a smaller portion the next meal. Of course, if your

foster pup(s) stays with you for several weeks, you will need to increase these portions very gradually and continue to check them as they continue to grow. Cats and kittens should also be presented with a diet of good quality, dry cat or kitten food. Some cats like canned as well as dried food. It is very important that both cats and kittens consume adequate amount of food to insure their good general health. Sometimes it is necessary to stimulate their appetites by giving them canned cat food along with the appropriate dry food. It is recommended that you provide dry food in one bowl and a small amount of canned food in another next to it. Use shallow bowls when feeding small kittens and puppies so they can reach the food easily. You may place a bowl of water a short distance away from the eating area and show the cats where it is. In the wild, big cats don't bring their prey to the waterhole to eat it; the competition is too strong. Their domestic counterparts, your cats and kittens, are also more likely to consume an adequate amount of water if it is properly located. Despite popular belief, cats and kittens should never be given milk as they cannot digest it properly. The result may be diarrhea that could be confused with a symptom of illness.

When feeding adult cats, you may have dry food available all the time, but you can present them with a serving of canned food twice a day. Kittens are unlikely to eat canned food that has been left out for a long time and allowed to dry out, so you may serve small portions of canned food to kittens 3 or 4 times daily in addition to a measured bowl of dry kitten food. It is important for you to be aware of how well your foster felines are eating, as lack of appetite can be an early warning sign of illness. Remember the association of skull to tummy size! Make the portions small to moderate in amount so that you can visually check the bowls and determine how much has been consumed.

The next question is "Where do I get the food?" Any special dietary needs are provided to you by RCAPA, and you can request any dry food you will need and if it is available RCAPA will provide it. Many foster volunteers prefer to buy their own food to avoid frequent trips to the shelter to pick up more. If this is your choice, you need to select a good quality, name-brand food from a grocery or pet supply store. Purina and Pedigree brand foods are good choices for dogs and they are made in both adult and puppy formulas. Kal-Kan, Whiskas and Friskies are good choices for cats. Kittens should be fed an age appropriate and weight appropriate food such as "Kitten Chow." You should try to provide lamb, chicken, or turkey based foods, which are easily digested and produce less mess. Changing animals from one diet to another, whether it is from canned food to dry food or from bland food to regular food, must be done gradually over a period of several days. Begin by mixing a small amount of new food while decreasing the old food over a period of 5-7 days or longer if moving young puppies or kittens from canned to dry food. Animals may become ill if their food is abruptly switched to a new variety. So try to keep foster animals on one brand and type of food for the duration of the foster.

There may be times when, because of age, weight or health conditions, you will be advised to use a special prescription diet food such as Hills p/d or c/d formulas. RCAPA will provide cans of prescription food as necessary and if available.

There may be other times when you are asked to give dogs or puppies what is termed a "bland diet." This may be required if they are having digestive problems as a result of illness or parasites. The basic formula for a canine bland diet is one part boiled and rinsed ground beef, chicken, or turkey mixed with one part boiled or steamed white rice. You may also add a small amount of rinsed and strained cottage cheese to this mixture. This food should be served either warm or at room temperature. The shelter medical staff will advise you on how long you should feed this diet, and whether you will need to add any supplements. If you are asked to prepare a special diet for cats or kittens, the shelter medical staff will advise you of what food to use.

As a final reminder, it is very important to know if the animals are eating adequately. You should watch them after the food is given to them. This is particularly helpful if you are fostering a litter of puppies or kittens. Make sure that each animal is eating a sufficient amount of food and is not being pushed aside by his littermates. If this does happen, try feeding them separately so you can be sure that each is eating enough.

*Special note:*

*If you're foster animal appears underweight, or is on a weight gain program do not over feed the animal. Large portions can be dangerous to a starving animal. Provide the animal with frequent smaller portions, and don't forget the potty breaks.*

***Bon appetit!***

## 7. "MOM, DAD, I'M BORED!"

Believe it or not, it's not just all work when you foster an animal in need. You actually get to play with them! As a matter of fact, you need to play with them. This kind of interaction is called "socialization" and it is often the main reason why some animals are put into foster care for a few weeks.

RCAPA often receives litters of puppies and kittens that have had little or no human contact even though their mothers may be familiar with people. These babies must become accustomed to people or they will not be successful in an adoptive situation. They may grow up to be timid or aloof or may even become "fear-biters" when placed under stress. So, get on your mark, get set, let's play!

One of the easiest methods for interacting with puppies and kittens is to sit down on the floor with them and let them come explore you. (Remember-bare skin tears easily so dress appropriately!) Pick up each animal and stroke and cuddle them. Speak to them in a happy voice. This is also a good time to observe the social dynamics of the litter as a whole. Try to identify and make a note of which pups or kittens are outgoing, shy, affectionate, or reserved. This information will be of interest to the future adoptive parents.

After a while, the fast-paced play will begin to slow down. This is a good time to work with each pup or kitten individually. Hold the animal with one hand under their chest and use your other hand to run up and down each leg. Gently squeeze the pads of each foot. Run your hands gently over the pup or kitten's face and mouth. Handle the ears by gently lifting and stroking them. This gentle and thorough touching at a young age will accustom the animal to human contact and make them more social and more confident in their new adoptive homes.

It is also very important not to allow or encourage bad behavior when handling your young foster animals. You should always have a few acceptable toys available to use as "distractions" when you play with puppies and kittens. You don't want to be searching for a toy while your darling little foster baby is treating your hand like a T-bone steak! If you would like assistance choosing toys for your foster please let the Volunteer Coordinator know.

If you have children in your home, you will want to supervise their interaction with the animals so that neither the children nor the animals have a "bad" experience that will affect their attitudes later in life. Children should be advised to move slowly as they walk around the young animals and to avoid wearing shoes with laces if possible. A careless step can injure an animal very easily. They should also be cautioned not to wave their hands in front of the animal's faces since they will tempt

the animal to play-bite, mouth or scratch the child's hand. Since young kittens and pups sleep a good deal of the time, they should be allowed to do so without interruption and "playtime" should be coordinated with their schedule.

Finally, it is important to use appropriate toys for each kind of foster animal. Puppies should never be given kitten toys. They are too delicate and sometimes too small for the rough-and-tumble play of a litter of puppies. Puppies often enjoy soft foam toys that they can bite, but any bells or plastic decorations should be removed before allowing pups to play with them. Adult dogs will enjoy larger and harder toys than puppies can handle, such as Frisbee, tennis balls or nylon bones. Of course, they should never be given real bones to chew because they can be a health hazard to the dog.

Well, you probably didn't think that "playtime" could be so much work, look on the bright side. There is nothing more entertaining and relaxing at the end of a long day than watching a litter of puppies or kittens at play until they fall asleep. So relax and enjoy yourself. It's one of the most rewarding experiences of foster care!

## 8. "OUCH!"

Foster animals, like all animals cared for by RCAPA, receive the appropriate preventive medical treatment needed to protect them from a variety of viral and bacterial infections and to ensure good health. Depending on the age and health of the animal, this program includes one or more vaccinations and tests. "Ouch!"

Adult dogs and cats usually receive a vaccination upon arrival at the shelter, before adoption, or before they are placed into foster care. In three weeks they will be given a booster shot if they are still at the shelter, or in foster care. Dogs are given a shot called "DHLPP" (distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus, and para-influenza), and cats receive a "FVRC-P" (rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and panleukopenia) shot. A one year rabies vaccination is given to foster animals 4 months of age and older. This program of vaccinations is delayed if the animal is already sick. The existing illness is treated while in foster care and the vaccinations are begun when the animal's health permits.

Puppies and kittens receive their first vaccinations at the shelter if they are six weeks of age or older, and then they begin a series of booster shots. Kittens are vaccinated every three weeks until they are twelve weeks old, and then they should receive a booster shot annually after that. Puppies also receive shots every three weeks, but their series runs until they are four months old, and then they receive a booster shot annually after that. The length of time the puppies or kittens are in foster care will determine how many of these shots they receive at RCAPA. The shelter will keep a record of the types and dates these shots are given to your foster animals so that information can be updated properly when they are adopted.

When you pick up your fosters at the shelter, you will be given a schedule of dates for subsequent vaccinations. You are asked to call the foster coordinator, on or near the indicated dates so they can arrange a time that is convenient for you and the very busy clinic staff.

Animals at the shelter, placed into foster homes, or adopted also receive various tests for illnesses they may have. Dogs over 6 months of age are tested for heartworm disease. If the dog is heartworm positive a very difficult decision will be made by the foster coordinator and the shelter manager. The dog may, or may not be considered for foster at that time. If the decision to place the dog into foster care is made, the dog will require a very severe treatment regime, and the foster care will be more challenging. Cats and kittens are tested for Feline Leukemia Virus (FELV), and if requested by an adopter, or being placed into foster home they are tested with a combination test for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). If either of these feline tests are positive the animal will no longer be considered for foster, or adoption. Both of these tests require a blood pull, "Ouch!"

## 9. "MOM, DAD, I DON'T FEEL GOOD!"

Many times animals at the shelter begin to show obvious signs of illness such as upper respiratory infection (URI) or kennel cough. If a foster placement can be arranged in a reasonable amount of time, these animals will be treated medically in a foster home until they are in good health and can be adopted to a new home. This is where you, the foster parent, will play such an important role. If you are willing and able to commit your time and effort for a period of a few days up to a few weeks (or in rare cases, longer), to care for these animals, they may be successfully adopted into new homes.

In another case, you might be asked to foster animals that do not show any obvious signs of illness. They may be assigned to foster care for purposes of weight gain, age or socialization. Since the most common viral bacterial diseases that effect animals have an incubation period of seven to ten days, your fostered animal may have contracted an airborne infection that does not produce visible symptoms until they have been in your home for a few days. In such cases you need to be able to recognize the symptoms of illness so you can contact the foster coordinator immediately for further instruction on what to do.

The most common clinical signs of illness are coughing, sneezing, congested breathing sounds, vomiting, diarrhea, discharge from the eyes or nose, lack of appetite, listlessness, depression, fever, excessive thirst, or dehydration. Animals may also show signs of abdominal tenderness by "flinching" when you touch them there or by having difficulty lying down on their belly. If any of these symptoms occur, you should notify the foster coordinator immediately. Do not wait a few days to see if the problem resolves itself; most likely it will not! Any delay in treatment may increase difficulty in treating the animal successfully.

The most common of these illnesses are URI or kennel cough. However, it is also possible that such symptoms may signal the onset of a more serious disease such as parvovirus, or distemper. When you contact the foster coordinator they will set up an appointment for a health check with the shelter medical staff. You will need to bring in all fosters under your care for proper evaluation and treatment. If the animals are exhibiting signs of a contagious disease, you; must decide if you wish to continue the foster assignment. Remember these are usually illnesses that can be transferred to your own animals, but are generally easy to treat.

If you decide to continue the foster arrangement, you will be given the appropriate medication and instructions on how and when to administer them. Generally, antibiotics, either in pill or liquid form, are prescribed for these diseases. It is important not to skip any doses, so you are encouraged to keep concise records of each time you medicate the animals. You should also make daily notes detailing the visible symptoms of each animal, as this information will aid in overall treatment.

## **Quarantine Periods for Contagious Diseases**

*If a foster animal is found to have a more serious contagious disease the foster home must be placed on a quarantine period before other foster animals can be placed into that foster home.*

<i>Feline Leukemia (FeLV)</i>	<i>1 week</i>
<i>Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)</i>	<i>1 week</i>
<i>Feline Infectious Peritonitis</i>	<i>3 weeks</i>
<i>Canine Distemper .</i>	<i>3 weeks</i>
<i>Panluekopenia (feline distemper)</i>	<i>3 months</i>
<i>Parvovirus</i>	<i>3 months</i>
<i>Ringworm (fungal)</i>	<i>3 months</i>

## 10. PARASITES YUCK!

We can all be great hosts and hostesses, especially our cats and dogs. They entertain a variety of guests, both in and on their bodies. Yes we are talking about those pesky critters called internal and external parasites. As guests go, these guys are definitely unwanted.

There are 2 types of internal parasites: Worms and single celled organisms. Most internal parasites live in a dog's or cat's digestive systems. Worm infestations may produce a variety of symptoms such as stunted growth, vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, lethargy, anemia and poor appetite. Since different medicines treat different worms, a stool sample must be analyzed by the shelter to determine the correct medication. This will be done before you take a foster animal home and you will be given any additional medication(s) as needed.

A heavy infestation of *roundworms* can cause a potbellied appearance and may show up in the animals stool. Roundworms are so common in puppies and kittens that RCAPA routinely administers a worming medicine called "Strongid" to all animals being adopted, or going into foster care. This same medicine also works to eliminate *hookworms* that can cause black, "tar like" stools containing blood. Your foster animal should be treated with Strongid three weeks from the first dose, to eliminate any newly hatched worms. *Whipworms* are treated with "Panacur", generally administered for three days consecutively. *Tapeworms* are transmitted by animals swallowing an infected flea. If animals show signs of tapeworms they are generally given a single dosage of "Drontal" to eliminate the tapeworms.

The single-celled organisms in the digestive system are named *coccidia* and *giardia*. They are generally very nasty! Coccidia infections frequently produces mucus in the stool and giardia can produce a stool that is greenish black and extremely smelly. In either case, diarrhea is the common symptom. The shelter will examine a stool sample to determine if these organisms are present. If so, they will provide you with the appropriate medication(s) and instruction on how and when to administer them. Generally, coccidia are treated with "Albon" over a period of several days, and giardia can be more difficult to diagnose, but can be successfully treated over a period of several days (treatments may vary).

The main way to control the spread, or re-infestation of, these parasites is through proper hygiene. Since many of them can be transmitted to humans, it is especially important that you always wash your hands well after handling puppies and kittens. If they have any fecal matter on their coats, this can become a source of contamination. Be sure that children who handle the animals also wash their hands afterwards. Naturally, you should keep your own animals separated from foster animals until their period of treatment has been completed. Fecal matter on the floor of the puppy pen or in the litter box should be removed as soon as possible to avoid re-infestation. The floors, cages/crates and litter boxes should be cleaned with a *sanitizing solution of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water*.

This solution should be allowed to remain on the surface several minutes before being wiped off. These surfaces should then be rinsed clear of the solution before the animals are returned to them. Also, immediate removal of animal waste in the yard will help prevent the spread of parasites.

Now let's discuss the external parasites, specifically *fleas and ticks*, *ear mites* and *mange*. On the plus side, these parasites can be identified without having to examine fecal matter up close and personally. On the other hand, they can also affect you and your animals! If animals have visible signs of fleas, flea dirt, or ticks, they will be given a special bath if they are old enough to have one. They will also be given a flea and tick prevention treatment. If the animal has ear mites, the obvious signs are frequent scratching of the ears and shaking of the head, with black debris in the ear canal. The shelter medical staff checks ears as a routine practice. The foster coordinator will show you how to properly apply the required medication(s). Mange mites are not visible to the naked eye, but there are visible signs of infection: patches of hair loss (particularly around the face), thickening of the edges around the ears intense biting and scratching of the body and even a very strong peculiar odor coming from the animal. You will not usually be asked to foster an animal with mange since it is very contagious to people. However, if you are willing to accept such an animal for foster care, or your foster animal later develops symptoms of mange, you must be especially careful about cleanliness. The animal's bedding should be washed frequently since these mites can live in them for quite some period of time. It is all right to pet the animal as long as you wash thoroughly afterwards, but you should avoid sitting on their bedding or holding them in your bare arms until treatment has been completed and all visible signs of the mange are gone.

Many of you may already be somewhat familiar with this next one, since it is fairly common in school age children. Ringworm! Ringworm is another condition a foster animal may have, but symptoms do not show until the animal has been in foster care. Ringworm is a skin fungus that is contagious to both humans and animals. Cats seem to be more susceptible to ringworm, and can also be carriers without showing any symptoms. Treatment is generally very effective however it may be difficult to control the spread from animal to animal in a multiple pet household. This is why it is so important to isolate an animal suspected of having ringworm, and always use an antibacterial fungal cleanser when washing your hands and arms after handling the suspected animal. Betadine scrub is very useful for cleaning your hands. If a foster animal has ringworm, the foster home must be placed on a 3 month quarantine period once the foster animal leaves the home.

OK, now you've heard all about the bad things that can effect and infect your foster animals. Look on the bright side! Most animals only have to deal with one or two of these parasites at any given time (if at all) and treatment is generally very effective.

## 11. THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES...

As you approach the end of your foster experience or even during it, you may wish to take some photographs to remember the animals you have cared for so diligently. Certainly photos are not mandatory, but they can provide you with a great deal of pleasure as time passes and you want to recall the animals you have helped.

In addition to your fond memories, photos can be useful in the adoption process. This is where you come in! When animals are placed on the website and picture boards, they are in need of a good story and striking picture that will draw people's attention. We encourage foster parents to write a brief description or story on the animal to make the animal more unique and appealing to prospective adopters.

You have shared your home with these animals, often for several weeks. You know whether they are shy, timid, outgoing or affectionate. Was this one the runt of the litter? Was that one the leader of the pack? Were some more mellow, while others were very active? All of these observations can be included on the website and picture boards. This information may help a person or family make the decision to select your foster animal for adoption. If you can provide a photo of the animal in a home setting, it will be easier for potential adopters to identify with the animals individual characteristics. . You may even choose to prepare your own "**photo biography**" of the animal. Some sample photo biographies will be discussed during your training session.

If you decide to take photographs of your foster animals, here are a few tips that might help you:

- Unlike dogs and cats, puppies and kittens pose a special problem; they don't sit still!
- Try to take photos at the end of a play session when they are tired.
- You can wake them up briefly from a nap to snap a shot of them.
- Close-up photos of the face are more effective than distance shots of them and can convey more of the animals personality

Whether you take photos or not, you will most likely always remember each foster experience. Every animal is special and unique. Each time you remember them, you will know that you have helped them to live in a permanent loving home. Great job!

## 12. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Congratulations! You have completed your foster experience. Your foster(s) are healthy enough, fat enough, and confident enough to be adopted. What happens next?

When you think your foster animals are ready for adoption you should call the foster coordinator. They will arrange a time for you to bring them in for a final evaluation any necessary shots or worming and preparation for adoption. The amount of time needed for the final evaluation may vary depending on staff time and the animal's needs. You should plan on spending a few minutes with the foster coordinator to explain any records you have compiled and discuss future adoption events. If you have prepared photo bios, they should also be given to the foster coordinator. Some animals may be returned to the shelter after the foster period if space permits. Many foster animals will remain in a foster home until they are adopted. This is a key part of your foster parenting, you need to be proactive, and really get the word out that you have a foster animal and are looking for a permanent loving home. You are also strongly encouraged to attend adoption events to show off your pride and joy to potential adopters. Although you want to get potential adopters interested right away, you must also realize the foster animal can not be placed into a new home, even temporarily, without the approval, and completed adoption process by the foster coordinator. Continued communication between yourself and the foster coordinator is vital in this area. The last thing we want is for this wonderful fostering experience to become a nightmare for you and the shelter when it comes time to find that very special animal a permanent loving new family.

If you would like to establish continued contact with the adoptive parents to share your experiences with them, and receive updates on the animal you cared for so lovingly, you may leave your name, telephone number, and address (for those Christmas cards), with them so they can contact you if they wish. At no time can the adoptive parent be pressured into contact, and under no circumstances can a previous foster parent try to remove the animal from the adoptive home.

Unfortunately, adoptions can go wrong and the animal may be returned to the shelter by the adopter. At that time you may be called upon to continue the foster arrangement if the animal still qualifies for fostering. If you cannot carry out the new foster period, every attempt will be made to find another foster volunteer to care for the animal(s). However, no guarantee can be made, and depending on the current shelter situation, and the animal's condition the animal may have to be humanely euthanized.

Fostering animals is a very intense experience, much like raising your own children. It can be difficult, frustrating and time-consuming work. When they leave "**home,**" you may miss them and feel emotional loss for a time. However, feel secure in the fact that you have made a difference, a **BIG DIFFERENCE,** in the lives of the animals you fostered. Because of your efforts, they now have the opportunity of being adopted into new, loving homes.