

# Cat & Kitten Fostering



## **Burlington County Animal Shelter**

**Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday 12 pm - 4pm**

**Thursday 12pm - 7pm**

**Holidays Closed**

**(609) 265-5073**

## General Info

Thank you for caring for underage kittens! Kittens need foster care until they are 8 weeks old and/or until they weigh 2 lbs. That is the minimum weight at which it's safe to spay or neuter them and they must be altered before we can place them up for adoption at Burlington County Animal Shelter (BCAS). When you return the kittens for their spay or neuter surgery, that's the end of your foster period for that animal and a job well done! Foster periods can last for two to six weeks (depending on the age of the kittens) and foster homes are vital to these kittens.

The Burlington County Animal Shelter (BCAS) provides medical care for some foster animals. Some of our friends may need more care than foster parents can provide. Since we're the organization responsible for these animals, it's important that our vet or vet techs make all treatment decisions about them. Please note that if you did take your foster animal to a private vet, BCAS could not reimburse you for any medical costs and a non-BCAS vet should not treat an BCAS animal unless our organization makes a special exception.

The Burlington County Animal Shelter unfortunately cannot provide you with food, litter and other supplies needed for foster animals.

## Medical Info

While the shelter checks kittens over to make sure they appear healthy upon arrival, most illnesses have an incubation period between exposure and the onset of symptoms. Please watch your fosters carefully for any changes in their normal behavior or habits. If your foster animal shows these symptoms, please call!

Loss of appetite – Can be normal the first day as foster adjusts to a new home. If foster is not eating the second day, call that day.

Diarrhea – If stools are soft but not watery, monitor for two days. If there is no improvement, call the third day. If stools are watery, call that day.

Vomiting – If foster throws up food two or more times, call that day. If foster vomits bile, or liquid, or blood call that day. If vomiting is frequent, call immediately.

Dehydration – Dehydration is generally associated with diarrhea, vomiting, and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, pinch the kitty's skin gently. If the skin springs back slowly (takes more than 1 second), the kitty is dehydrated. Call immediately—dehydration can be fatal to kittens!

Sneezing - More than three times a day, call that day.

Runny nose or congested-sounded breathing- Call that day. These are often signs of an Upper Respiratory Infection (a fancy way to say cold) and our vets usually treat this condition by prescribing a week of antibiotics.

Coughing – Call that day. Hair

loss – Call immediately.

Watery, goopy or red eyes – Call that day.

Itchy/dirty ears – Call that day.

If your foster animal is on medication but is getting worse or not getting better as expected, please call that day.

Some animals do not show traditional signs of illness. They may be less active than normal, have a loss of appetite, avoid their litter box, or avoid other animals or people. Please call us if you notice any of these changes.

**If you have questions or concerns about your foster animal, please call:**

8 AM- 4 PM (Monday-Saturday): Foster Coordinator # 609-265-5073

Email the veterinary technician at [nmmariano@co.burlington.nj.us](mailto:nmmariano@co.burlington.nj.us) during office hours (Emergencies only) After hours email [nicoleolivia1027@gmail.com](mailto:nicoleolivia1027@gmail.com)

Shelter Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday 12 pm - 4pm  
Thursday 12pm - 7pm & Holidays closed

You can also find help through <http://www.friendsofbcas.org/> and their facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/FOBCAS>

## Some Things To Consider Before Fostering

### Kitten Fatalities

Something to be aware of before you begin fostering is that sometimes foster animals become ill and pass away in foster care. The fatality rate for kittens is high-- 1 in every 5 doesn't make it. This is the hardest thing about fostering and if this is a possibility that you don't think you'd ever want to risk encountering, then perhaps volunteering at our shelter and working with the cats there might be a better volunteer fit.

We do everything we can for every litter of kittens; most of the time, that's enough for them to become big enough to go up for adoption. Sometimes it's not enough, but at least we gave that kitten a chance and provided the very best care we could. Please return the remains to the shelter should the kitten not survive.

Without foster homes, these kittens would not have survived at all— a shelter is not in a position to care for an animal for two to four weeks or longer until the kitten could go up for adoption. Although there are some foster kittens we cannot save, the important thing is that we try for each and every one.

### **Letting Go**

When kittens thrive, sometimes you're faced with another challenge: it can also be hard to let go and return your kitten to the shelter to be spayed or neutered and then go up for adoption. You can always adopt a foster animal (regular adoption requirements and fees apply), but please think about whether or not you'd have difficulty returning a foster kitten before beginning to foster. Much as you might like to, it would probably not be feasible for your household to adopt every single kitten you foster!

## **Before You Bring Kitty Home**

### **Where should the kitty stay?**

**All Burlington County Animal Shelter (BCAS) cats and kittens must be kept indoors.**

House them in a small room, such as a bathroom, that you can keep closed off from the rest of your house. Cats and kittens acclimate to new locations slowly, and keeping them confined in a small space will make the transition to your house much easier for your foster. Another advantage to keeping them in one small area is that since they'll be set up there with food, water and litter, they will immediately learn where the litter box is and will use it! In addition, housing them in a small room will keep your foster separated from your pets, thereby helping to prevent the spread of known or unknown illnesses.

The room should have adequate heating or cooling and good ventilation. Having a warm spot for mama cats and young kittens is particularly important, as kittens under 3 weeks can't regulate their body temperature.

Kittens should be kept in a room where they can't hide underneath or behind large furniture.

### **What will I need?**

You will need the following items to set up an appropriate space for your foster kitty:

Food bowl for dry food

Food bowl or saucer for canned food, if offered

Water bowl

Litter box - For young kittens, regular litter box sides are too high; a disposable baking pan or other low-sided pan will work well. If you have more than one cat, or have a whole litter of kittens, you will probably need multiple litter boxes. Resident cats and foster kitties should not share a litter box.

Litter scoop

Litter – Don't use clumping litter with kittens under 8 weeks. There is a risk that the kitten might ingest the litter. A good brand that does clump (making it easy to scoop), but isn't harmful if ingested is World's Best Cat litter.

Box or carrier for bedding - You may want to use the carrier in which you took the kitty home. You can also use cardboard boxes cut to an appropriate size. For a mom cat nursing kittens, keeping the plastic carrier in her area is a good idea— that way she can nurse her kittens in there and have some privacy and quiet time with them.

Bedding – Old towels, sheets or blankets.

Flea comb & brush

Toys (ping pong balls, feather wands, wadded up foil, paper bags, etc.)

Scratching post

Kitchen scale – needed for kittens under 8 weeks old only; should be sensitive to the ounce.

### **Catproofing**

Remove any potentially toxic plants, or hang them out of reach. (See attached list of toxic plants on page 9.)

Close toilet bowls.

Check for exposed electrical cords.

Remove breakable items that could be knocked off shelves.

Remove small, ingestible items such as rubber bands or pieces of string.

### **Setting up**

Litter box should be as far away as possible from food and water bowls.

Place bed on the floor, make sure sides are tucked in for small kittens.

## **Introducing Kitty to Your Home**

### **Introduction to the new space**

When you arrive home with the kitty, take her directly to her room and close the door. It is best if only one or two people are present in the room when you first arrive home.

Open the door to the carrier, and let the kitty come out on her own. Sit quietly and talk to her.

The kitty may not come out until you leave the room. This is normal.

The kitty may hide beneath furniture for a time – maybe even a day or two. If your kitty is hiding and not eating, be sure to call no later than the end of the second day.

### **Foster kitties and your pets**

Be certain your resident pets are up to date on their vaccinations. This is for their own protection, as well as for the protection of foster kitties. Besides regular booster shots, an additional vaccine to consider for your resident cat if you plan to foster kittens is a feline leukemia shot. This shot will give your cat(s) additional protection against this illness, but not a must in order to foster.

All kittens should be kept completely separate from your resident cats. This is for the safety of your cats. Kittens cannot be tested with high accuracy for feline leukemia or FIV until they are 6 months old. We test kittens for feline leukemia at 6 weeks of age, but results should be taken as indicative and not conclusive. It is possible for a kitten that tests negative for feline leukemia at 6 weeks to test positive if retested in another couple of weeks or if retested at 6 months with the more accurate blood test.

If you have a mother cat, do not let your pets near her when she is with her kittens; she is apt to be very protective.

If your foster kitty is ill, she should be kept completely separate from your resident cats.

Wash your hands with an anti-bacterial soap after handling your foster kitty, whether or not she is ill. This will help prevent spreading known or unknown illnesses to your resident pets.

Do not let your resident pets and your foster kitty share toys, eat out of the same dishes or share litter pans.

## **Daily Care**

### **Feeding**

#### *Monitoring weight gain*

It is a good idea to monitor young kittens' weight with a sensitive kitchen scale. Kittens typically weigh between 2 and 4 ounces at birth, and then gain about 4 ounces a week thereafter. You should weigh kittens every few days to ensure weight gain. See the kitten development chart at on page 9 to see weight milestones. Please call us if your foster kittens are not gaining weight.

#### *Water*

Fresh water should be available at all times.

#### *Under four weeks*

If kittens are with their mom, she will take care of feeding them. Observe mom and kittens to ensure that all the kittens are nursing.

If these kittens have been separated from their mother, they need to be bottle fed. A separate page of instructions will be given, if needed.

#### *Four weeks*

Kittens with mom will still be nursing at this age, though mom may be beginning the weaning process.

If bottle-feeding, continue feeding formula every 4-6 hours.

Begin introducing solid food. You can use a weaning formula, such as KMR Second Step (which is recommended to be reconstituted with KMR formula). A good (and less expensive) alternative to Second Step formula is offering canned kitten food thinned with water or KMR formula to make a “kitten soup” that will be easier for the kittens to eat. Place the food in a low-sided dish or saucer. If mom is present, the kittens will generally follow her lead in eating the food. If they’re on their own, you may want to put a little bit of food onto the roof of their mouths, offer them some off a spoon and then show them the saucer until they catch on.

Make sure water is available in a small bowl.

#### *Five to six weeks*

Bottle feeding kittens should be weaned from the bottle at this point.

For kittens who were bottlefed, offer either KMR Second Step or canned food 3-4 times per day, approximately 1-2 teaspoons per serving.

For kittens who have not been bottlefed, offer 1-2 teaspoons wet food 3-4 times a day. At this age, they should be able to eat both wet and dry food.

Make dry kitten food available all day. Royal Canin Babycat is a high-quality dry food specially formulated for kittens 4 weeks to 4 months. If they aren’t interested in the dry food yet, try soaking it in water to see if that makes it easier for them to eat.

#### *Seven to eight weeks*

Feed canned food 3 times per day, approximately 1-2 tsp per serving. Decrease quantity of canned food over the two weeks as kittens become more accustomed to dry food.

Make dry kitten food available all day.

#### *Adolescents (2 months to 1 year)*

Feed dry kitten food until at least 8 months of age, preferably to 1 year, after which you can switch to dry adult food.

If your foster is not gaining or maintaining its weight with dry kitten food, supplement with canned kitten food.

#### *Nursing mothers*

Make dry kitten food available all day.

Feed ½ can (or more) of kitten formulated canned food twice daily if mom is not maintaining weight with dry food only. Mom can have as much food as she wants, since she has to produce so much milk for her kittens!

#### *Healthy adult cats*

Feed ¼ to 1/3 cup quality dry cat food twice daily. Finicky eaters can have access to dry food all day.

#### **Potty time**

Kittens under 4 weeks do not go to the bathroom without stimulation from mom. The mom cat will lick the kittens' bottoms, and consume what they produce.

At around 3-4 weeks, mom cats will stop helping their kittens eliminate. Kittens at this time can begin to learn to use a small litter box (for example, a disposable baking pan). Some kittens will just follow mom's lead, others you might need to put in the litter box and encourage to scratch by scratching yourself or holding the kitten's paw and scratching.

To help ensure proper use of the litter box for adults and kittens, you should:

- Place in a quiet area.

- Your foster kitty and your resident cat should each have their own litter box.

- Some cats don't care for hooded boxes.

- Clean out the box at least once a day.

#### **Fleas**

Kittens over 4 weeks and adult cats will be treated with flea meds by the Burlington County Animal Shelter (BCAS), should they have fleas and/or ticks.

Foster kitties should **not** be flea-dipped, flea-powered, or flea-collared. These flea control products are toxic to kittens, and many adult cats have adverse reactions to them as well.

If you have a kitty under 4 weeks with fleas, use a flea comb a few times a day to remove fleas. You may wash kittens with the original blue Dawn dish soap only. It is safe on cats and kittens and it kills the fleas. Bedding should also be washed daily until fleas are gone. You can also give young kittens a sponge bath to help remove fleas and flea waste. Be very certain kittens are dried thoroughly afterwards.

#### **Grooming**

Cats and kittens over 5 weeks appreciate daily brushing with a soft bristle brush.

Brushing is especially important for long-haired cats.

If you are comfortable doing so, trim your foster kitty's claws (or you can always ask us to do it, if her claws are becoming lethal weapons!)

#### **Medical care**

Many foster kittens and some foster cats will need to come into the shelter at some point during their stay with you for routine medical care, like a vaccination.



Kittens typically get their first combination vaccination at 6 weeks, and then require boosters again at 9 weeks and 12 weeks. Rabies vaccinations are given at 4 months.

Some foster kitties may be on medication when you take them home. Please follow medication directions carefully. Most medications our vets prescribe for kittens are liquid antibiotics given orally.

If you are required to give your kitty pills, the easiest way to administer pills is to hold the kitty securely, open her jaws, and then place the pill as far back in her mouth as possible. After you have placed the pill in her mouth, you may want to tilt her head back slightly and hold her jaw shut for a few moments to prevent her from spitting out the pill.

If your kitty has an upper respiratory infection, it is often beneficial to take the kitty in the bathroom with you while you take a shower. The steam helps ease congestion. You can also put a humidifier in the room where the kitty is being housed.

## Socialization

### Socialization / Playtime

Spend as much time as you can with your foster kitty each day.

Speak softly to her, petting her and grooming her as she comes to accept you.

Handle unweaned kittens for a few minutes each day to get them accustomed to being handled by people.

Handle your kitty's paws, look at their teeth and touch their ears. This will help them be comfortable with trips to the vet.

For younger cats and kittens that want to play, a feather toy on a stick is popular.

Avoid using your hands as toys. This can confuse your kitty about appropriate use of teeth and claws—and it can hurt when they have more teeth and sharper claws!

If the cat or kitten bites or scratches you, say “Ouch” loudly, and stop moving your hand or arm. If the cat or kitten is over-stimulated, they may need a time-out.

Expose kittens to different sights, sounds and people. Introduce potentially scary experiences in small doses.

### Training

Cats don't respond well to punishment.

For other behaviors that you want to discourage such as scratching or climbing on counters, use a spray bottle filled with water, shake a can with coins or pebbles inside, or clap your hands sharply to startle the kitty.

You can also discourage scratching by spraying citrus smelling sprays or inexpensive perfumes on off-limits items.

## **How to Prepare For Your Next Litter**

After returning one litter of foster kittens, please wash bowls and litter box thoroughly to prevent spread of infection from one litter to the next. It's also important to clean the floor of foster kitten room. The BCAS recommends disinfecting it with a mixture of 1 part bleach, 32 parts water or other cleanser with bleach and allow to dry and air out.

## **Letting Go**

Returning your foster to the Burlington County Animal Shelter (BCAS) to find her "forever" home is one of the hardest- but also one of the most rewarding- aspects of being a foster parent. Your foster kitty is ready to come back when she is at least 8 weeks and 2 pounds if she was underage, or healthy if she was sick, or more sociable if she was shy. The veterinary technician should have given you an estimated date of return when you picked up your foster kitty. You may call the shelter and speak with a veterinary technician about your return date the closer to the estimated return date.

If you decide you just can't part with your foster kitty and you want to adopt her, please inform the foster coordinator *before* your scheduled return date. Your kitty will still need to go to our spay/neuter clinic to be altered, and all normal adoption fees and adoption counseling will apply.

It is normal to feel sad when you return your foster kitty. You need to remember what a wonderful thing you did for your little foster. You gave her your time, your attention, and your love, and you made it possible for her to go to a new loving home with a family of her very own. You are a special person to have done all that for the little stranger who came to your door.

## Kitten Development Timeline

Age	Development Milestones
<b>Newborn</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Weigh between 2 and 4 ounces (kittens gain approximately ¼ pound, or 4 ounces, per week)</li> <li>-Eyes and ears are closed</li> <li>-Ears folded over</li> </ul>
<b>2-3 days</b>	-Umbilical cord drops off
<b>4 days</b>	-Begin to purr
<b>5-8 days</b>	-Ears open
<b>7-10 days</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Eyes open, all kittens' eyes are blue</li> <li>-Ears begin to uncurl around day 8</li> </ul>
<b>10-14 days</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Weigh approximately 8 ounces</li> <li>-Ears and eyes open</li> <li>-Still no teeth</li> </ul>
<b>2-3 weeks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Weigh approximately 12 ounces</li> <li>-Baby incisors (front teeth) come in</li> <li>-Crawling</li> <li>-Can begin to eliminate without help from mom (around 3 weeks)</li> </ul>
<b>3-4 weeks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Weigh approximately 1 pound</li> <li>-Baby canine teeth come in</li> <li>-Beginning to walk but back legs are tentative and tails are held straight out behind them for balance</li> </ul>
<b>4-6 weeks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Start cleaning themselves</li> <li>-Can begin to run</li> <li>-Can begin to use litterbox</li> <li>-Baby premolars erupt</li> <li>-Can begin to eat some solid food</li> </ul>
<b>6-8 weeks</b>	-Need first vaccination
<b>8-10 weeks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Weigh approximately 2 pounds</li> <li>-Ready to be spayed or neutered</li> <li>-Ready to be adopted</li> </ul>

## Houseplants Toxic to Cats

Many cats like to chew on plants. The following is a list of houseplants toxic to cats and kittens. Please make sure your foster kitty does not have access to any of these plants. Also ensure that your foster kitty is not drinking water out of plant saucers.

<p><b>[A]</b> Aloe Amaryllis Andromeda Japonica Asian Lily (Liliaceae) Asparagus Fern Australian Nut Autumn Crocus Avocado Azalea</p> <p><b>[B]</b> Bird of Paradise American Bittersweet European Bittersweet Branching Ivy Buckeye Buddist Pine</p> <p><b>[C]</b> Caladium Calla Lily Castor Bean Ceriman (aka Cutleaf Philodendron) Charming Diffenbachia Chinaberry Tree Chinese Evergreen Christmas Rose Clematis Cordatum Corn Plant (aka Cornstalk Plant) Cornstalk Plant (aka Corn Plant) Cutleaf Philodendron (aka Ceriman) Cycads Cyclamen</p> <p><b>[D]</b> Daffodil Day Lily Devil's Ivy Dumb Cane Deadly Nightshade (See Nightshade)</p>	<p><b>[E]</b> Easter Lily Elephant Ears Emerald Feather (aka Emerald Fern) Emerald Fern (aka Emerald Feather) English Ivy</p> <p><b>[F]</b> Fiddle-Leaf Philodendron Flamingo Plant Florida Beauty Foxglove Fruit Salad Plant</p> <p><b>[G]</b> Glacier Ivy Gladiolas Glory Lily Gold Dieffenbachia Gold Dust Dracaena Golden Pothos Green Gold Nephthysis</p> <p><b>[H]</b> Hahn's self branching English Ivy Heartleaf Philodendron Heavenly Bamboo Holly Horsehead Philodendron Hurricane Plant Hyacinth Hydrangea</p> <p><b>[I]</b> Iris</p> <p><b>[J]</b> Japanese Show Lily Japanese Yew (aka Yew) Jerusalem Cherry</p> <p><b>[K]</b> Kalanchoe</p>	<p><b>[L]</b> Lace Fern Lacy Tree Lily of the Valley</p> <p><b>[M]</b> Macadamia Nut Madagascar Dragon Tree Marble Queen Marijuana Mauna Loa Peace Lily (aka Peace Lily) Mexican Breadfruit Mistletoe "American" Morning Glory Mother-in-Law</p> <p><b>[N]</b> Narcissus Needlepoint Ivy Nephthytis Nightshade</p> <p><b>[O]</b> Oleander Onion Orange Day Lily</p> <p><b>[P]</b> Panda Peace Lily (aka Maana Loa Peace Lily) Philodendron Pertusum Plumosa Fern Poinsettia Precatory Bean</p> <p><b>[Q]</b> Queensland Nut</p> <p><b>[R]</b> Red Emerald Red Lily Red-Margined Dracaena (aka Straight- Margined Dracaena) Red Princess Rhododendron Ribbon Plant Rubrum Lily</p>	<p><b>[S]</b> Saddle Leaf Philodendron Sago Palm Satin Pothos Schefflera Spotted Dumb Cane Stargazer Lily Striped Dracaena Sweetheart Ivy Swiss Cheese Plant</p> <p><b>[T]</b> Taro Vine Tiger Lily Tomato Plant Tree Philodendron Tropic Snow Dumbcane Tulip</p> <p><b>[V]</b> Variable Dieffenbachia Variegated Philodendron</p> <p><b>[W]</b> Warnecke Dracaena Wood Lily</p> <p><b>[Y]</b> Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow Yew (aka Japanese Yew) Yucca</p>
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