



Foster Caregiver Handbook

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Welcome

Welcome and thank you for participating in the Foster Care Program of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria! Our program was established in 2009 with ***the mission to inspire compassion for all living things, to provide shelter to animals in need, and to promote adoptions, animal welfare, and responsible pet ownership in our community.*** You are joining a team of compassionate individuals dedicated to increasing the adoption rate and saving lives of animals. Through your actions as a foster parent, your love of animals will make a difference in the welfare of animals in our community!

Caring for foster animals can be an extremely positive and rewarding experience. However, the role of a foster parent isn't always easy. Occasionally, unforeseen medical or behavioral problems arise. Foster parents must be responsible, observant, compassionate and patient. Direct supervision is provided by the Foster Program staff, and indirect supervision is provided by our Veterinary staff, our Behavioral staff, and our Directors.

Goal of the Foster Care Program

The goal of the Foster Care Program is to provide certain animals a temporary home and the extra care that they need to thrive.

- Raise the standard of health of ill and injured animals
- Ensure that all underage and underdeveloped animals can reach maturity
- Increase the adoptability of animals in need of socialization or training
- Increase the capacity of our shelter to care for animals in need throughout the community

Types of foster placements

We have several different types of foster cases that we place through our foster program at the AWLA. These include:

- Medical (minor and severe)
- Behavioral (minor and severe)
- Weaned underage/underweight kittens and puppies
- Neonatal care
- Time/space
- Fospice
- Weekend stays

What do foster homes do?

Animal foster homes allow the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria to rescue homeless animals from a variety of situations by providing these animals with temporary care and shelter until they are ready for adoption. **Animal foster parents are asked to provide foster animals with plenty of love, adequate food and water, shelter from the elements, enrichment, and exercise. Administering medication may also be necessary.**

In addition to providing the basics, occasionally foster parents may also be asked to **transport** foster animals to veterinary appointments and adoption events. Animal foster homes play a crucial role in **rehabilitating** rescued animals. Foster parents are in a unique position to help abused or neglected animals learn how to love and trust again. Foster homes can help these animals **become more “adoptable”** by providing **socialization and basic training**. By teaching or re-teaching an animal how to live in a home setting, foster homes help increase the odds for a smooth and successful transition into a permanent adoptive home. In the case of **orphaned baby animals**, foster homes provide surrogate parenting and round-the-clock care for tiny animals that are too young to survive on their own. By providing orphaned animals with plenty of nutrition, love, and stimulation during their first eight weeks of life, foster homes help ensure their health and survival as adults. **Foster homes save lives!**

Commitment to a Foster Animal

Length of a foster animal's stay can vary. The foster team will always let you know the ideal length of time an animal needs a foster home before you agree to care for them. The foster caregiver's commitment and responsibilities will vary with the situation of each animal. Some animals require more time and energy than others due to their age, health or temperament.

Foster Caregiver Job Description

Objective

To provide a temporary, loving home for at-risk animals and prepare them for adoption. To provide a temporary home for animals waiting to be adopted.

Responsibilities

- Ensure the safety and comfort of all foster animals in your care
- Socialize, feed, medicate, groom, and train foster animals in your home in accordance with the AWLA Foster Program guidelines

- Isolate foster animals from resident animals, unless stated otherwise
- Regularly observe, record, and report the health status of foster animals in your care
- Regularly communicate the status of foster animals to the Foster Program staff
- Schedule appointments for animal pick-ups, drop offs, and medical exams with Foster Coordinator
- Ensure your resident pets are current on their vaccinations as recommended by your vet
- Review and follow pet restrictions set by your landlord, HOA, or apartment complex
- Transport foster animals for the purpose of pick-ups, vaccinations, examinations, approved veterinary care, and upon completion of the term of the individual foster contract or upon the request of the AWLA
- Return foster animals to the AWLA in the event of an unforeseen emergency or if you should leave town
- Maintain a positive and professional relationship with the AWLA staff, volunteers, and other foster caregivers. Please bring any issues to the Foster Program staff
- Willingness to abide by the standards of care set forth by the AWLA

What are the requirements to become a foster?

The AWLA is always looking for new foster parents! **The only general requirements are that you are 18 years of age or older, love animals, and have the time and resources to provide a foster animal with adequate care.** Other requirements will vary depending upon the specific needs of a given foster animal. The AWLA makes every effort to match foster parents with an appropriate foster animal.

Foster Caregiver Training

- Review entire Foster Orientation Video
- Complete Understanding Quiz with a score of 6/8 or higher. Anyone with a score lower than 6/8 will not be approved

Sanitize Your Home Between Foster Animals

In order to prevent disease and parasite infestations in your home you must thoroughly clean areas where the foster animal has stayed before taking in another foster animal. The room must be cleaned prior to a new foster animal's arrival.

- Wash bedding in hot water, detergent, and bleach
- Discard non-washable toys
- Disinfect all washable surfaces
- Thoroughly wash and disinfect all crates, carriers, scoops, food and water bowls and

- litter boxes.
- Vacuum all carpeted areas
- Clean any urine or feces soiled areas with an enzyme cleaner to avoid residual odor
- Regularly clean up all waste in the yard to decrease the risk of spreading disease

Foster Program Contact Information

AWLA Foster Program: (703) 746-5580 (direct)

Foster Hotline - for URGENT MATTERS ONLY that can not wait until the next day: (571) 620-2851 (text or call)

AWLA Front Desk: (703) 746-4774

Email is the best way to communicate non-urgent information.

Please email the Foster Program staff with routine questions, concerns, requests for supplies, and to schedule foster animal returns, foster animal pick-ups, or non-emergency appointments. The Foster Program staff will strive to respond within one to two days.

★ Text messages and calls to the Foster Hotline are the best way to communicate emergencies and urgent information. Please don't use this for non-urgent information! (Anything that can not wait until the next day to be answered/addressed)

Please text or call the Foster Program staff for urgent concerns. If your call is directed to voicemail, **please leave a detailed message including your name, the name of your foster animal, phone number, and a description of the urgent situation.** The Foster Program staff will return your call or text as soon as possible. The Foster Program staff strive to be available to respond to emergencies every day of the week and after hours.

★ If you need assistance with an emergency and you cannot reach the Foster Program staff, please call the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria's main number during shelter hours.

Emergency Contact Information and Protocols

What constitutes an emergency?

An emergency is any situation in which a foster animal's life is in danger. The following examples are of emergency situations.

- **Illness or Trauma** – Indications of severe illness include difficulty breathing, lethargy, severe vomiting and/or diarrhea, or signs of pain
- **Lost foster animal**
- **Deceased animal**

Emergency Medical Protocol

If an emergency occurs with your foster, please contact the Foster Program staff ASAP. Once contacted the decision will be made by appropriate parties that there is a true emergency with your foster animal, you will be asked to bring your foster to the shelter if our shelter veterinarian is available or receive authorization to take your foster animal to VCA SouthPaws. The Foster Program staff will contact the clinic prior to your arrival to give the authorization for treatment.

*****Please note** that if you decide to take the foster animal to a veterinary facility without prior approval from the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, AWLA will not be responsible for any of the costs incurred.

Lost Foster Animal Protocol

If your foster animal escapes and becomes lost, please contact the Foster Program staff immediately. We will help you connect you with animal services and work with you to find them.

Deceased Foster Animal Protocol

In occasional cases, sick or weak animals may die while in foster care. If your foster animal passes away, please contact the Foster Program staff immediately. You will be asked to provide detailed information as to what happened around the time of the death so that we can determine if other foster animals in your care may be at risk. You will be asked to bring the body back to AWLA and a necropsy may be performed to help us determine the possible cause of death.

Reporting a Bite Incident

Before an animal goes into foster care, they receive a brief handleability observation at the time of full physical exams at AWLA. Any concerning behavior will be noted and disclosed to the foster. However, this is just a snapshot of their behavior and even the calmest animals can show signs of aggression in stressful situations; i.e. traveling, new human and pet interactions, new environments.

If your foster animal starts showing signs of aggression, please immediately contact the Foster Program staff to arrange for further evaluation and help from our behavior and training department.

Pet bites and deep scratches need to be taken VERY seriously. It is very important that if anyone in your household, including your private pet, has been bitten by your foster animal or if your foster animal has been bitten by another pet or wildlife that you contact us immediately. We may need to have your foster animal returned to AWLA for mandatory quarantine for the safety of the foster caregiver and the animal. This is Virginia Commonwealth law, and not an AWLA-specific policy.

Types of Foster Appointments

Picking Up Foster Animals

The Foster Program staff will contact potential foster parents by email when an animal is in need of foster care. If it is an urgent foster (neonates), contact may be by phone. If you are ready to pick-up a foster animal, or will be within the week, you can sign up on our “Fosters on Deck”. The first foster caregiver who responds and accepts the foster assignment will receive the animal(s) to foster. If you are contacted, please respond as quickly as you can to let us know if you’re available or not. You always have the option to decline a foster assignment for any reason.

AWLA will provide you with the basic supplies required for the animal(s) that you are fostering. You will be responsible for returning any remaining supplies at the conclusion of each fostering assignment. If you are able to donate or supply your foster animals with any supplies, please inform the Foster Program staff.

You will receive a packet including medical records, emergency contact information, and an emergency authorization form. We will also provide any medications, dispensers, instructions and a medication chart if applicable. Age appropriate animals will be provided with collars and ID tags. Please make sure that collars stay on the animal at all times.

All animals will have had a physical examination and if your animal is of age and health, it will come fully vaccinated, dewormed, flea and tick treated, rabies vaccinated, and microchipped. Should this not be possible due to a medical or behavioral reason, you will be informed. Please note kittens and puppies under a certain age will have not received certain vaccinations or testing.

Returning Foster Animals

When nearing the completion of each foster assignment, **Foster Program staff will contact you to schedule or confirm an appointment to return the foster animals** to the shelter. When returning the foster animals, it is important that **all medications and supplies are returned to the Foster Program staff**. In addition, caregivers may provide a Report Card or write a description of their foster(s) for display and forward any photos that may help get the animal adopted. All materials may be submitted to the Foster Program staff. This helps us maintain continuity of care and helps speed up the adoption process.

Bonding with a foster animal, seeing the animal grow and thrive under your care and then passing the animal back to the shelter and on to an adoptive home is immensely rewarding and can be very emotional. It can be sad to see a foster animal leave your home and return to the shelter, but our Adoptions staff will do their best to find an appropriate, permanent home for all of your foster animals. You can also check in with the Foster Program staff for updates. They will be happy to let you know how your fosters are doing and if they have been adopted yet.

Routine Medical Appointments

All routine foster medical appointments take place at the shelter. Your foster animal's vaccination requirements will be explained to you when you pick up your animal. Foster Program staff will send you email reminders when your foster animals are due for vaccinations and recheck appointments with our shelter veterinarian.

Routine foster medical appointments include:

- Physical exams
- Vaccinations and deworming
- Preventatives
- Nail trims

Non-routine Medical Appointments

All non-routine appointments can be scheduled by the Foster/Veterinary Program staff as needed, and are based on our shelter veterinarian's availability. If your animal needs a non-routine appointment, please contact the Foster Team as soon as possible to get it scheduled.

Examples of non-routine foster medical appointments include:

- Upper respiratory infections
- Diarrhea and blood in stool

- Post-surgery rechecks
- Blood glucose curve checks
- Bloodwork and diagnostics
- Heartworm treatments

PLEASE NOTE! If you take a foster animal to a vet clinic without prior authorization from the AWLA, you will not be reimbursed for your expenses.

Scheduling Spay/Neuter Drop Off Appointments

Foster kittens and puppies are ready to be spayed and neutered once they meet all of the following criteria:

- They weigh at least 2 pounds
- They are at least 8 weeks old
- Males have both their testicles descended
- They are apparently healthy and medically cleared for surgery

Once your foster animal is cleared for spay/neuter surgery, we will schedule a time for you to drop them back off at the shelter. From there, they will be spayed/neutered and made available for adoption at the shelter (unless other special arrangements have been made with the Foster Program staff prior to their surgeries).

On Arrival

To make sure the AWLA staff can assist you best possible we ask that you check-in at the front desk. Front desk staff will notify the Foster Program staff that you are here!

Traveling With Your Foster

We understand unexpected travel can occur without warning! **Foster animals should not be taken out of the area. In case of an immediate emergency, they need to be in the nearby area to have access to one of our approved veterinarians/vet clinics.** If you are traveling, let the Foster Team know so we can schedule a time for you to bring your foster animal back to the shelter. You're always welcome to offer to pick your foster animal back up when you return.

Adoption from Foster Care

Getting your foster adopted!

As a foster caregiver, you are your foster animal's biggest fan and their biggest adoption advocate! We ask our foster caregivers to provide us with updated information about their foster animal's personality, send **updated pictures and videos of your foster animals, and complete foster report cards** so that we can promote them for adoption on our website and social media.

Once your foster animal is cleared for adoption, we can post them to our website, advertise them at the shelter, and provide you with strategies to help them get adopted! Some animals will already be available when they are sent to a foster home - the Foster Program staff will let you know if that's the case!

The Adoptions department will also reach out to you if a potential adopter would like to meet your foster animal. Please reply promptly so that a meet and greet with the potential adopter at the shelter or in your home (whatever works best for you) can be scheduled.

For dog fosters: Dog meets should ONLY be done at the shelter with staff present. If the adopter has a resident pet at home, they should first meet the foster animal without their resident animal. If they wish to proceed, schedule a dog-meet with our Adoptions Team here at the shelter so that staff can be present in the case of an emergency. Typically, if the dog-meet goes well, the adopter will take the dog home at that time!

If you have a relative or friend who is interested in adopting one of your foster animals, please contact the Adoptions and Foster Program staff with their information. The relative/friend may also call the shelter to let them know they've met the animal and would like to adopt. **No animal may go to a potential adopter's home until the adoption is made official with the AWLA. A foster caregiver may not place a foster animal in a new home. All adoptions must be approved by an AWLA staff member.**

Adopting your Foster Animal

Sometimes your foster is "the one"! If you decide that you would like to adopt your foster animal, you will have first priority to adopt them unless our staff has given you other instructions! You will proceed with the adoption process through our Adoptions team. You can reach them at 703-746-4774 or adoptions@alexandriaanimals.org.

AWLA's Euthanasia Policy

We ask that all fosters and volunteers acknowledge their understanding of our euthanasia policy before becoming involved with AWLA. We are available to talk to you about this, or any, of our policies if you have questions or concerns.

We are a no-kill shelter. That term can be a bit misleading, but a “no-kill shelter” is generally defined as one that finds placement for 90% or more of the animals in its care. The AWLA exceeds those standards, finding placement for more than 96% of the animals that come to us. We work hard to find appropriate placement for every animal that comes to us, but we believe that if an animal is suffering from an untreatable illness or injury, or if an animal can not safely live in the community, euthanasia may be the most humane option for that animal. However, we prefer not to use the term “no-kill” because we want to build positive, supportive and non-judgmental relationships with the shelters in our region. Because of our community’s support, we are privileged to have advantages that many shelters in the state do not, and we want to work *with those shelters* to help animals rather than creating barriers or placing limits on what they can do because of terminology. In doing so, we can not only help animals in the City of Alexandria but also assist shelters across the region.

Summary of Policies and Procedures

We require your cooperation with the following in order to provide maximum service to all of our foster caregivers and to ensure the safety and health of our foster animals:

1. In the event of an after-hours emergency, please call AWLA's Foster Hotline at the number provided on the Foster Program Contact Information sheet.
 - a. Please contact the Foster Program staff immediately if your foster animal is sick or injured.
 - b. Please notify AWLA immediately if your foster animal is lost.
 - c. Please notify AWLA immediately if your foster animal dies in your care.
 - d. Please notify AWLA immediately if there is a bite incident.
2. Please make an appointment for picking up and returning foster animals. Please contact the Foster Program staff or call the front desk if you are prevented from completing these appointments.
3. Please follow the AWLA's instructions for care, treatment, and transportation of your foster animal. If you feel that you can't administer medications - please alert AWLA immediately to have the animal brought back to the shelter for their medical treatment/administration.
4. Routine exams take place at the AWLA shelter. If you take a foster animal to a veterinarian without prior authorization from the AWLA, you will not be reimbursed for your expenses.
5. If you leave town or are unable to care for your foster animal(s) for any reason, you must return the animal(s) to the AWLA. Please inform the Foster Program staff as soon as you are aware of such a situation so that we can plan and provide for their care.
6. All foster dogs over 8 weeks of age must wear a collar and identification tag at all times.
7. Cats and kittens must be kept indoors only except during transport in a secured carrier.
8. Cats, kittens, and puppies must be confined in a carrier while in vehicles and while being carried to and from vehicles.
9. Adult dogs must wear a collar and leash while outside and while traveling in vehicles.
10. Puppies that have not completed their vaccination series must be kept separate from other animals and may not interact with other dogs during walks.
11. Foster dogs and puppies may not visit dog parks.
12. The responsibility of adopting out foster animals rests solely with the AWLA.
13. You are required to inform the Foster Program staff of any changes in your address, telephone numbers, or email address.
14. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Foster Program staff. If you have immediate concerns and Foster Program staff is unavailable, please contact the Front Desk.