



CARING FOR YOUR RSPCA FOSTER CAT



Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Telephone: 0300 1234 999 www.rspca.org.uk

The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099.

The RSPCA only exists with the support of public donations.

Copyright © 2016 RSPCA. All rights reserved. This material must not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the RSPCA.

Pictures: izold, BarbFoto/istock.com; Jo Murphy x2, Becky Murray x2, Andrew Forsyth x3/RSPCA Photolibrary P97 2.16



Supported by Feliway

Thank you for fostering a cat for the RSPCA.

This booklet is designed to help and support you in caring for your RSPCA foster cat.

Please read this booklet before you welcome a foster cat into your home – it includes important preparations which need to be made prior to their arrival, which will help them settle into their new life with you. You should also read this information in conjunction with the *General information on fostering an animal in RSPCA care* booklet. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your RSPCA fostering coordinator.

The number of cats you can foster at any one time will be dependent on your facilities, the time you have and the individual cats. Your RSPCA fostering coordinator will decide what they feel is best in conjunction with you. It is unusual for more than three adult cats to be placed in an individual foster home. If you already own or foster animals of a different species then the suitability to foster cats will need to be considered bearing in mind the individual cat, your individual animals and your facilities/time. The fostering coordinator will do this in conjunction with you.

It is preferable that you don't already own cats as introducing adult cats can be very stressful for both your cat and the foster cat; however we will always look at individual circumstances and individual animals.



RSPCA foster cats

RSPCA foster cats are examined by a vet and their behaviour observed before being placed within a foster home. Every effort is made to ensure that fosterers and their families are not placed at unreasonable risk but please bear in mind that it is not always possible to predict a cat's behaviour.

Preparing for your RSPCA foster cat

Before collecting your foster cat

The RSPCA website has lots of useful information on cat care so we recommend that you visit: www.rspca.org.uk/cats before collecting your foster cat.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats can be viewed at: www.gov.uk and we recommend that you are familiar with this so you understand your obligations under the five welfare needs as defined by the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

If you live in Wales, the Welsh Government Code of Practice can be accessed at: www.wales.gov.uk

RSPCA Minimum Expectations applicable to cat fostering *(at the time of publication)*

RSPCA Minimum Expectations are the RSPCA's 'rules'. We expect you to follow these when looking after an animal for us. Deviations are only possible on the advice of a vet or the RSPCA's chief veterinary officer.

New RSPCA Minimum Expectations are issued by the RSPCA as and when new evidence is presented on the best welfare for the animals in our care. Your fostering coordinator will keep you up to date with any new 'rules' issued.

- Cats are to be kept indoors/in a secure area to prevent straying/loss.
- Kittens are not to be housed away from the queen (female/mother) until they are at least eight weeks of age, unless this is under veterinary guidance.
- Cats' coats are to be maintained in a healthy condition and free from matting.
- Cats are to receive deworming at least every three months and in accordance with data sheet instructions and veterinary advice.
- All cats are to receive defleaing as per data sheet instruction and veterinary advice.
- Appropriate enrichment is to be provided for each cat and is to include a combination of toys, food enrichment (e.g. treat ball) and facilities for scratching.
- All kittens are to be adequately and appropriately socialised and habituated to prevent fear behaviour towards animals, situations, environments and people.
- Information is to be recorded on the cat welfare and behaviour observations form.
- All cats are to have continuous access to clean, fresh water suitable for human consumption.
- All cats are to be provided with a suitable diet; the quantity, frequency, delivery and type of food should be determined by what is appropriate to the animal's nutritional and behavioural needs.
- Cats are not to be fed a vegetarian diet. ○

PLEASE NOTE: this is not an exhaustive list of all RSPCA Minimum Expectations applicable to cats in RSPCA care.

Other pets

If you have a pet dog or cat, it can be useful to 'scent swap' before the foster cat comes to your house. Your fostering coordinator will help arrange this.

There is no accurate way of knowing how individual animals will react to each other. We do try to minimise problems by not placing foster cats with a known

history of disliking other cats/dogs or displaying aggressive behaviours towards cats/dogs.

Advice on introducing cats and introducing cats to dogs is available at: www.rspca.org.uk/cats/company.

Cats may be interested in caged animals if they are not used to them. Ensure that such animals are kept securely out of reach – ideally in their own room, which the cat will not be able to access.

Feeding

You will be advised on what to feed your foster cat and how often by your fostering coordinator. It's important that you don't



suddenly change your foster cat's diet. Speak to your fostering coordinator if you want to change foods.

To avoid conflict with existing pet cats, or if you have multiple foster cats, make sure you have enough food dishes for all the cats and place them apart from each other – ideally in different rooms. Please do not use double-diner style bowls (this applies to the provision of food and water for one cat too – separate food and water bowls should be used).

Cats naturally eat several small meals a day so it is best to split their daily ration into several smaller meals. To help alleviate boredom, we recommend that part of your foster cat's daily ration of dry food is placed in a feeding device, such as a treat ball or kitty Kong. You can even make your own feeding device using toilet roll tubes. Your fostering coordinator can provide you with a handout on cat enrichment.

Make sure your foster cat has constant access to clean drinking water. Cats do not like to drink close to where they eat so make

sure you place their food and water as far apart as possible – in separate rooms is ideal.

Monitor your foster cat's body condition to check they are not gaining or losing weight. Your fostering coordinator can provide you with the Purina body condition score chart to help you monitor your foster cat's weight. If you have any concerns about your foster cat's eating habits or weight concerns, talk to your fostering coordinator with a view to seeking veterinary advice. ○



How can Feliway help your foster cat?

Millions of cat owners around the world have noticed a difference in their cat after using Feliway. Whether it's spending more time with the family or simply helping to create a better bond with others in the household. Cat owners regularly tell us that when their cat/s are exposed to Feliway, they seem to be more happy and affectionate. Feliway can really make a difference in cat loving homes. Additionally, Feliway has been clinically proven to help reduce or stop inappropriate behaviours caused by stress, including:

- vertical scratching
- urine spraying
- less interaction with the family/hiding away
- over-grooming
- conflicts between household cats.

What is Feliway?

Have you ever noticed your cat rubbing their cheek on objects around the house or even on you? They do this to mark their home as safe and familiar. Feliway is a copy of this mark or 'pheromone' and it has been proven to reduce anxiety in cats, helping create a safe haven in the home.

Using a Feliway diffuser before you introduce your new foster cat can help create a supportive environment, which will help him/her settle into their temporary home. The diffuser will last approximately four weeks and covers 50 – 70m².



Creating a cat friendly environment

Indoor cats

With RSPCA foster cats, we have no choice but to keep them indoors in order to prevent escape/loss and to provide an isolation period to ensure no disease is present. Fostering is an alternative to having them in a cattery environment but some cats may find adapting to an indoor life more difficult. For indoor-only cats extra effort is needed to make sure they remain happy and healthy.

Indoor environments can become predictable and boring, leading to stress, inactivity and obesity. It's important you provide your foster cat with everything necessary to meet their welfare needs:

- provide litter trays in a quiet place

- make sure your foster cat has enough space – indoor-only cats should have access to several rooms
- provide multiple resting places
- provide scratching posts in several locations
- provide opportunities for daily exercise to stay fit and healthy
- provide/create new ways for your foster cat to stay stimulated and active, both physically and mentally – cats can become frustrated and bored with indoor-only lifestyles
- as your foster cat won't have the freedom to interact with people/other animals outside, you become their main companion, so make plenty of time to interact if your foster cat enjoys doing so.

Your fostering coordinator can provide you with an operational guide on cat enrichment – although written for a cattery environment, it has lots of handy tips on how to keep your foster cat mentally stimulated.

Home environment

Adult cats will need access to a variety of rooms within a house to provide mental stimulation and an enriching environment.

Pregnant queens (female cats) or queens with their kittens can be placed in households that are only able to provide one room to a cat – variety of environment may not be as important during this phase as the queen will be busy attending to her offspring.

However, before the kittens arrive the queen may still be active and you will need to regularly spend time interacting and playing with her. She will also still need opportunities to climb and scratch. Once the kittens are born and are being weaned off their mother's milk, it is important that the queen has the space and opportunity to take herself away from the kittens. Once the kittens are weaned, both the queen and the kittens will need access to a larger space.

Resting areas and hiding places

Cats need to have hiding places and they like to have a good view of everything going on.

Allow your foster cat access to at least two types of resting place – one at floor level, enclosed on three sides and another higher one with a good view. It's important the higher position is safe and won't allow your foster cat to fall, as this could cause injury. Cat trees are a good way to achieve a higher resting place but shelves and the top of furniture (e.g. wardrobes) may be preferred by some cats.

Resting places don't have to be expensive pet beds; a cardboard box with a hole cut out and snugly blankets inside will suit some cats as a hiding place.



Preventing escape or loss

It's important that the RSPCA does everything possible to prevent the loss, straying or escape of all the animals in our care. This is even more important for animals who are not in the ownership of the RSPCA, for instance if you are fostering a 'cave cat' or a PetRetreat cat – see accompanying booklet: *General information on fostering an animal in RSPCA care*. This is why one of the RSPCA Minimum Expectations is that cats are to be kept indoors/in a secure area to prevent straying or loss.

It is really important that you make sure any areas you believe are secure are actually secure.

For most people, keeping their foster cat secure will require keeping them indoors. Make sure that family members, friends and visitors take care when opening external doors and be mindful of opening windows.

For a few people, they may be able to allow their foster cat access to their garden – if it is secured to prevent escape. A typical example of this would be roll-top bars fitted on the top of all fences/walls/gates or an external run on the house. Cats are extremely good climbers so a high fence would not be considered secure. If using an external secure area, regularly check to ensure that anti-escape devices are still in a secure state.

Cat enclosure: www.woodenart.org.uk/Mark Hadley




Containment fencing: www.katzecure.com



Cats can be particular about the type of litter used in the tray, so it's best to keep them on the litter they are used to. If your foster cat wasn't litter-trained when they arrived then you may have to experiment with different litters to find one they are comfortable going to the toilet in – you could try a fine sandy litter first.

Once you've found the one your foster cat prefers, keep using that and avoid changing the brand/type of litter. You'll need to put enough litter in the tray to allow your foster cat to dig and cover their poo which is a natural toileting behaviour. Strong scents can also put a cat off using a litter tray so it's best to use unscented cleaning products to clean trays.

Do not place food or water bowls near the litter tray – many cats will refuse to eat or drink near their toilet. 

Collars

Only use the collar if/as supplied or advised by your fostering coordinator. Cats should only be fitted with quick-release collars (also known as snap-safe collars) in case the collar becomes entangled on a household object.

Litter tray

Provide a litter tray in a quiet place and clean it regularly. Cats are often reluctant to use a dirty tray or one located in a busy area. If you have multiple cats, you will need to provide one tray per cat plus an extra one. Locate them away from each other, ideally in different rooms.



Helping your RSPCA foster cat to settle in

Arriving home with your foster cat

Don't expect your foster cat to settle in straight away. Many of the cats that come into our care may have suffered abuse and/or neglect and have never experienced a 'normal home environment', so it may take time for them to settle. We advise that, when you first take your foster cat home, you should give them as much space as possible and wait for them to build trust in you.

Cats hide as a way of coping with stress or worry – it helps them to feel more safe and secure, so it is important your new foster cat is given opportunities to hide away if they want to, until they feel more relaxed. It is very tempting to fuss and cuddle them but this can lead to anxiety and stress. Allow your foster cat time to settle. It is easy to underestimate how stressful the transition from cattery to home life can be.

Introduce your foster cat to visitors in a controlled manner and make sure they always have the option to move away from any person or situation they find uncomfortable.

Some of these cats have genuine dislikes that have been caused by previous negative experiences. Do not attempt to cure them without seeking advice from your fostering coordinator. Speak to your fostering coordinator about Feliway, an artificial pheromone

product (a plug-in diffuser) – this could help your foster cat to feel more secure and help them settle.

Consistency and routine in the home are important for keeping your foster cat happy and healthy. If all members of the household handle and care for your foster cat consistently then they should settle into a routine and feel happier.

Familiar food

When a cat is living in a new environment, in the first few days, it is normal for them to have loose motions brought on by the change in environment and stress associated with that change. A change of diet can also cause loose motions, which is why it's important to stick to your foster cat's normal food as advised.

Diarrhoea is loose and watery poo. As long as your foster cat is bright, not lethargic and is showing no other signs such as vomiting or blood in their faeces, a raised temperature or dehydration, there is no need to go to a vet but please inform your fostering coordinator so they are aware. Feed your foster cat a light diet of white fish or RSPCA Assured chicken and rice. Once the faeces are normal, you can wean your foster cat back onto normal feed. If they don't improve or show other signs of illness, they must be taken to the vet for treatment and to prevent dehydration. Diarrhoea can need more urgent attention in kittens and ill or elderly cats. ●



Learning to live together

Leaving your foster cat on their own

How long your foster cat can be left on their own will depend on a number of factors such as how often they require feeding and how much company they like to have. There are no hard and fast rules – every animal is treated as an individual – but generally we would prefer foster cats are not left on their own for long periods of time. When they are left you should provide them with toys and food devices to help prevent them from getting too bored.

Children

Cats can make excellent companions for children but there are some basic rules that should be observed in order to teach children how to stay safe around cats – to protect both child and cat. Advise children to try their best to remain calm, quiet and seated when meeting your foster cat for the first time. Children should let the cat

come to them, and sniff their hands and clothing to become used to the scent before they attempt to touch the cat. When cats groom each other they focus on the head and neck, so when people stroke them they prefer that they concentrate on these areas too.

It is advisable for you to arrange an area to be available at all times that your foster cat can retreat to – away from children and busy areas of the house. Your foster cat should not be disturbed by people when in this special place of safety. ●

Play time

Keeping your foster cat active will require you to regularly spend time actively encouraging them to run, pounce and play. You should provide opportunities for them to climb – placing a blanket on top of a wardrobe or secure shelf is also a good way to keep them active and gives them somewhere to escape to if they feel anxious or threatened.

Toys

Cats are playful and many enjoy playing with toys and people. Play can be a fun way for your foster cat to be active. What toys your foster cat likes will be very individual so you may have to try a few different kinds of toy. Small toys that look like prey items, feather sticks and catnip toys are common favourites.

Some cats will play on their own but a game with you can add variety and fun into your foster cat's day. It is also a great way



to interact and bond with your foster cat. Stick and string (also called fishing rod toys) are great for interactive play. Use the toy to encourage your foster cat to stalk, chase and grab the toy.

Having a good variety of toys available does not mean spending a lot of money; there are plenty of cheaper alternatives and even homemade options:

- kitchen foil balls
- feathers
- fishing rod toys
- play tunnels
- paper balls
- cardboard boxes
- toilet roll tubes/egg boxes containing treats.

Regularly refreshing the toys and changing them for new and different ones will help to keep the toys exciting and your foster cat interested. Many cats enjoy fast moving objects that are about the same size as their natural prey, so toys that are about the size of mice or small rodents are ideal.

Make sure that the toys are indestructible and large enough that your foster cat cannot swallow them. When introducing a new toy, supervise so you are aware if they chew bits off – any damaged toys should be disposed of.

Scratching posts

Cats must be provided with the opportunity to scratch. You can get scratching mats but many cats prefer a post. It needs to be sturdy and tall enough that they can stretch up fully – ideally, you should provide scratching posts in several locations throughout the house. ○

Understanding your foster cat's behaviour

It's good to be able to understand and recognise what your foster cat is feeling so you need to be familiar with signs of stress and good or poor welfare. Signs that a cat may be suffering from stress/fear can include high levels of grooming, hiding, sleeping hunched or altered feeding/toileting habits as well as spraying indoors.

A happy cat

These cats are relaxed and happy.

1

Cat is standing, has a relaxed body posture, ears are in a natural position, tail is held upright with the tip of the tail curved, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.



2

Cat is lying down, belly is exposed, body posture is relaxed, body is stretched out, ears are in natural position, eyes may be partly closed, mouth is closed.



3

Cat is sitting, body posture is relaxed, tail is held out loosely from body, ears are in natural position, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.



A worried cat

These cats are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you near them.

1

Cat is in a crouched position, muscles are tense, body is held tightly, tail is tucked tightly into body, ears are slightly swivelled sideways, head is slightly lowered and tucked into body, pupils are dilated, mild tension shows in face.



2

Cats who are worried or anxious may hide.



An angry or very unhappy cat

These cats are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.

1

Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head, pupils are dilated, tail is held tightly into body, body is tense, limbs are held tight and close to body.



2

Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head and drawn back, body is slightly rolled over to one side, pupils are dilated, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing.



3

Cat is standing, back is arched, body is held sideways, hair is raised, posture is tense, front paw is slightly lifted off the ground (ready to swipe if needed), ears are lowered and pointing out to the side, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing, tail is tense.



Cats that are frightened or in pain may change their behaviour or develop unwanted behaviours such as aggression, spraying indoors, disappearing or avoiding people. If your foster cat exhibits behaviours that you find unpleasant, distressing, or cause you concern for their welfare, please speak to your fostering coordinator for advice.

There is an information sheet on spraying behaviour on the RSPCA website; available at: www.rspca.org.uk/cats/behaviour. ○



Fireworks

Some cats become anxious at the sound of fireworks. Preparing in advance for the fireworks season is key. You can find out about how to prepare for fireworks and how to help your foster cat cope at: www.rspca.org.uk/pets/general/fireworks.

On the move

Many cats are fearful of cat carriers because of the negative association of them with travel/vets – this can make transporting them to the vet stressful for you and your foster cat. We advise leaving the carrier out in your home all the time, as an additional resting place so that your foster cat

can become familiar with the carrier. You could put it in a preferred resting place with your foster cat's favoured blankets/toys/treats inside it to help make it feel like a safe place to go.

When transferring the cat into and out of your car, ensure that they are securely confined in a suitable cat carrier. During transportation, the cat carrier should be securely restrained. NEVER leave your foster cat unattended in a car.

The RSPCA has strict rules on the transport of animals so, in addition to this information, your fostering coordinator will give you an operational guide on the transport of cats. ●

Keeping your RSPCA foster cat healthy

Health checks

Every day, your foster cat should be given a quick visual check for any signs of illness, injury or disease. This can be done during normal interaction with them such as grooming, stroking or playing.

Your foster cat requires a monthly health check that is recorded on an RSPCA health check form. You can perform this basic health check yourself and it is a simple tick-box form to complete. The RSPCA has an online health check training module, which is available to any RSPCA volunteer with an email address. Let your fostering coordinator know if you would like to do this.

Part of the health check is to weigh your foster cat. We appreciate that fosterers may not have scales suitable for weighing cats, so you will need to speak to your fostering coordinator – they may have an arrangement with a local veterinary surgery, bring scales to you or arrange for you take your foster cat to an RSPCA facility.

Grooming

Under the RSPCA's Minimum Expectations, cats' coats should be maintained in a healthy condition and free from matting. Regular grooming will keep your foster cat's coat in a good condition and can help improve your bond with them. Grooming sessions should be as short, calm and stress-free as possible. Be aware that some cats are sensitive about certain parts of their bodies and some don't like being groomed at all. Please make a note of any sensitive areas on the cat's paperwork so

we can communicate this to animal centres/potential adopters. Your fostering coordinator can provide you with an operational guide on grooming to give you more information.

Illness

If your foster cat becomes ill, contact your fostering coordinator or if you believe they are seriously ill, use the arrangements you have made for emergency veterinary cover.

If your foster cat is diagnosed with a contagious illness, such as ringworm or cat flu, then speak to your fostering coordinator and vet about what precautions to take. It is very important to follow good hygiene practices so ensure all surfaces are cleaned and bedding thoroughly washed. You may need to consider cleaning carpets to eradicate all traces of the disease; this will depend on which illness it is and how it is transmitted. Further support is available from your fostering coordinator.

If you have other cats, you should assume they are contagious as well until the vet says otherwise.

Poisons

Remember, common household items can be poisonous to cats. Examples include human medicines, lillies, spot on flea treatments for dogs, and a variety of cleaning products. More information on poisoning can be found at: www.rspca.org.uk/cats/health/poisoning.

Any questions?

If you are unsure about any aspect of fostering or have any queries on your foster cat's care, then please do contact your fostering coordinator.

Thank you for volunteering for the RSPCA and for helping us to end cruelty, promote kindness and alleviate suffering to animals.

Advertisements for products in this booklet are accepted in good faith. However the RSPCA gives no guarantee or endorsements of the products provided by the advertisers, nor that the advertisers will fulfil their obligations or claims.