



How to be a

# Successful Foster

## **IF YOU NEED MEDICAL ADVICE OR ASSISTANCE:**

- ☎ For emergency situations at any time, either during or after regular business hours, contact ARL Foster Coordinator **Hannah Evans**. cell 515-608-0393 email: [hevans@arl-iowa.org](mailto:hevans@arl-iowa.org)
- ☎ For emergency life-threatening situations after regular business hours, your Foster Coordinator may direct you to Blue Pearl for treatment. 4631 Merle Hay Rd Des Moines, IA 50322

It is not unusual for some animals to initially have a reduced appetite as it can be stressful being moved to multiple new environments. Remember, your foster pet was at the shelter first before arriving at your home. Allow your foster pet time to adjust to their new environment. After the initial adjustment period, if you observe any of these signs, notify the Foster Coordinator and Medical Dept:

- ✓ An increase or decrease in appetite and/or water intake may be a sign of something more serious
- ✓ Change in the color of discharge from eyes/nose could indicate an infection that may require antibiotics
- ✓ Blood in urine, stool or vomit
- ✓ Excessive vomiting and/or diarrhea
- ✓ Any significant change in activity level should be addressed

**Make your home pet-friendly:** Before you bring your foster animal home, make sure you “pet proof” your home. Remove poisonous plants and protect furnishings. Keep the pet’s room warm and comfortable. Also, take steps to prevent the animal from escaping.

**Keep your personal pets up-to-date on their vaccinations.** All animals should be current on vaccinations that protect them from diseases. Before you bring home a foster animal, consult with your vet to make sure your own pets are properly protected with what they need to keep them safe.

**Keep foster animals separated.** To help keep both your personal pets and ARL foster animals healthy and stress levels low, we ask that you keep any resident pets separated from foster pets unless otherwise instructed by ARL staff.

**Wash your hands after handling foster animals, every time!** If your foster pet is ill, germs can be transferred to your resident same species pets simply by your touch, or on your clothes.

**Recognize your limits.** Fostering requires a great deal of time and energy-both emotional and physical. Don’t overextend yourself. Understand that some foster animals will not survive. Many animals arrive at the ARL from unknown backgrounds. Despite our best efforts, the animal you foster may develop a severe illness that cannot be treated, be unable to recover from an illness, or display a dangerous behavior. Do the best you can to help the animal and notify the Foster Coordinator immediately with any concerns.

**Share stories and photos.** We highly encourage you to send photos and ‘personality’ traits of your foster pets to our Website Coordinator, Jessica Jorgenson ([jjorgenson@arl-iowa.org](mailto:jjorgenson@arl-iowa.org)) This will help us get your pet’s profile on our website sooner, increasing the chances of a quick adoption.

- ★ Send up to 3 photos per pet, preferably at least one "headshot".
- ★ The photos must be full-size, un-cropped JPG images, showing that animal at its current age.
- ★ Please do not send photos that are embedded in a document, we are unable to use.
- ★ Match each pet’s name to their Animal ID# provided on your foster contract, include that ID# in your email.
- ★ Also include the date the animal is scheduled to return to the ARL, if known.

**Return the Foster Pet to the ARL on time:** The ARL depends on you to make the program work, so be sure to return the pet at the agreed upon date and time.

**Adoption:** If you decide to adopt your foster pet, please contact the Foster Coordinator to begin the regular adoption process. Remember, no pet can be adopted legally until it has been spay/neutered.

## **Mommy & Me: Foster Guide**

### **1. SET UP YOUR FOSTER ROOM**

Choose a room that can be easily temperature controlled (no drafts or open windows), that is quiet and private, away from the hustle and bustle of the household. Keep any resident pets away from this room and your foster family. A spare bedroom is a great choice! Bathrooms can also work—just don't forget to put down the toilet seat! Make a cozy bed for mom & babies using a medium-height cardboard box or the bottom of a cat carrier. You'll want enough room that mom can stretch out to nurse and sides high enough so babies don't fall out. Use bedding that is soft yet washable; towels and/or fleece blankets are ideal. Change daily, more often if soiled. One trick is to make several layers; you can easily remove the dirty layer and have a fresh set underneath. Always keep bedding dry and warm.

### **2. SAFTEY FIRST!**

Kittens and cats are curious, playful and often mischievous. Don't leave anything out that your fosters can chew, swallow or break (electrical cords, hair ties, glassware, etc.). Look for places they can hide and be sure to block access to those areas. *Tip: Lie down on the floor and look at your foster room from a cat's kitten's point of view to ensure it's completely safe.*

### **3. MINIMIZE STRESS**

The more stress the mom endures, the less she will be able to do for her babies. To minimize stress on the mother, never take the family out of your home (unless directed by the ARL) or even the designated foster room. Give the mom time to trust you. For the first couple days, only visit minimally to feed mom, clean their bedding and ensure all babies are nursing. Once you have gained the mother's trust, you can start interacting with her babies.

### **4. FOOD**

Feed mom good quality kitten wet food and make sure she has dry kitten food available at all times. Her calorie intake needs to remain very high to maintain nursing her kittens. Make sure she always has access to fresh water. Kittens will nurse every 1-3 hours for the first three weeks. Only when they hit four or five weeks old will they be ready to start weaning off mom and onto wet food.

### **5. LITTER**

Kittens won't start using a litter box until about four weeks old. Until then, mom licks the kittens to stimulate them to go to the bathroom. It's best to use a non-clumping litter while the kittens are nursing. Clumping litter can be dangerous to kittens because if they ingest any, it can clump in their intestines. Once the kittens start using the litter box, you will need to add low-sided boxes that are easy for the kittens to get in and out of, and clean more frequently. Also, keep the litter box away from the food bowls as much as possible.

### **6. CLOSELY MONITOR EVERYONE'S PROGRESS**

Kittens should nurse every 1-3 hours for the first three weeks. Mom should be grooming each kitten after feeding, and licking their bottoms to stimulate elimination.

#### **a. Contact the Foster Coordinator if you observe any of the following in the Momma cat:**

- i. The mother spends all her time away from the kittens
- ii. She does not groom or nurse them frequently
- iii. The kittens cry and she seems to not respond

#### **b. Contact the Foster Coordinator if you observe any of the following in the kittens:**

- i. Constant crying and failure to stay at the nipple
- ii. Refusal to nurse
- iii. Feels cold to the touch
- iv. Withdrawing from the other kittens
- v. Rejected or ignored by the mother

### **7. SOCIALIZATION**

You can safely handle the kittens at any age. Momma might get a little panicky at first, so be considerate of her, but she isn't going to reject the babies because you touched them. It is important for young kittens to get handled frequently, so that they become accustomed to and enjoy it! This will also help to make them less defensive about being touched, preparing them for vet visits and general grooming in the future. Typically sensitive areas include toes/paws, chest and belly, and mouth. Touch these areas in a gentle way as part of your petting sessions. Get your kittens used to having their nails trimmed at a young age (you can have this demonstrated if you are unsure how). Pet and hold their paws gently as part of their daily handling. Pair this with a treat to help build more positive associations. Make sure your kitten is picked up a few times a day or more. Make it a positive experience by pairing it with petting and treats, encouraging purring and affectionate behavior when holding.

Playtime is also a very important part of kitten development! Kittens need toys to play with so that they can occupy their minds as well as get exercise.

*Tip: use attached chart to follow each kitten's progress!*

