



Youth Foster Program Manual



HOW OLD IS THAT KITTEN?



a little wobbly!

Kittens are adorable at any age, but did you know that figuring out how old a kitten is can help determine what sort of care they need? It can be tricky to tell, but our at-a-glance kitten progression chart, featuring Darling the kitten, is here to help you out!



FOUR WEEKS

When kittens are first born they are completely helpless—their eyes are closed, their ears are folded, and they can't stand, keep themselves warm, eliminate waste, or eat on their own. They rely on mom for everything!

Darling is starting to become more aware of his surroundings! At about seven days old, a kitten's ears will unfold and their eyes may start to open.

Look at those blue peepers! Darling's eyes are fully open, and he is taking his first wobbly steps. Kittens this age start interacting more with each other, but still need mom.

Darling's now playing with his siblings and getting more mobile. You should be able to tell if kittens are boys or girls. You can start providing a litter box and wet food.

Look how much Darling has grown! At four weeks kittens are sturdy on their feet and playing with each other, toys, and people.



ONE WEEK

so fragile!



TWO WEEKS



FIVE WEEKS

let's play!

Get ready for a lot of fun! Darling is now full of energy and plays exuberantly. Interacting with people is important for kittens at this age. Darling is developing lots of personality!



SIX WEEKS

Every day Darling is getting more sure of himself through socialization and play. He's using the litter box and eating cat food—though he still visits mom for snacks and comfort.



SEVEN WEEKS

Darling is almost fully weaned, and continues to play and learn. Being introduced to new people, places in the home, and other pets is an important part of socialization.



EIGHT WEEKS

so grown up!

Two pounds! Darling now weighs enough to be neutered. He's also getting more skilled and adventurous. Darling is learning so much from his mom, siblings, and human caregiver.



NINE WEEKS

Looking pretty grown-up, Darling! At this age kittens are behaving and using their body language like adult cats. Darling is eating all solid food, and his eyes have gone from blue to yellow.



TEN WEEKS

ready to take on the world!

Darling is fully weaned, neutered, and—because he was socialized to people—ready for his loving adoptive home. They grow up so fast!

Get even more details (and cute pics!) with our week-by-week kitten progression resource at alleycat.org/KittenProgression

Marion County Animal Services Youth Foster Program Procedure Manual

Foster Care:



Foster families care for young, ill or injured animals until they are healthy and/or old enough to be spayed or neutered and put into adoption.

Marion County Animal Services (MCAS) provides the medical care, and other items needed to care for the cats (example: food, litter, litter box, bowls, etc.).

MCAS relies heavily on foster families to help us save the lives of many cats in our community.

Foster families are required to adhere to all Marion County laws pertaining to animals, which are available at: www.marioncountyfl.org/animal.

To be able to foster for MCAS, no one residing in the residence could ever have been convicted of animal cruelty, neglect or abandonment in any state. Households with any history of animal ordinance violations may not be eligible for this program, as determined by MCAS management.

Hours Earned:

For students who are approved to foster, Marion County Animal Services offers 10 community service hours per week while the pets are in their care.

The average time foster kittens are in need of foster care is 6-8 weeks. They typically require a combined total of 1-2 hours of care per day.



Custody:



Animals fostered through this program are legally owned by MCAS; the foster family is only taking temporary custody of the animal and does not become the animal's owner.

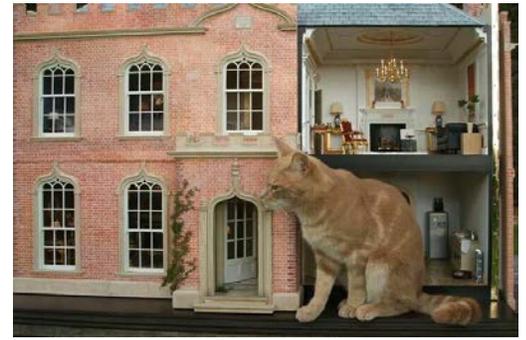
It is possible for the foster family or someone they know to adopt an animal that has been in foster care but normal adoption procedures and fees do apply.

Fostering For MCAS:

Students ages 16 and over can foster with a parent/guardian's approval.

MCAS requires that while a foster pet is in your home you will not provide care for any other organization's animals.

Foster animals must remain at the home address listed on the foster application. If you move you need to update that information with MCAS. Animals cannot be taken to another county or another location without permission from MCAS.



Risks:



MCAS will provide the basic medical needs of the foster animals. We have limited resources and may not be able to treat all conditions, in the event of certain serious illnesses or injuries, the veterinarian staff may decide on humane euthanasia.

The animals that are in need of foster care may be incubating illnesses that could be transmitted to other pets. MCAS will not provide medical care or treatment for personally owned pets in the event that they become ill or injured.

MCAS cannot guarantee the behavior of the animal and therefore is not responsible for any injuries nor personal

items that may be damaged by the animals.

Check Ups:

By appointment, foster families will need to bring the animal(s) in for periodic exams and vaccines approximately every two weeks.

After the spay/neuter surgery, the animal(s) will be returned to the foster families for a few days to heal in the comfort of a home, prior to being returned to MCAS to be placed in the adoption area.

If the foster animal(s) are not returned for scheduled appointments or upon the end of the necessary time commitment as designated by MCAS, an Animal Control officer will be dispatched to remove the animal(s) from the home and permission to foster animals in the future will be revoked.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a foster animal should perish, please contact MCAS and return the deceased animal to MCAS.



Fading Kittens



Occasionally a kitten that seems healthy will suddenly begin fading or become unthrifty. They may stop growing and begin to lose weight. They may present with diarrhea and vomiting and cry a lot. Even with medical help these kittens may not survive even 48 hours.

No one knows exactly what causes this condition but it is suspected to be Panleukopenia, a contagious disease with a high mortality rate.

If you notice these symptoms or that your foster kitten stops socializing and seems lethargic, please contact MCAS as quickly as possible.

Emergency vs. Non-Emergency:

If a foster animal is showing any of the symptoms below, an evaluation is required. Please call MCAS at 352-671-8705 to get the animal scheduled for an exam.

What's Not an Emergency?

- Runny discharge from the eyes or nose
- Slightly swollen eyes or eyes held closed
- Coughing / sneezing / slight wheezing
- Lack of appetite / kittens not eating for 24 hours
- Lethargy (lack of energy)
- Diarrhea lasting more than 3-4 feedings
- Vomiting
- Slight weight loss
- Lack of bowl movement for less than 24-36 hours or straining in the litter box.



In case of an emergency situation after hours please call the on-call Animal Services technician. You can reach them by calling 352-512-4504.

What's An Emergency?



- Not breathing / labored breathing
- Signs of dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating
- White/Pale gums
- Unable to stand or extreme lethargy
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake
- Body temperature cold
- Broken bones
- Seizures
- Profuse bleeding: bleeding doesn't stop when constant pressure is applied for 3 minutes
- Trauma: dropped, stepped on, hit by a car, etc.

Facts about Feline URI

Feline URI is similar to the common cold in humans. It's caused by a virus, and stressful environments and situations factor in as well. With supportive care and rest in a quiet, calm place like a loving home, most cases resolve in 7-14 days.



Signs of URI

- Sneezing
- Runny nose or nasal congestion
- Red, swollen or runny eyes or squinting
- Coughing or hard swallowing
- Sores (ulcers) on the tongue, lips, nose or roof of mouth
- Fever, lack of appetite, hiding and/or decreased energy

URI Treatment Plan

Just like with humans, viral infections aren't cured by antibiotics, even though they might be used for bacterial infections. A cat with URI should be separated from other cats in the household and put in a quiet space where he can recover in a low-stress setting. The cat can gradually be introduced to people and other animals in the household after recovery.

In-Home Care for URI

- A low-stress room is necessary for the cat to rest, acclimate and recover
- Make sure the cat is eating (when cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food well) so offer canned food, warmed gently in the microwave to stimulate appetite
- Gently clean discharge from nose and eyes with a warm moist cloth at least twice a daily
- Administer any prescribed medications as directed by the veterinarian

NOTE: ALWAYS wash hands after handling sick cats.

When to Contact our Shelter

- Not eating for more than 24 hours
- Green or yellow discharge from the nose
- Foul odor coming from the mouth or nose
- Difficulty breathing, especially panting or breathing through an open mouth
- Depressed, unresponsive, weight loss, dehydration (are the gums pale?)
- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours
- Little or no improvement after a week of home care

You may contact us via phone: 352-671-8700 or email: animalservices@marioncountyfl.org.

For foster emergencies after hours, call our on-call technician at 352-512-4504.

Care and Feeding Foster Cats/Kittens



It's very likely that the cats/kittens are going to get sick: This is normal, so don't panic. See the fact sheet on URI's.

Hide and Seek: It is very normal for a stressed cat to hide for a while until they get more comfortable with their surroundings. Please allow them to come out at their own pace with only gentle coaxing.



Be aware that adult cats may be too stressed to eat for a day or two: If they go three days without eating please contact MCAS right away. Make sure you keep food and water available for them at all times. If kittens go more than 24 hours without eating or drinking contact MCAS as well.

Wet Food vs Dry: Keep dry food available, if the cat/kitten doesn't eat, you can add a small amount of wet to the dry and mix it up. Only use wet to get them to start eating. Don't leave wet food available at all times. Use approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ can wet to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry



Pooper Scooper: If you are using clumping litter just scoop it throughout the day and change the litter as needed. If you're using clay litter, scoop it daily and change it often. Make sure to wash your hands after scooping liter.

The Adjustment Period

What to expect during the first few weeks with your new foster cat

Consider this

Your new foster cat may have been abandoned or surrendered by a previous family. The cat or kitten had to adjust to the shelter and now is going home to a new, unfamiliar place with strangers. It's kind of scary if you think about it! Being gentle, considerate, and patient will help ease your friend into its new foster home.



“I’m scared”

The cat might be afraid and unsure of its new surroundings. It is normal for a cat to hide for the first couple of days or even weeks. It is best to put the cat in a small, private room to start (instead of giving it access to the entire home). Be sure to have the cat's food and litter box nearby.

Establish a routine

Routine is important for cats; they want to know what to expect. Establish a routine for feeding, litter box duty, play time and grooming. Make sure these duties are performed on a consistent schedule.

Expect mistakes

Most likely the cat had a completely different routine before it met you, it may have used a different litter, eaten different food and lived by a different set of rules. It will take time for the cat to adjust to your home's rules, so please be patient. Keeping the new foster pet in a small, private area will help it start a new routine.

Things can get touchy!

Many cats are uncomfortable being picked up and held but will sit in your lap happily for hours. Some like to cuddle right beside you. Cats become overstimulated easily and may bite to let you know they are done being pet. Let the kitty do what is comfortable for him or her. Petting and cuddling are important, but don't overwhelm the cat with too much attention, remember the cat needs rest and privacy.

How long will all of this take?

Allow the cat/kitten several weeks to adapt to the new surroundings. Adult cats may take longer to adjust than kittens do.

Parents/Guardians:

The parent/guardian of the student must agree to supervise the care of the foster animal(s).

Parents are approved to bring the animal(s) to MCAS for appointments, while the student is in school.

Students need to provide the majority of the care of the animal for them to receive the community service hours for this program.

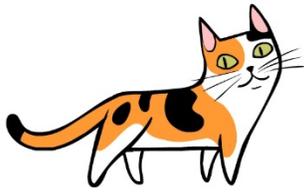


Tips from the Experts:

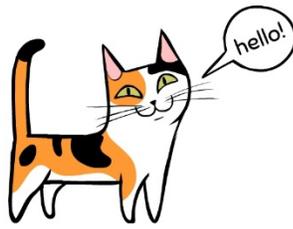
Here are some helpful tips from some of our best foster families:

- Socialization is the key: the more unique situations the animal(s) get to experience the better they will adapt to new environments.
- Getting lots of love and affection while in foster care will help them get adopted.
- Keep things as clean as you can - it can get out of hand very quickly.
- Keep the temperature of the area the cats will be in comfortable for them.
- When in doubt, ask questions, it is fine to learn as you go. [Check with the MCAS staff, not the internet, for answers, since the internet is not always accurate.]
- Don't get too discouraged if an ill animal takes longer to get better than you expect.
- Never give kittens cow's milk to drink-it can cause diarrhea which can lead to dehydration.
- Consider using doggie waste bags to clean your litter pan, they are small and convenient.
- Keep toilet lids closed-if kittens accidently jump in, they may not be able to get out.
- Glance at doors before closing kittens are often in the way.
- Always supervise playtime to avoid any injuries.
- Don't Panic!!! It will be okay.

CAT LANGUAGE



INTERESTED



FRIENDLY



ATTENTIVE



RELAXED



TRUSTING



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



CONTENT



CONFLICTED, CAUTIOUS



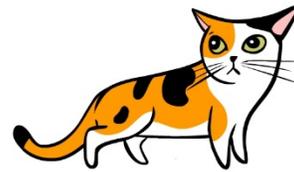
PLAYFUL



EXCITED



"THIS IS MINE"



ANXIOUS



PREDATORY



WORRIED



FRIGHTENED



THREATENED



TERRIFIED



SUPER TERRIFIED



IRRITATED



DISGUSTED

Strange Facts

ThePetsCentral.com

About Cats



cat

The word **cat** refers to a family of meat-eating animals that include tigers, lions, leopards, & panthers.



Cats have true fur, in that they have both an **undercoat** and an **outercoat**.



Cats sleep



16-18hrs per day.

A female cat may have

3 to 7

kittens every **4** months.



A cat can jump even **7 times** as high as it is tall.



Cats respond better to **women** than to **men**.



You can tell a

cat's mood by looking into its **eyes**.



Many cats cannot properly digest **cow's milk**. Milk and milk products give them diarrhea.



A cat can live **20** or more years but the average life span of a domestic cat is **14 yrs**.



Cats must have

fat in their diet because they can't produce it on their own.



Almost **10%** of a **tail**.
catt's bones are in its



Cats with white fur & skin on their **ears** are very prone to sunburn.



Cats respond most readily to names that end in an **"ee"** sound.



A cat can spend **5** or more hrs a day **grooming** himself.



Cats take between **20-40** breaths per minute.



Kittens remain with their mother till the age of **9 weeks**

It is estimated that cats can make **over 60** different sounds.



A queen (female cat) can begin mating when she is between **5&9** months **old**.



A cat is pregnant for about **58-65 days**.



A tomcat (male cat) can begin mating when he is between **7&10** months old.



The cat has **500** skeletal muscles



A cat taken far from its home can return to it. But if a cat's owners move far from its home, the cat **can't find them**.



Cats have **30** teeth (12 incisors, 10 premolars, 4 canines, and 4 molars)



A cat **can not see** directly **under its nose**. This is why the cat can not seem to find tidbits on the floor.



YOUTH FOSTER PROGRAM F.A.Q.

1. What kind of foster animals would I be taking home?

Cats/kittens: you choose the conditions you are willing to foster; such as illness, injury, or underage/underweight animals. When we have a cat/kitten that needs to be fostered out, we look through our applications and call foster families based on the answers they gave us in their foster application.

2. Where should I keep my foster(s)?

We generally advise housing foster animals separate from any other pets in the household, especially if the foster animal has some sort of illness (such as an upper respiratory infection) to avoid your pets getting sick. Many foster families choose to keep their foster animals in a bathroom or spare bedroom. Depending on the type of foster you have, keeping them in an extra-large dog crate, puppy playpen, or multi-story ferret cage can also be sufficient.

3. How do I introduce foster animals into my home?

Many of our animals have gone through a lot of changes and stress before being placed into a foster home; they have gone from being strays/pets in another home, to our shelter where they are examined and vaccinated (if applicable) and may even have undergone a surgery, and then placed into foster care. You can expect new foster animals to hide and be very cautious about their new temporary home and caregivers. We recommend keeping them separated from any other pets in the house in a dimly lit, quiet room to give them time to adjust to their new environment. Please remove all air fresheners, oil plug-ins and scented items from the kitten room. We suggest going slow with introducing yourself to the new additions and giving them time to approach you and learn to trust you. Food and treats generally work very well to encourage new fosters to approach you.

4. What supplies will I need?

We provide the basic supplies, such as bowls, food, litter, litter boxes, beds, toys, and crates (if applicable). It is a good idea however to have some pet-friendly cleaning supplies on hand, along with dedicated foster towels and washcloths for bathing and cleaning.

5. How long will I have my foster animal?

There are a lot of variables depending on several different factors; the age of your foster, what illness/condition they have and what care they may need. The average time is 4-6 weeks but can go to 8 weeks or more on rare occasions.

6. What is the purpose of the 2 week check-up?

During this visit, we will ask how your foster animal is doing at home and if you have any questions or concerns about your foster. Many times during these visits we will give booster vaccines to the foster. If the foster is sick, they may also be seen by the vet and prescribed a medication to help them get healthy. We will also make sure you have enough supplies for your foster animals.

7. My foster is acting different than normal. What should I do?

If you are ever concerned about your foster, please feel free to give us a call or stop by the center. We are here to help and support you!

8. My foster passed away. What do I do?

In the unfortunate event that your foster passes away in your home, we do ask that you notify us as soon as possible and we may ask you to return them to our facility.

9. Can I take my foster to my personal vet?

We ask that you do not utilize your own vet, as we have veterinarians here who will be able to provide care for your foster. We are unable to reimburse for any services rendered outside of our facility. Our veterinarian will be able to provide routine and emergency care for animals in the foster program.

10. When will my foster be spayed/neutered?

Once your foster is healthy enough to undergo surgery we will schedule them with our surgery staff. After surgery, we do ask that they go back home with you for a few days to recover and then we will be able to place them for adoption.

11. How should I clean between sets of fosters?

Sanitizing between groups of fosters is imperative. A very mild bleach solution along with an antibacterial soap can be used for bowls, litter boxes and crates. Never use bleach when fosters are present! Cats have very sensitive sniffers and bleach can be harmful to them. Floors can be cleaned with a mixture of water and white vinegar. We recommend laundering any towels or blankets on a high temperature wash.

12. I want (or my friend wants) to adopt my foster. What do I need to do?

If you or your friend is interested in adopting a foster, just let us know! We can make arrangements for a smooth transition so your foster can be adopted with the least amount of stress (and the most amount of excitement!) possible.

13. How can I contact you?

You can reach Marion County Animal Services at 352-671-8705.

For afterhours help ([emergencies only](#)), call 352-512-4504. Please see manual for what constitutes an emergency.



So Glad To Have You On Our Team!



We are so excited to have you join our team and we are very grateful that you have volunteered to help us save some of the homeless animals in Marion County.

We can't thank you enough for your willingness to open your heart and home to animals in need of special care.

We look forward to working with you and having you be a part of our foster family.

From all of us here at Marion County Animal Services, we want to say thank you for volunteering your time, love, and home to these animals desperately in need of help and we welcome you to our team!

