

Houston
Pets
Alive!

Cat Foster
Caregiver
Orientation





Houston Pets Alive! was founded in 2014 by veterinarian Andrea Birkelbach. We are comprised of animal-loving volunteers and staff who never stop working to save the next life.



Our mission is to save the lives of at-risk companion cats and dogs and find them loving homes.

HOUSTON PETS ALIVE!

Helping animals that are at risk of entering the shelter, or not leaving the shelter with a positive outcome

- young kittens not yet ready for adoption
- young kittens who are susceptible to catching disease in the shelter or need socialization
- juvenile and adult cats who need help finding a home
- juvenile and adult cats recovering from illness

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Where Our Kittens and Cats Come From

- Municipal Shelters — Euthanasia Lists
- Positive Alternative to Shelter Surrender (PASS)

1,445 felines saved in 2022!



What does HPA! provide for fosters?

- All Medical Care (in our clinic at 2800 Antoine Dr)
- Food
- Litter
- Supplies
- Support



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What does a foster caregiver provide?

- TLC
- Safety
- Medical/Behavioral observation and care
- Socialization
- Recheck appointments every 2-3 weeks
- Taking kittens to our medical clinic for illness and emergency care

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Are You Ready to Foster?

Agreement within the household

Prepare & “pet-proof” your home

- Isolation room
- remove hazards
- block hiding spots

Attachment

- Be prepared to get attached. You may want to adopt your foster pet but the goal is to say **goodbye**.



Are Your Pet and Human Household Residents Ready?

Can you separate/confine your foster pet?

- Resident pets should be in good health and up-to-date on vaccinations.
- Consult your veterinarian if in doubt.

Is anyone living in the home immune compromised, pregnant, very young or elderly?

- Consult a physician if in doubt.

Please note: HPA! does not
provide medical care for resident pets
or their owners



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Shelter Pick-up

It is common to pick up kittens from a Shelter, such as BARC, HCAS, FBAS

Screening and care for common conditions:

Upper respiratory infections (URI), Parasites, etc

Shelter will give initial vaccines, dewormer and flea treatment if kittens are old enough

Even with thorough veterinary screening, some contagious conditions, such as ringworm and certain parasites, may not be detected prior to the start of a foster period. HPA! cannot guarantee the health of any foster animals.

Many conditions may benefit from Foster Care!

Make sure your own pets are up to date on vaccines and preventatives!

On-Deck Fosters

- As an HPA! Foster Caregiver you will submit a survey each time you are ready to take on foster kittens or a foster cat
- On this survey you designate how many kittens you feel comfortable fostering and what dates you are available
- You can also let us know what kind of diseases you are willing to treat in your home
- This means you're up next and you can expect to get your fosters very soon! We will contact you when the next kittens or cats are ready.

Supplies We Give You

In most cases, HPA! can provide the following supplies:

- KMR (for neonates)
- Wet and dry life-stage appropriate food
- Litter boxes
- Clumping and non-clumping litter
- Secure cat carrier
- Dewormer for kittens
- Any necessary medications

Because this is dependent on our current stock of supplies, which are all made possible by donations from our supporters, we cannot guarantee supplies but will always do our best to provide what we can and ask that you purchase supplies for your foster/s whenever possible.

Email foster@houstonpetsalive.org when you need more supplies!

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Supplies You Provide

Provided by the Foster Volunteer:

- Scratchpads and other toys
- Bedding (towels, blankets, cat beds): ensure all bedding is washable and kept clean and dry at all times
- Food and water bowls
- Soap/detergent for cleaning
- Bleach for disinfecting



Quarantine Period and the Isolation Room

An initial quarantine period in your home is highly encouraged for 2 weeks in an isolation room such as a spare bathroom or bedroom.

Isolation room should be:

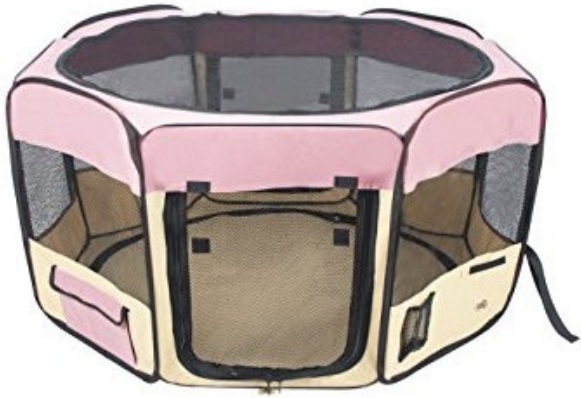
- Easy to disinfect
- Warm
- Quiet
- Spare bathroom or laundry room is ideal!
- Block all hiding spots and remove dangers like cords
- You might even want to have specific “cat room” clothing

If you are not able to provide a room to meet these qualifications, you can use an extra-large dog crate or playpen for fosters to stay in during their quarantine.



How to Set-Up Your Fosters' Home

- Litter box (clean often!)
- Dishes with dry food and water (24/7 access)
- Newspaper as kennel bottom in litter/food area
- Cardboard carrier with door off as hiding spot/bed (if needed)
- Separate sleeping area, litter area and feeding area as best as possible
- Clean entire space often, especially if there is illness



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How Are They Doing?

You should keep a daily log of some/all of the following:

- Weight
- Appetite (eating and drinking normally)
- Urinating and defecating normally
- Behavior notes
- Loss of hair
- Vomiting
- Sneezing
- Discharge from eyes



Weigh, weigh, weigh!

- For orphan kittens, 3 days of weight loss or of no weight gain = **red flag**
- *We want our babies to be chunky 😊 Goal is 2.25lbs!*

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Kitten Growth Milestones

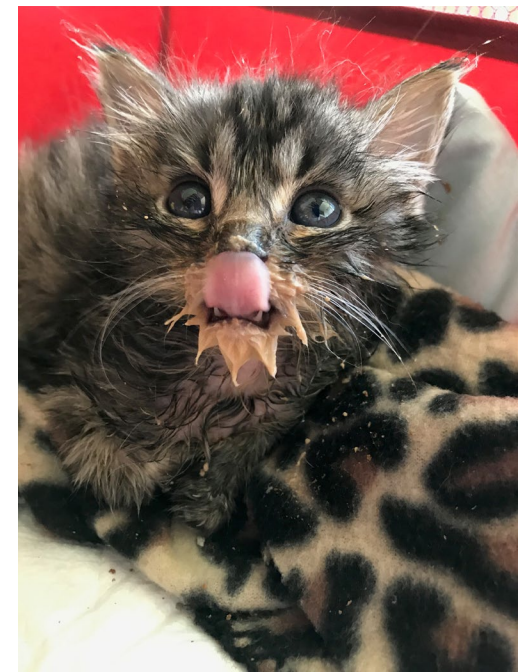
Age	Weight	Milestones
Birth	2 – 4 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyes and ears are closed. • Sleeps 90% of the time. • Minimal handling.
4 days		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to purr.
10 – 14 days	8 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyes and ears should be open. • Healthy kittens will be round and warm with pink skin and will rarely cry.
2 – 3 weeks	12 ounces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby incisors erupt, can begin to eliminate without help. • Will start crawling, standing, and playing with littermates. • Begin regular handling.
4 weeks	1 pound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby canine teeth erupt, beginning to walk but do not have great balance, will begin to groom themselves, able to thermoregulate. • Ready for gruel and may be ready for introduction of dry kitten food.
6 weeks	1.5 pounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby premolars erupt. • Ready for their 1st vaccine. • Running, playing, using the litterbox, grooming themselves. • Should be eating dry kitten food, supplemented with canned.
9 weeks	2.25 pounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are now “mini” cats. • Ready for surgery and adoption!



Basic Care Guidelines

Transitioning Kittens (3-5 weeks)

- Start with gruel (wet food mixed with water)
- Hand feeding, flat serving plates and warming the food are all helpful tactics
- Bottle/syringe feeding might be necessary
- Leave dry food and water out
- Leave litter box out



Eating on their own Kittens (4+ weeks)

- Leave dry food and water out
- Wet food 3x daily
- Gaining weight (aiming for 2.25 lbs)
- Lots of socialization!



Moms with Kittens

Basic Care Guidelines

- Mom should do all the work
 - Bottle feeding experience may be required in case supplemental feedings are needed
- Mom should always have access to lots of wet/dry food and water
- Monitor mom
 - Behavior: is she taking care of babies?
 - Babies shouldn't cry for too long
 - Mom should groom them
 - Eating/drinking habits
 - Litter box habits (watch out for diarrhea)
 - Irritated mammary glands



More on Moms with Kittens

- Weigh babies every single day
 - They should gain 1/2 oz per day
 - Goal is 2.25 lbs!
- Keep all babies in the nest for 3 weeks
 - “Runt” needs more 1-on-1 time with mom
 - Minimal handling during first 2 weeks
- Supplies:
 - Nesting box
 - Snuggle safe heating disc or heat pad
 - Bottles/syringes and KMR
 - Larger litter box for mom
 - Plastic carrier



Basic Care Guidelines

Juvenile and Adult Cats (6 months +)

- Plastic carrier (loaner or your own)
- Isolation period (can use playpen)
- Feed wet food 1-2x a day
 - Leave water and dry food out 24/7
- Lots of socialization!
 - Observe behavior
- Larger litter boxes
- Medical care as needed
 - URI (most common)
 - Minimum of 2 FVRCP vaccines
 - Rabies vaccine (at 3 months)
 - Dewormer, Flea meds
 - Ringworm
- Spay/Neuter surgery ASAP
- Microchip, Combo test



Mortality Rates in Kittens and Difficult Decisions

- Mortality rate in kittens up to 12 weeks old: 15-40%
- Even if you do everything perfectly, you might still lose a kitten
- Fading Kitten Syndrome can leave us with no “Why?”
- We take the decision to euthanize any animal very seriously and we will never euthanize due to lack of space or time
- We pursue all reasonable efforts to save an animal but there may be cases when an animal requires medical treatment that goes beyond our ability to humanely provide
- Kittens who spend time nursing from their mother are generally in better health

Kitten Kindergarten

(Critical socialization between 2-7 weeks old)

- Young kittens are often under socialized
- Multiple short socialization sessions (3-5 minutes) on a daily basis are best
- Keep them confined in a quiet room for the first few days
 - Helps you observe eating and bathroom habits
 - Helps them adjust to the new environment
- Use mealtime as a treatment for socialization
 - Offer food and sit with them while they eat
 - Create a consistent feeding schedule with wet food
- Play soft/classical music intermittently (search “relaxing music for cats” on Youtube.com)
- Use cat pheromone like Feliway, if needed



More on Kitten Kindergarten

- Play time: don't encourage biting behavior (hands aren't toys)
- Make sure kitten is comfortable every step of the way
 - Freezing/submission is a sign of fear
- Get them used to household noises and voices by slowly introducing them



- If they have a littermate, that is best! Other cats teach them how to behave and keep them occupied!
- Make sure siblings do not suckle on each other! This can cause injury. Kittens will need to be separated.



Kitten to Kitten Introductions

- Gradual introduction between 2 singleton kittens close in age and size
- Normal reactions:
 - Small hisses
 - Batting at each other
 - Rough play & some vocalizing
- Signs of a serious problem:
 - Persistent bullying by one kitten
 - “Aggressor” is difficult to distract with toys
 - One kitten keeps the other from using the litter box or eating food



Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Viral and bacterial respiratory infections are very common in cats, especially young or stressed ones.

Symptoms include:

- clear to colored discharge from eyes and/or nose
- loss of appetite
- depression
- congestion
- sneezing
- coughing
- fever

Common treatments include:

- Rest
- Hand feeding
- Warm eye compress
- Antibiotics
- Ocular ointments

Wash your hands thoroughly after handling an animal with visible URI symptoms before contact with any other cats as URI is extremely contagious. URI is similar to a human cold, but is generally not transmittable to people or other animal species except for cats.



Ringworm – It's not as scary as it sounds!

- Despite its name, ringworm is a fungal infection that causes alopecia/crustiness/redness of the skin (just like athlete's foot)
- Transmission is primarily through direct contact with an infected animal. Secondarily through fomite (objects or materials that are likely to carry infection, such as clothes, utensils, and furniture) transmission.
- Treatment includes a combination of topical and oral treatments that are used to clear the infection as rapidly as possible. Typical foster length is 3-6 weeks.
- Cleaning and disinfecting against ringworm should include thorough cleaning and disinfecting steps to remove spores from the environment or contaminated objects most effectively.

Follow-Up Veterinary Appointments

0-6 Weeks Old

- No appointments needed unless showing signs of illness

6-9 Weeks Old AND 1.5 pounds (18oz/680g)

- Wellness check
 - ☐ Intake Exam
 - ☐ Gender verification
 - ☐ 1st FVRCP vaccine
 - ☐ Dewormer
 - ☐ Flea Meds

9-11 Weeks Old AND 2.25 pounds (38oz/907g)

- Spay or Neuter
 - ☐ Spay surgery (females) / Neuter surgery (males)
 - ☐ 2nd FVRCP vaccine
 - ☐ FIV/FelV combo test
 - ☐ Microchip
 - ☐ Dewormer
 - ☐ Flea Meds

At 12 weeks of age or older:

- Kitten will need a rabies vaccination

HPA! Clinic:

2800 Antoine Drive, Suite 2854
Houston TX 77902



A Fear-Free Trip to the Vet

Reduces Fear, Anxiety and Stress

- The carrier:
 - Put towel/blanket inside that smells like home inside
 - Cover the outside with a towel or blanket
 - Keep it elevated
- Plan ahead: don't wait till the last minute to put kittens in the carrier
- Use treats (wet food, pure-chicken baby food) during and after the appointment
- Play soft/classical music in the car
- Give them time to come out of carrier when you get home



HPA! Emergency Line

210-595-0790



For urgent medical concerns

- The line is ****monitored from 6am to 10pm CST****. Leave a message if no one answers and someone from our medical team will call you back. You can also text this number if you prefer to send a text message.
- Do not go to your own veterinarian.
- Your Foster Guide will provide more detailed information about symptoms you might see in your kittens for common problems.
- If an emergency comes up and you cannot reach the medical hotline, contact the Foster Coordinator, Lisa, at **281-779-6376**

When do I call?

Medical Emergencies: Call 210-595-0790 (Medical Team)

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Bleeding profusely | • Unresponsive |
| • Severe Lethargy | • Ingested a dangerous item |
| • Having trouble breathing | • Unable to stand or walk |
| • Seizure/disorientated/drunk walking/ataxia | • Hit by car or otherwise seriously injured |

Other Emergencies: Call 281-779-6376 (Foster Coordinator)

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| • Bite with broken skin | • Lost foster pet |
|-------------------------|-------------------|

When do I text?

Text 281-779-6376 Please allow up to 24 hours for a response

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Incident of aggression | • Cut or puncture wound |
| • New limping | • Colored nasal discharge |
| • Vomiting more than once/twice a day | • Low appetite/not eating |

When do I email foster@houstonpetsalive.org?

Please allow up to 24-48 hours for a response

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Sneezing | • Hot spot/skin irritation |
| • Watery/goopy eyes | • Visible worm in poop |
| • Dirty/stinky eyes | • Low appetite/not eating |
| • Itchy Skin | • Straining to urinate/blood in urine |
| • One episode of vomiting/diarrhea | • Coughing |
| • Diarrhea for more than 24 hours | • Chewed/removed staples or sutures |

Adoptions

- The majority of our cat and kittens are adopted through our partner pet stores, where they have higher visibility than on our website alone.
- Four Petsmarts and One Petco
 - Petsmart Copperfield
 - Petsmart Bunker Hill
 - Petsmart Dunvale
 - Petco Westside



Adoption Ambassadors:

Finding a home for your fosters within your network of friends, family and acquaintances

Get Creative with finding your fosters homes...Let's talk about ideas!

- Facebook, share with your friends and family
- Instagram—create an instagram account to share your fostering journey
- Family, friends, co-workers

This will be the most rewarding part of your fostering journey!

Our Top 10 Fostering Tips!

1. Keep the litterbox clean and welcoming!
2. Do not foster more than 1 litter at a time
3. Do not allow your foster cat outside
4. Provide daily interactive play sessions and safe enrichment like Cat TV!
5. Notify foster team ASAP if bad behaviors are starting to develop or are not going away
6. Please do not let you foster cat interact with resident cats during the initial quarantine period
7. Never physically punish your foster cat
8. Fatten kitties up – we want them to get to 2.25lbs!
9. Keep our emergency medical number handy at all times! 210-595-0790
10. Remember the goal is GOOD-BYE!





Lisa Dinkelman
Foster Coordinator
281-779-6376

lisa.dinkelman@houstonpetsalive.org
foster@houstonpetsalive.org

Gail Cain
Adoptions Coordinator
832-439-0190

gail.cain@houstonpetsalive.org
adopt@houstonpetsalive.org

Mindy Dang
Animal Programs Manager
mindy.dang@houstonpetsalive.org

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Next Steps!

- Be sure to mark foster@houstonpetsalive.org and adopt@houstonpetsalive.org as “safe senders” so that you don’t miss any important communications from our team.
- Read through our Foster Care Guide thoroughly
- Fill out the foster survey
- Fill out the “On-Deck” survey each time you are ready to take home cats or kittens!
- Expect a call, text or email when we have kittens/cats for you!
- Join our private HPA! Cat Foster Facebook group to connect with other cat Fosters. Share pictures, stories and receive advice on caring for your kittens



THANK YOU!

