

Somerset Regional Animal Shelter

Friends of Somerset Regional Animal Shelter

Foster Care Handbook



Shelbie says, "Become part of the SRAS family and foster today!"



Table of Contents	Page #
<u>General Information</u>	3
What is Fostering	3
Seven Reasons You Can Foster – Even If You Think You Can’t	3
How to Prepare Your Home for a Foster Pet	4
Commonly Asked Questions about the Fostering Process	6
Questions You Should Ask about Your Foster Pet	7
Tips for Letting Go When Your Foster Pet Is Adopted	8
<u>Cat-Specific Information</u>	9
How to Be the Best Cat Foster Parent	9
Kitten Socialization and Development	10
<u>How to Become an SRAS Foster Parent</u>	11
<u>Foster Care Refrigerator Tip Sheet</u>	12
<u>Foster Parent Application</u>	13
<u>Foster Care Contract</u>	14

General Information

What is Fostering

By Jane Harrell, Petfinder.com senior producer

What does fostering involve?

When you foster, you agree to take a homeless animal into your home and give him or her love, care and attention, either for a predetermined period of time or until the animal is adopted.

Why does SRAS need foster homes?

There are many reasons an animal might need foster care. Some of the most common include:

- A kitten or puppy is too young to be adopted and needs a safe place to stay until he or she is old enough to go to a forever home.
- An animal is recovering from surgery, illness or injury and needs a safe place to recuperate.
- An animal is showing signs of stress such as pacing or hiding.
- An animal has not lived in a home or has not had much contact with people and needs to be socialized.
- SRAS is running out of room for adoptable animals.

Why should I foster?

Fostering is one of the most rewarding experiences you can have (other than adopting, of course). By taking an animal in need temporarily into your home you're:

- Freeing up a spot so that SRAS can take in another animal.
- Providing a less stressful environment for recovery from surgery, illness or injury.
- Giving your foster pet the time he or she needs to be ready for adoption.
- Helping SRAS learn more about the animal so he or she can end up in the best home possible.
- Socializing the animal to a home environment and possibly getting him or her used to being around other pets and different types of people.

How do I sign up to foster an animal?

Visit SRAS at 100 Commons Way in Bridgewater, NJ, email us at somersetregionalanimalshelter@aol.com, or call us at 908-725-0308. We'll work with you to identify the right foster pet for your household.

Seven Reasons You Can Foster – Even If You Think You Can't

By Emily Fromm, Petfinder.com executive producer and Liz Pease, Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society director of operations

I don't have the space

Many foster care providers used to think this too. All it takes is a small spare bedroom, office, or a bathroom. Ideally, foster pets should be kept separate from your pets for at least two weeks, longer for nursing mothers and kittens, but it doesn't take much space to do that. Remember, whatever space you have at home is probably more than the animal has at SRAS now!

I might get attached

OK, yes, you might. But no matter how difficult it is to bring your foster pet back to SRAS, just knowing that you're helping to save a life should ease any short-term pain. When you take in a foster pet, it gives us the room to help other animals. It also lets us learn more about the animal's personality than we ever could in a shelter environment, which, in turn, makes the animal much easier to adopt out. Yes, some animals are harder to bring back than others, but be strong! You can do it!

My own pets won't tolerate a foster pet, especially an adult

If you have a separate room, this shouldn't be much of a problem. Yes, your pet(s) will know there is another animal in the house, and they may be a little upset about it at first. But, chances are they'll get over it pretty quickly. Feliway Comfort Zone diffusers or Rescue Remedy flower essence can also help. Tell your pets they need to do their part too! Eventually, they will be totally nonchalant about the whole idea of fostering.

I can't afford to take another animal

This one is easy! You can get all your food and litter from SRAS if you like, and SRAS covers all medical expenses associated with the foster pet. If you buy your own supplies for fosters, save the receipts because you may be able to take a tax deduction.

A foster pet might get my own animals sick

If you follow basic health protocols, such as washing your hands between handling cats and wearing an over-shirt when handling foster cats, you shouldn't have any problems. A sick animal should be kept in a separate room and bedding should be washed with bleach after use.

Someone else will say yes; there are plenty of foster homes

They won't and there aren't. It's that simple.

I already have a foster pet

All right, this gets you partly off the hook. But, wouldn't your foster pet like a friend?

How to Prepare Your Home for a Foster Pet

Before bringing home your first foster pet, make sure your animals are up to date with their vaccinations. Talk to your veterinarian about fostering and follow their recommendations about any precautions you need to take. The veterinarian may suggest additional vaccinations/immunizations to protect your pet(s).

Preparing your home

Once you have chosen an area where you will care for your foster pet, you should "pet-proof" the area. Pay attention to any small or dangerous objects, such as pins, needles, paper clips, nails, staples, string, rubber bands, caustic/toxic chemicals, moth balls, plants and any other items that are potentially dangerous. Animals are also attracted to electrical cords, TV cords, telephone cords and curtains. These items should be blocked so they can't get to them. A good rule of thumb is "if you don't want to lose it, put it away." Also, to ensure nothing is missed, get down at animal's eye level. Look closely for any small holes or dangerous items that may have been missed at your first pass of pet proofing.

Precautions to take by room: Kitchens/Bathrooms/Utility Rooms

- Use childproof latches to keep little paws from prying open cabinets.
- Keep medications, cleaners, chemicals, and laundry supplies on high shelves or in childproof cabinets.
- Keep trashcans covered or inside a latched cabinet.
- Check for and block any small spaces, nooks or holes inside cabinetry, furniture, floors, appliances, etc. where your foster pet may hide. Also, make certain that spaces behind washer/dryer units are closed off so your foster pet can't get in there either.
- Always keep your dryer and washer units closed. Make sure your foster pet hasn't jumped into the dryer or washer before you turn it on. (This does happen.)
- Keep all foods out of reach and/or in cabinets. Even if the food isn't harmful to the foster pet, the wrapper could be.
- Keep toilet lids closed to prevent drowning. Curious puppies and kittens can easily fall in.

Precautions to take by room: Living/Family Rooms

- Place dangling wires from lamps, VCRs, TVs, stereos and phones out of reach. You can place the cords through PVC pipes to prevent the foster pet from chewing on them.
- Keep children's toys put away when not in use.
- Put away knick knacks that are valuable to you.
- Block any spaces where your vacuum can't fit, but a foster pet can fit.
- Remove dangerous items like string, pins, yarn, etc.
- Move houseplants, many of which can be poisonous to animals, out of reach. This includes hanging plants that can be jumped onto from nearby surfaces.
- Put away all sewing and craft supplies, especially thread and yarn.
- Secure aquariums and cages that house small animals, such as hamsters or fish, to keep them safe from curious paws.

Precautions to take by room: Garage/Basement

- Move all chemicals to high shelves or behind secure doors.
- Clean up all antifreeze from the floor and driveway. One taste can be lethal to an animal.

Precautions to take by room: Bedrooms

- Keep laundry and shoes behind closed doors.
- Keep any medications, lotions or cosmetics off accessible surfaces, like the bedside table.
- Move electrical and phone wires out of reach of chewing.

Preparing your yard

If you have a fenced in yard, check that there aren't holes in the fence or any other escape route. Do not leave your foster dog in the yard without your supervision. You will be amazed what little holes a big dog can get through or what tall fences a dog can jump. Keep your foster dog on a leash in your yard for his or her first few trips outside as he or she explores the new environment.

Commonly Asked Questions about the Fostering Process

How long will I be expected to foster this animal?

The answer depends on the particular animal's situation. If a kitten, the foster home is needed until the kitten can be spayed or neutered which is when he or she reaches 2 pounds. It typically takes approximately 2 months for a kitten to reach that weight. For other animals, it can be as short as a weekend to give them a break from the shelter or several months to help socialize them. SRAS staff can help identify the right foster pet for your situation and schedule, including arranging for temporary or permanent re-homing of the foster pet when you go away on vacation or need a break from fostering for other reasons.

Will SRAS provide food, litter, supplies (such as a litter box), medications, etc.? Are purchases made for foster care tax deductible?

You will be provided with food, litter, medications, bedding, etc., although donations of these items would be appreciated. If you buy your own supplies for fosters, save the receipts as these items may be tax deductible. Contact your accountant for more details.

What happens if I can no longer care for the foster pet?

If your situation changes the animal should be returned to SRAS. Please contact SRAS as soon as you know that you'll no longer be able to foster.

If I have a problem, whom can I contact? If I leave a message, how quickly will SRAS get back to me?

During business hours (everyday 8am - 4pm and Wednesday 8am - 7pm), contact SRAS at 908-725-0308. If an SRAS staff member does not answer the phone, please leave a message and your call will be returned before the end of business that day. If you call after business hours, please leave a message and your call will be returned the following day.

If you're experiencing a medical emergency, please refer to the next question.

What should I do if there is a medical emergency?

If an emergency occurs during SRAS business hours (everyday 8am - 4pm and Wednesday 8am - 7pm), contact SRAS at 908-725-0308 immediately. A medically experienced person will assess the situation and direct you on how to proceed. If a staff member does not answer the phone, please hang up and call again. Alternatively, if during business hours, you can bring the foster pet to SRAS without calling.

After normal business hours, contact SRAS through the emergency number at 201-364-1702. An animal control officer will assess the situation and direct you on how to proceed.

How often do I need to bring my foster pet back to SRAS for check-ups?

Each foster parent will receive a check-up schedule on the first day of foster care and will be responsible for bringing the foster pet to SRAS on the day(s) indicated. Kittens who are nursing will need to be vaccinated at three-week intervals for a total of three vaccinations. They will also need to be dewormed two to three times at ten-day intervals, as determined by the veterinary technician. Deworming medication may be sent home with the foster parent for administration with clear directions.

Are foster pets contagious? Will my pets or my health be jeopardized?

Ideally, foster pets should be kept separate for at least two weeks prior to any type of interaction with your pets, longer for nursing mothers and kittens. If your pets are current on their vaccinations (rabies, DHPP for dogs and FVRCP for cats), maintain healthy diets and lifestyles, and are not immune compromised, then the health risk to your pets is minimal. If someone in your household is immune compromised, consult your doctor before fostering.

Who pays for medical bills if they arise? Does that include treatments for my pets if they catch something from my foster pet?

All veterinary procedures and bills are handled by SRAS. The foster parent should not take the foster pet to their own veterinarian. Medical costs for human family members or veterinary care for other pets in the household will not be covered by SRAS.

Can I introduce the foster pet to my young children?

Young children should be introduced to the foster pet slowly to determine compatibility and the attitude of the foster pet toward youngsters. Even after the initial introduction, always have an adult supervisor around when your young child is with the foster pet.

Who is responsible for communicating with potential adopters, screening them and introducing the foster pet to them?

All adoption interactions should take place at SRAS.

Will I be required to bring the foster pet to adoption events?

No. You will only be responsible for bringing your foster pet back to SRAS for predetermined check-ups. For example, kittens require vaccinations at certain times.

Could my foster pet be deemed unadoptable and, if so, what happens then?

It is very unusual for a foster pet to be deemed unadoptable. Your feedback on the animal's behavior and personality is a crucial part of matching the animal to a suitable forever home. Animals with extreme behavioral issues are not part of the foster program.

Can I adopt my foster pet?

Of course! Speak with an SRAS staff member for details about adopting your foster pet.

Questions You Should Ask about Your Foster Pet

By Jane Harrell, Petfinder.com senior producer

Here are some questions you should ask the SRAS staff before you sign up to foster.

- How did the animal come to be with SRAS and how long has he or she been there?
- Why does he or she need a foster home now?
- Does he or she have any medical concerns or need medication?
- Has the animal been spayed or neutered? If not, when will that occur?

- Is he or she up-to-date on his or her vaccinations and has he or she been tested for diseases?
- Since conditions such as kennel cough and upper respiratory infections cannot be tested for, how long should I keep him or her separated from my own pets?
- Does he or she have any behavioral issues or concerns? How are they dealt with?
- Do you know how he or she is with kids, cats, dogs and/or strangers? Can my children or pets meet him or her before I commit to fostering?
- Do you know how he or she does when left alone? Is he or she crate trained?
- Is he or she litter box or house trained?

Tips for Letting Go When Your Foster Pet Is Adopted

By Jane Harrell, Petfinder.com senior producer

One of the most frequent questions asked by a foster parent is, “How do you let go?” Similarly, a lot of people say they don’t foster because “I could never give them back.”

That’s why we’re sharing tips for letting go at the end of a foster period. While they’re not exactly foolproof, these tips have helped foster parents let go of their foster pets so that they could be placed in loving, happy homes.

Get a foster pet that is not right for you long term

Letting go starts the moment you decide to take on a new foster pet. Select the foster pet who you believe you can help, but wouldn’t want to adopt. Don’t take in a foster you can’t handle, you want to keep everyone safe, just choose one who doesn’t quite suit your lifestyle. Do you hate to clean? Foster a cat with a long coat. Are you a couch potato? Foster a high-energy animal. As much as you’ll miss your fosters when they’re adopted, part of you will welcome the return to normalcy when they’re gone.

Get your friends or family involved

Fostering can be a family activity. If you live with roommates, you can also get them involved. It should go without saying that your whole household needs to agree to foster an animal in the first place. Having your foster pet bond with a variety of people can help you keep the emotional distance you need to let go. You won’t think of the animal as “yours” and you won’t worry that he or she will never be happy without you. It’s also great for the animal. Having your friends and family handle, play with and cuddle him or her gets your foster pet used to meeting and interacting with strangers, a valuable skill for any animal and one that helps him or her make a good impression when meeting potential adopters.

Remember that letting go of this foster pet enables you to save another life

If keeping this foster pet means you can’t take in another animal in need, then you could be missing out. And the other animals in need are definitely missing out. Remember that, while each adoption saves a life, a great foster parent can save many lives, by socializing and rehabilitating animals who might not find homes while living in a shelter.

Ask for follow-up stories and pictures from your foster pet’s adopter.

Talk to the SRAS staff and ask for as much information as you can get about the adopters.

None of these tips will completely alleviate the pain of letting go of your foster pet, nor will any of them ensure you won't get attached. But think, if the worst that happens is that you fall in love with your foster pet and end up with a new family member, is that really so bad?

Cat-Specific Information

How to Be the Best Cat Foster Parent

This article was originally provided by Catster

Becoming a foster parent to homeless cats can be a very rewarding experience. Foster care for cats basically requires patience, a compassionate nature, a flexible lifestyle, and some experience with and knowledge of cat behavior. Below are some general tips that may ease your transition into foster life with cats of various ages.

Fostering adult cats:

- Don't give a new foster cat the run of your entire house. Start out by confining the foster cat to a spare bedroom, office, or a bathroom. Ideally, foster cats should be kept separate from your pets.
- Provide a cozy bed, a bowl of fresh water, and a clean litter pan at all times.
- In the beginning, approach your foster cat slowly, cautiously, and in a non-threatening way.
- Don't allow a cat to go without eating for more than a day. Note that fasting can have serious health consequences in cats. If your foster cat has to be coaxed to eat, try tempting treats like canned salmon or tuna.
- If your foster cat strains to eliminate or you notice that he or she has not eliminated in over 24 hours, this may be a medical emergency. Contact SRAS immediately at 908-725-0308 if during business hours. After normal business hours, call 201-364-1702 .

Fostering nursing mother cats:

- Provide a box big enough for everyone, with sides tall enough to keep the kittens from falling out but low enough for mother cat to escape.
- Line the box with several layers of bedding so that you can peel away layers as the kittens soil the top layer.
- Let mama cat feed and care for her kittens as long as she is actively engaged with them.
- Provide a nutrient-dense diet for the mother cat. Kitten food is ideal. Offer food several times a day, or consider keeping a bowl of dry food available to her at all times.
- It's normal for the mother cat to want time away from her kittens between feedings. Once the kittens start exploring, you can keep them contained in one room with a baby gate that the mother can easily jump over.
- Kittens will begin trying out moist food at about four weeks of age. If any seem slow to begin feeding on their own, you can help out by putting a bit on your finger to let them smell it.

Fostering orphaned kittens:

- Kittens will soil their nest box daily, so use disposable cardboard boxes and washable or disposable bedding.
- Use a heating pad on one side of the nest box only, so that kittens can move away if they get too warm. Keep the pad at a low setting.

- You'll be provided with commercial kitten formula and a feeding bottle or syringe that holds between two and four ounces. Feed slowly! SRAS staff will show you the ideal way to bottle feed kittens.
- Sterilize feeding bottles with boiling water and cool before filling.
- Don't warm formula in the microwave as it creates hot spots that might burn the kitten's mouth. Instead, set the filled bottle in a bowl of hot water to raise it to the right temperature.
- Feed kittens while they are resting on their tummies. Tipping them on their backs to feed can cause them to aspirate fluid into their lungs.
- Newborn kittens need to nurse every two to three hours, including through the night.
- Until the kittens are about three weeks old, they need help urinating and defecating. After every feeding, use a damp, slightly rough terrycloth washcloth to stimulate the anus and urinary openings.
- By four weeks of age you can introduce some solid food. Strained baby food meats or premium canned kitten foods are a good choice early on.
- As soon as the kitten starts eating solid food, a bowl of water should be available at all times.
- Kittens open their eyes at about two weeks and are moving around on their own by three weeks.

Kitten Socialization and Development

By Jacque Lynn Schultz, C.P.D.T., Companion Animal Programs advisor national outreach

A cat's personality is largely formulated in the first eight weeks of life. Leaving health issues to the veterinarian, here's what you can do to help your kittens be all that they can be behaviorally.

No place like home

When setting up a cat nursery, avoid the empty room/sterile box set up, especially for kittens two to eight weeks of age. Kittens kept in a more complex environment for their first two months are less nervous in life than those kept in un-stimulating surroundings. Provide plenty of sensory stimulation. A radio or television can be left on in the room some of the time. Flooring can consist of newspapers, old towels, carpet squares, and linoleum tile. A small cardboard box for the kittens to crawl in with a hole cut in the side can serve as a den once the kittens are mobile. Don't use fresh produce boxes, though, because they may have been sprayed with harsh pesticides.

Engage in gentle handling as soon as possible. Early human handling results in precocious development. When the kittens are two to three weeks of age, increase the sphere of handlers to include three or four people daily to help the kittens learn to trust all humans. However, keep adult male cats out of the nursery as the mother will perceive them as predators and will be stressed unduly.

A family affair

Since kittens learn by watching how an adult cat operates, it is important to keep the litter with the mother until at least eight weeks of age, which coincides nicely with the end of weaning for most kittens. Through observational learning they get the hang of using the litter box and whether or not to cover waste, how to hunt and kill (although this behavior is partially predetermined genetically), what foods are safe to eat and who is appropriate as a friend. Kittens also learn to cope with stress and frustration, since the mother cat controls the "milk bar" and they don't always get the opportunity to feed until satisfied. Lastly, it is important to keep littermates together until eight to ten weeks of age. Through their interactive play, kittens learn to control their clawing and biting, and to extend their acceptance of littermates to cats outside of the family.

Hand-raised single orphans or those separated from their mother before eight weeks often prove to be hyperactive kittens who cannot handle frustration. As adults, they have a tendency to be fearful and aggressive toward people and other cats. They learn less well and have a predilection toward an asthma-like respiratory condition. Often, orphans can be spared this fate by adding them to another litter or at least fostering them in a home with other cats to serve as role models.

These guidelines for optimal socialization and development could just make generalizations such as “aloof,” “anti-social,” and “scaredy-cat” no longer applicable to America’s most popular pet.

How to Become an SRAS Foster Parent

Visit SRAS at 100 Commons Way in Bridgewater, NJ, email us at somersetregionalanimalshelter@aol.com, or call us at 908-725-0308. We’ll work with you to identify the right foster pet for your household.

Foster Care Refrigerator Tip Sheet

In Case of Emergency Call:

908-725-0308 everyday 8am – 4pm and Wednesday 8am – 7pm

201-364-1702 after normal business hours

Remember To:

- ✓ Keep your foster pet separated from your pets initially
- ✓ Introduce your foster pet to your young children slowly
- ✓ After letting your foster pet settle in, introduce him or her to friends and family to help with socialization
- ✓ Supervise your foster dog when he or she is outside
- ✓ Bring your foster pet back to SRAS per the check-up schedule provided
- ✓ Provide SRAS with information about your foster pet's personality
- ✓ Call SRAS immediately if your situation changes and you can no longer care for your foster pet

And most importantly:

Have fun with your foster pet!!

Foster Care Contract

I, the undersigned, wishing to provide foster care for shelter pets from Somerset Regional Animal Shelter, do certify the following:

(Please initial)

- _____ I have read the Foster Care Procedures and agree to the terms set forth therein. I agree to follow the procedures and understand that failure to do so may result in the termination of this contract at the discretion of Somerset Regional Animal Shelter.

- _____ I have discussed the Foster Care Procedures with the shelter manager or staff representative and have been given the opportunity to voice my questions and concerns.

- _____ I will place the well-being of my foster pet above all else and will do everything possible to ensure his or her health and comfort.

- _____ I understand the importance of my foster care duties and am ready to undertake the responsibility of caring for a Somerset Regional Animal Shelter foster pet.

- _____ I agree to take full responsibility for my foster pet and will not hold Somerset Regional Animal Shelter responsible for any damage or injury that may be caused by any pet I may foster.

Signed:

Foster Parent

Date

SRAS representative

Date