

Missy's Rescue Foster Program Handbook

Welcome to the volunteer foster program at Missy's Rescue (MR). This handbook is provided to foster parents as a guide for the care of cats and kittens. The goal is to prepare cats and kittens for adoption.

Thank you for opening your home to a rescued cat. The foster program at MR has been in existence for 9 years. With your help, the Rescue saves over 1000 cats per year from euthanasia. Over 100 foster homes are involved. This program provides a safe environment for cats to heal and socialize until a permanent adoptive home can be found.

Cats that need foster care fall into the following categories:

- Kittens too young to be adopted.
- Orphaned kittens.
- Abused cats that need socialization and tender loving care.
- Injured cats.
- Cats recovering from surgery or illness.
- Abandoned mother cats with kittens.
- Feral cats that require socialization.
- Cats that need a temporary home while the Rescue is overcrowded.

Requirements of Foster Homes

Foster cats require an indoor space separate from other household animals. A spare bedroom, bathroom, or laundry room is ideal. The bathroom is by far our favorite. Any indoor space free of hiding places or places where a cat could get stuck will work and that is easy to clean. It is important that the foster parent visits this room often so that the cats become well socialized. Cats are not allowed outdoors under any circumstances. A room without carpet is easier to keep clean.

Time Commitment and Responsibilities

Each situation is unique to the needs of the cat. Cats going into foster care are often stressed. It is essential that foster parents understand that moving cats from the Rescue to the foster home is also stressful. The animals depend on the foster parents for security during this adjustment period, which can take from a few days to a few weeks. Foster parents must be patient and commit to the cat until the healing or socialization is completed to avoid the unnecessary stress of readjustment to multiple temporary homes. Foster cats must remain in the care of the original foster parent unless prior permission is received from MR.

The length of time foster cats stay in a foster home depends on the health and adoptability of the cat. Before cats can be adopted, they must have their initial tests for feline diseases, be spayed or neutered and be well socialized. Foster parents should plan to provide a home for 2-10 weeks.

When the foster parent and MR decide that the cat is ready for adoption, a date and time will be arranged to take the cat back to the adoption facility. Please write a short biography that includes the cat's name, personality traits, and temperament. Also include any experience the cat has had with dogs and children. This information will be very helpful in placing the cats in compatible homes. As much as it is possible, adoptive homes are found based on the foster parent's criteria in mind, i.e.: 2 kittens that are very bonded to each other, one that dislikes dogs, one that really likes dogs, etc.

Vaccines, testing, spay and neuter surgery

All cats that are healthy at or over 6 weeks of age will receive the first upper respiratory vaccine, flea treatment and first worming treatment before going into foster care which will need to be redone at 2 week intervals. Cats that weigh over 2 ½ pounds will generally be spayed or neutered before going into foster care. Sometimes cats are too small or too sick to have these tests and treatments before going into foster care. As kittens grow and become healthy in foster care, they will need to return to MR to receive these medical treatments. Mother cats will receive medical services at the same time as the kittens.

Parameters for standard medical care:

- Blood tests – 6 weeks old if not done before leaving the Rescue.
- Vaccines – started at 6 weeks old and repeated every 2 weeks until 12 weeks of age or a series of 2 for adult cats. Sometimes cats will run a low fever, be less active or eat less for 24 hours following a vaccine. If these symptoms last longer than 24 hours call the Rescue.
- Worming treatment – first treatment at 6 weeks old and repeated every 2 weeks.
- Spay/neuter – Cats must weigh at least 2 ½ pounds. These surgeries are done on various days at spay/neuter clinics. The foster parent will bring the foster cats into the rescue the evening prior to surgery and pick them up in the evening after the surgery so the cats can recuperate at the foster home.

The foster parent will need to call MR to arrange a time for each of these medical services.

Identification Numbers

Identification numbers are given to all cats and kittens. This helps us to locate their information in the computer quickly; otherwise we have to search hundreds of records to find out what they need.

Please keep these numbers handy and have ready if you have any questions about your fosters.

Preparing a Space for a Foster Cat or Kittens

MR supplies the food, litter, equipment and medical services. Foster parents provide a stable and safe environment as well socialization.

Foster homes need:

Litter Box – MR will supply a litter box. Cats will use a litter box instinctively. Cats that like to dig need a deep litter box to minimize scattering the litter out of the box.

Cat litter – Use safe litter. MR will supply Cat Country Pellets, which is made from wheat grass. Do not use clumping litter with kittens under 6 months old; it can cause intestinal blockage if accidentally swallowed and respiratory distress if inhaled, either of which can be fatal. If the foster parent wants to provide the litter, there are a few acceptable choices. Clay litter is inexpensive and accepted by most cats. Natural products made of recycled paper, pine, or wheat are also acceptable.

Crate or kennel – MR can loan a crate or kennel to provide a familiar smelling, dark, quiet place to sleep. They can also be used for transporting the cat.

Food – MR will provide all food for the cats. It is important to provide good quality food purchased from a pet supply store rather than a grocery store. If the foster parent wants to provide the food, that is fine but please use the suggested foods below.

MR provides foster parents with the following cat foods, based on the needs of the cat.

- Nutro Natural Choice Complete Care dry food for cats for adult cats
- Nutro Natural Choice Complete Care dry food for kittens older than 6 weeks, pregnant cats, and mother cats.
- Wellness, Precise or Merrick canned food for finicky cats and kittens transitioning to solid food at 4-6 weeks. Always get the largest cans.
- Royal Canin Babycat for kittens transitioning from nursing or bottle feeding to solid food at 4-6 weeks old.
- KMR Milk Replacer for Kittens for newborn to 6 week old kittens

All cats and kittens should be “free fed”, which means that there is always food and water available. Tall, heavy ceramic dishes are used for most cats and cats wearing cones, while flat dishes work better for flat faced cats or canned food. A cat with a decreased appetite might respond to warm food.

Cats can be finicky eaters. If the cat is rejecting the food, not gaining weight appropriately, or has diarrhea, contact MR for instructions. Do not feed cats any food not approved by MR. Do not give cats table scraps or cows milk.

Water – fresh water in a clean bowl must be available at all times.

Heating Pad – A heating pad or heating disc set on low is needed for orphaned kittens or sick cats or kittens. Always cover a heating pad with a towel and allow space for the cats or kittens to crawl off of the pad if they get too hot.

Toys – Stuffed mice, small balls, and cardboard from toilet paper rolls, wine corks, and crumpled paper are good cat toys. Adult cats sometimes like catnip but kittens usually are not interested. All toys should be disinfected before another foster cat plays with them. Do not let cats play unsupervised with string or rubber bands which if swallowed can cause fatal damage in the intestines.

Scratching post – Corrugated cardboard scratching mats are inexpensive and divert cats from scratching furniture.

Scale – A scale to weigh cats is helpful in determining if they are gaining weight appropriately or if they weigh enough to be spayed/neutered. A scale is optional equipment. The scale at MR is extremely accurate.

Keeping the Household Safe and Healthy

It is always a health risk to expose your pets to other animals. Animals are at risk of contracting an illness in the veterinarian's office, the city park, or the back yard. However, the health risk is minimal if your pet's vaccinations are current, they maintain a healthy life style, and they are not very young, very old, or immune compromised. Any concerns should be addressed by a veterinarian before becoming a foster parent. Unless they are too young or too sick for the procedure, all foster cats are tested for feline leukemia before going into foster care. Keeping foster cats isolated from household pets will minimize any transmission of disease. Foster cats can be particularly susceptible to illnesses carried by household pets because they are already in a vulnerable state. Strict isolation for at least the first 3 weeks is imperative because some illnesses have a 3 week incubation period when cats are contagious but not symptomatic. Also household cats that are being allowed indoor/outdoor access can carry deadly viruses into the home without showing any outward signs of illness themselves. Be aware that a mother cat with a litter of kittens can be very protective and might act aggressively toward other animals and people to protect the kittens.

Dogs are not affected by feline upper respiratory diseases, feline leukemia, or feline immune deficiency virus. Parasites and fungi however, can be passed between cats and dogs.

Humans who are in contact with live animals can be exposed to a group of diseases called zoonoses. A zoonotic disease is a disease transmitted from animals to humans or humans to animals. There are about 200 zoonotic diseases. If someone in the household is immune compromised or pregnant, a potential foster parent should consult a doctor and/or a veterinarian before becoming a foster parent.

Proper sanitation and hygiene reduces the risk of transmitting diseases. Washing hands with soap and water before and after touching foster cats will help minimize the risk of transferring infections. Both before foster kittens arrive at the foster home and after they leave, the entire room should be cleaned. All surfaces should be cleaned with a 10% bleach solution, made with 1 ounce bleach diluted in 1 quart water. Any equipment borrowed from MR should be cleaned with the same solution before it is returned. Avoid all other cleaning products because some can cause diarrhea and vomiting and many are highly toxic to cats. Lysol, Pine sol, 409, Spic & Span and many other cleaning products are deadly to cats. Even using Simple Green and Vinegar has been known to cause diarrhea.

Introducing the foster cat to a new space

Because cats in a new environment are stressed, their first reaction is to run and hide. You can ease this transition by setting up a special isolated room (bathrooms are by far our favorite) as a safe haven in advance. Avoid rooms with mattresses where people or children have slept. First of all, cats or kittens may get injured in box springs and mattresses have small amounts of human urine smell to them. This comment may offend some people but think of it from the cats point of view, they have a strong sense of smell and always want to please you and what better way than to potty where you have. Take the foster cat/kittens into the room in the house where they will be living. Open the carrier and let the cat decide to come out. Often a cat will prefer to stay inside the carrier for a couple hours, until the cat feels safe. Give the cat time to adjust to a new territory. Visit the room often but let the cats set the pace for the visits without forcing attention on the cats. When they are ready, they will approach the foster parent. If cats are allowed to adapt slowly to a new environment, they will acclimate gradually and eventually completely. The length of time this takes will depend on the cat's temperament, past experiences, and the presence of other animals in the household. Expect the adjustment to last a couple weeks but it can take several months.

Veterinary Care

All medical care is provided by MR and its consulting veterinarians. Emergency care not affiliated with MR must be approved by MR management in advance of treatment. MR will not assume responsibility for any bill incurred without prior approval by MR. If a foster parent thinks that a cat requires medical attention, contact MR during normal business hours and it will have the cat seen immediately. If there is a life threatening emergency after hours, call the emergency number provided by MR.

Please call MR to consider veterinary care in any of the following situations:

Kittens younger than 6 months:

- Diarrhea that lasts for more than a day.
- Vomiting and diarrhea that lasts for more than 6 hours.
- Vomiting more than once an hour.

- Lethargy without a fever for more than 24 hours.
- Lethargy with a temperature over 103 degrees or under 99 degrees.

Cats older than 6 months:

- Not drinking for more than 24 hours.
- Diarrhea that lasts for more than 2 days.
- Diarrhea and occasional vomiting for more than 24 hours.
- Vomiting more than 2 or 3 times in an hour.
- Not eating for more than 2-3 days.
- Lethargy without fever for more than 2-3 days.
- Lethargy with temperature over 103 degrees or under 99 degrees.

Sometimes foster parents may just get a feeling that a cat isn't doing well. In that case, call MR or your emergency contact person to seek advice.

Common Cat Illnesses

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) – FeLV is a retrovirus that causes changes at the cellular level, putting the cat at risk for cancer, blood disorders, and a weakened immune system. Cats that have FeLV often appear healthy but are at risk of becoming severely infected by common organisms that normally would not affect a healthy cat. There are no symptoms unique to FeLV. The signs of FeLV are general signs of illness. Diagnosis is by a blood test. FeLV is contagious through all body fluids, especially food and litter areas but lives only a couple of hours on surfaces outside the cat's body. There is a vaccine for FeLV but it is not effective if the cat is already infected with FeLV. There is no cure for FeLV and it is considered a casual contact virus, in other words, someone who pets a FeLV cat and then pets yours, can transfer the virus. Therefore, all cats are tested for FeLV as early as possible.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) – FIV is a retrovirus similar to FeLV, except that is not passed to other cats by casual contact. It is usually passed by bite wounds, reproductive acts or from a mother to her kittens. The cat can appear healthy until the immune suppression allows an infection that the cat is not able to fight. Enlarged lymph nodes are a common symptom but diagnosis is by blood test. There is a vaccine available but it does not always offer complete protection. There is no cure for FIV.

Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper) – Feline Distemper is highly contagious and almost always fatal. It is a resilient virus that attacks the lining of the intestine and is transmitted only between cats. The incubation period is 2-14 days. It is most common during the warmer months and during the spring and summer when most kittens are born. Kittens and unvaccinated cats are highly susceptible. Symptoms include lethargy, lack of appetite, vomiting, drooling and diarrhea, generally followed by death within 24 hours. Diarrhea is the most common of these symptoms. The virus is present in all body fluids

and can live on surfaces for up to a year. Therefore, if a cat is diagnosed with Feline Distemper while in foster care, special precautions and household cleaning are necessary:

- Double bag and dispose of all bedding, litter, toys, and plastic food dishes.
- Disinfect steel, aluminum and ceramic surfaces (including food bowls) with 1 ounce of bleach diluted in 1 quart of water for 10 minutes. Clean carpet, upholstery, and clothing with the same solution.
- Repeat this sanitization process for 3 consecutive days.

Household cats should be immune if they are current on vaccinations but watch for symptoms of the disease and act quickly if any are seen. Fostering should be suspended for 1 year after a confirmed outbreak of Feline Distemper.

Parasites – There are many common parasites seen in cats:

- Coccidia can only be seen with a microscopic examination of fresh stool. It causes diarrhea, lack of appetite and an overall neediness. The treatment is Albon, an oral medication given for a full 21 days.
- Giardia is picked up from contaminated water. The most common symptom is intermittent or chronic diarrhea. Serial stool samples may be required because it isn't consistently shed in all stools. Sometimes a sample must be collected directly by a veterinarian. Treatment is difficult because the organisms can be resistant to the medication.
- Roundworms can be diagnosed by seeing eggs upon microscopic examination of stools. The treatment is an oral medication called pyrantel. After giving the medication it is not uncommon to see worms in stools or being thrown up. The Center for Disease Control recommends treating every 2 weeks. The worms can migrate out of other tissues and organs for months and are transferable to children without proper sanitation procedures being followed. Washing hands etc.
- Tapeworm might be identified by visualizing segments of the worm in the stool. They look like grains of rice. Treatment is with oral medication called Droncit. Tapeworm often follows a flea infestation, from the cat swallowing fleas and is not considered life threatening.
- A Flea infestation might be recognized by seeing the actual insect or “flea dirt” in the fur. Young kittens can die from “flea bite anemia” caused by blood loss from the flea infestation so treatment is important. All cats are treated for fleas with Frontline before leaving the rescue or at 6 weeks of age. Flea treatment should be repeated monthly. Tapeworm may follow a flea infestation.
- Ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) can't be seen without magnification. A cat with ear mites will scratch its ears (sometimes violently enough to cause bleeding), and shake the head when the ears are touched. The cat will also have dark brown, crumbly wax its ears. Ear mites must be treated because they can lead to trauma or hearing loss. An ear mite infestation is treated with Ivermectin topically in the

ears once, then again in 10-14 days. Home care includes ear canal cleaning with mineral oil and cotton swabs before each treatment. To clean the ears, restrain the cat's head by grasping the ear flap between the index finger and thumb. It may help to have a second person hold the cat because the cat will try to scratch its ears while they are being cleaned. Place 1-2 drops of mineral oil in the ear canal. Massage the base of the ears, then insert the swab straight down and use a swab to clean from the bottom up. The ear canal is L-shaped so there is little risk of damage. Ear mites can spread to other cats, dogs, rabbits, and ferrets that are in close contact with the infected cat.

Ringworm – Ringworm is not a worm but rather a fungus that is very common in kids, cats, gardeners, and wrestlers. Ringworm is not life threatening for a healthy cat, but it can spread from cats to other animals and humans. Ringworm is often identified when a cat is losing patches of fur or has a flaky patch of skin. If ringworm is suspected, treatment should begin immediately, although a fungal culture of the skin will be needed for a definitive diagnosis. The results of that culture take 7-10 days. The fungus is treated either topically or orally, depending on several factors including the severity of the infection, the cat's health status, and the cat's age. The treatment lasts for at least 6 weeks, or at least 2 weeks past clinical resolution. The cat will need to remain in foster care until treatment is completed. The room should be disinfected completely with a 10% bleach solution, including the carpet because the spores can survive in the fibers of the carpet. Consult a doctor if transmission to a family member is suspected. Consult a veterinarian if transmission to a household pet is suspected.

Feline Upper Respiratory infection (URI) – a URI is a “kitty cold”. It has similar symptoms to human colds and, although highly communicable between cats, will not affect other animals or humans. Several different microorganisms can cause a URI but only three can result in more severe symptoms than may require treatment. They are Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus and Bordetella. They are transmitted via secretions from the cat's mouth, nose, and eyes. The irritation to these moist membranes causes characteristic sneezing and discharge from the eyes and nose. This discharge is usually light but occasionally the discharge is thick, the cat has a fever, and loses its appetite. The symptoms usually last from 7-10 days but can last for several weeks. Some cats become chronic carriers of Uri's and have mild recurrences when under stress. Infected foster cats should be isolated until symptoms are gone. Calicivirus sometimes causes some specific symptoms. In addition to the symptoms of a typical URI, the cat also develops ulcers in the mouth, nose, tongue, or eyes. The cat also acts stiff or limps because the virus affects the joints. Any time a cat is exposed to different cats or is highly stressed; there is a risk of a URI. Stresses include change of environment, loss of a companion, introduction of a new pet, change in diet, surgery, treatment for parasites, and vaccinations. Usually no treatment is necessary for a URI. Because there are no medications to fight viruses, all treatment is aimed at minimizing the impact of the symptoms. At the first sign of a URI, it is sometimes helpful to add 2 500mg L-lysine capsules to the drinking water to break the viral reproduction cycle. Cats are at risk for dehydration if they become lethargic, have a

significant loss of appetite, or run a fever. These symptoms require medical attention. Keep the cat's nose and eyes clear of discharge by wiping with a warm cloth. Humidify the room with a vaporizer or the shower to help thin secretions and clear congestion. Encourage the cat to eat and drink by offering fish flavored canned cat food, Hills brand A-D food, human baby food (turkey or chicken), canned tuna (sometimes causes diarrhea), or chicken broth without garlic or onion. Spend time consoling the foster cat with extra attention. Antibiotics such as Amoxicillin and Clavamox are sometimes used to fight secondary bacterial infections when our consulting veterinarian believes it is appropriate. As all antibiotics have side effects, the use of any other antibiotic is not appropriate unless specifically prescribed by our consulting veterinarian. On rare occasions, a cat may need to be hospitalized.

Dehydration – Dehydration will occur when the cat is either not taking in enough water (like with the loss of appetite) or losing too much water (through frequent urination, diarrhea, or fever). Dehydration can be identified by lifting the loose skin over the lower back. The skin should snap down quickly when released. If the skin remains lifted when released or slowly settles down over the body, the cat is probably dehydrated. Appetite can be stimulated by feeding a more palatable food or by warming the food. Sometimes balanced electrolyte solutions need to be given with a needle under the skin. This is a simple procedure that a foster parent can learn to do at home. It is imperative to diagnose the cause of diarrhea. Consult MR for advice

Injuries – MR will give foster parents specific instructions for cats with wounds, fractured or broken bones, or which have had surgery. The challenge is to follow all the veterinarians instructions while keeping the cat clean and well fed. These cats usually need to be confined in a small space (like a crate) to limit mobility. Care must be taken that food; water, litter box, and bedding are easily accessible despite the cat's limitations. Be alert for additional signs of illness because the cat will be stressed. Infection at a wound site or incision site will be characterized by excessive drainage that may be discolored or smell bad. Be sure stitches do not become loose. Active playing should be discouraged, but petting, brushing, and cuddling are all good activities for a recovering cat

Post surgery- Cats waking from anesthesia post-surgery are often confused and sometimes psychotic. They will often howl and act frantic and desperate. They must be contained in a small crate and left alone in a warm dark quiet environment. You can give them canned food on a piece of paper towel very slowly and quietly placed into the cage. BE CAREFUL! Cats have been known to fling themselves out the door or attack their fosters. Do not put a litter box or food or water dishes in the cage until the morning after surgery. The cat will flail about disturbing itself with the noise and litter can adhere to the incision. Do not try to offer affection. The cat for the most part will not be able to recognize you, your voice or its littermates. Calming techniques will fail and unnecessary injuries to you and the cat will occur. The cat is essentially stoned. Call MR if there are any concerns.

Giving Medications and Providing Home-Medical Care

Giving a pill: Place one hand on top of the cat's head so the thumb and forefinger are on either side of the cat's jaw, then tilt the head back until the nose points up. The mouth should open a little. Hold the pill between the thumb and forefinger of the other hand and use the middle finger to gently open the cat's mouth. Drop the pill as far back into the throat as possible and quickly push the pill back in the mouth by putting your finger between the top and bottom canines. Do not put your finger in from the side of the cat's mouth because you are more likely to be bitten that way. If you prefer them, Animal Talk can provide "pill poppers," which are easier for some people to use for giving pills. Close the cat's mouth, with the head still tilted back, and stroke the throat to encourage the cat to swallow. Release the cat when you are sure that the pill has been swallowed. Praise and comfort the cat when finished.

Giving liquid medication – Liquid medication is drawn into a syringe for exact dosing. The cat is held in the same manner as giving a pill but instead of pushing the liquid straight back into the cat's mouth, slowly push the liquid into the side of the cat's mouth.

Hiding medication in food – Ideally, medication is given directly to the cat. If the cat is feral or aggressive, liquid medication or crushed tablets can be hidden in a small amount of canned food. Only mix the medication into a volume of food the cat will eat immediately.

Taking a cat's temperature

A normal cat temperature is between 99 – 102.5 degrees. A temperature outside that range may be an indication of illness. If the temperature is below 99 degrees, place the cat on a heating pad. If the fever is over 103 degrees, remove the cat from a heating pad if one is in use. In either case, call MR for further instructions.

Equipment:

Rectal thermometer (digital is preferred).
Slip covers (to use with digital thermometer).
Lubricant (such as K-Y Jelly)
10% bleach solution (1 ounce bleach in 1 quart water).

Procedure:

Sterilize the thermometer by dipping it into the bleach solution then wiping it with a clean paper towel. Cover a digital thermometer with a disposable slipcover. Lubricate the thermometer with the K-Y Jelly. Lift the cat's tail and insert the tip of the thermometer 1/4 inch into the cat's rectum and hold for 1-2 minutes or until the digital thermometer signals with a beep that the cat's temperature has been read. Be very gentle – the tissues are fragile and can tear easily. A second person to hold and comfort the cat may be necessary. Clean the thermometer with the bleach solution when finished.

Hydrating with subcutaneous fluid – If a cat won't take enough liquid orally, it may become necessary to give the cat a balanced electrolyte solution through a needle under

the skin. This is a simple procedure. If MR decides that a cat requires hydrating with subcutaneous fluids, a foster parent can be taught the technique.

Enema for a constipated kitten – Young bottle fed kittens often become constipated. After examining the kitten, MR may decide that a kitten requires an enema to remove stool. MR can teach a foster parent how to perform this procedure at home. Remember to always be careful and gentle to avoid causing damage to the bowel.

Introducing Cats to Other Cats

As previously mentioned, foster cats should be isolated from other cats in the home. It is safer for both the foster cat and the resident cat.

If it is necessary to introduce foster cats to resident cats, it is vital that the foster cat has an established safe haven to maximize the comfort of the new cat and minimize the territorial threat to the resident cat. Start the introduction by allowing them to sniff each other through a closed door. Switching their bedding can also help them get to know one another's scent. If both cats seem calm, allow them to meet by cracking open the door between them a couple inches. They should sniff each other. If either cat hisses or growls intensely or swats at the other cat, close the door and consider the meeting session over for the day. A little hissing and batting at each other is expected. Trimming the nails can help prevent inadvertent injuries. If the cats remain relatively calm, try playing with the two of them with string or offer them treats. Open the door and let the cats enter the same territory while supervised. Do not force either cat into an unfamiliar space.

Sometimes a cat can be distracted with food or toys. Separate the cats and repeat this process a few times a day. Time apart gives them a chance to process the information gained while they were together. Continue to repeat the supervised visits until both cats are comfortable and there is no aggressive behavior.

Never punish a cat for aggressive behavior. Punishment will not discourage the aggressive behavior but it will upset the cat, which will prolong the aggression between the cats. Encourage getting along by staying silent or softly reassuring the cats while you separate them. The key to introducing cats to each other is patience. What often appears to be fighting is actually a way of defining territory. This is an essential part of learning to live together. As they get to know each other, intervention is only needed if blood is drawn or if one cat relentlessly dominates the other cat. Spraying the aggressor with a squirt bottle of water will discourage overly aggressive behavior. A loud noise like clapping hands will also distract them. Never get in the middle of a cat fight. Cats can turn their aggression on the foster parent and cat bites can lead to a serious infection in humans.

Introducing Cats to Dogs

After cats are healthy, introducing a foster cat to a resident dog is encouraged. Cats that have learned to socialize with dogs are more adoptable.

After the 3 week isolation period, begin to allow the cat to explore the dog's territory while the dog is away. When the cat appears relaxed while exploring and after trimming the cats front nails, allow the dog and cat to meet. At the initial introduction, the dog should always be on a collar and leash with the owner in complete control. A dog that shows aggression, like snarling, growling, and bearing teeth, will probably never accept

the cat. In those cases, the cat will be safer if kept separated from the dog at all times. The cat should be up high and unreachable by the dog. If they are both calm, walk the dog around the room on a leash, but let the dog lead the way. The cat should be allowed to escape or approach the dog as desired. Neither force nor expect a face-to-face interaction in the first few meetings. A dog is a predator and it is natural for a dog to want to chase a cat. Be prepared for the dog to yank on the leash and try to chase the cat. Kittens are very vulnerable because they remind dogs of small toys. Do not let the dog intimidate the cat by barking. All inappropriate behavior should be discouraged with a quick sideways tug on the leash. On the other hand, if the cat bops the dog on the nose, consider it a warning and a good sign; this may be the first step in setting up boundaries in the relationship. Allow the interaction for about a half hour, then, return the cat to the safe haven. Increase the amount of time they spend together each day. It is important to be patient and calm with these interactions to help the cat and dog to relax. Praise both animals profusely and never force an interaction. Consider supervised off-leash visits when both animals appear ready.

Cat manners

Yes, cats and kittens have to learn their manners. Please do not encourage or allow cats to ride on your shoulders, climb your legs, bite or scratch your hands or face or suck on you or your clothing. It may be cute as a kitten but imagine a full sized cat doing these things. This will make them less adoptable and can cause them to be returned once they are older. Always play pounce, bite, scratch, stalk and hunt games with fishing pole type toys.

Special circumstances

Taming Feral Kittens

Feral kittens are the offspring of feral cats. A feral colony starts with lost or abandoned unaltered domestic cats that congregate near a food source, such as a garbage dumpster. The mother feral cat teaches her kittens to be afraid of humans, to hide, and to defend themselves against adversaries. Feral kittens will spit and hiss when approached by humans and will bite and scratch if threatened.

Feral kittens can become affectionate and loving companions if they are tamed at a very early age. If taming is attempted after 12 weeks of age it is a much more difficult task. The process of taming can take from 2 – 6 weeks depending on the age and the temperament of the kitten. A foster parent needs to commit to the kittens for the entire taming process because for feral kittens it is a matter of learning to trust can revert to wild behavior if moved to multiple foster homes before they are ready for it. For this reason they also need to be placed in adoptive homes as early as possible.

Before fostering a feral kitten, a potential foster parent should be sure to have a current tetanus shot. Care should be taken to avoid bites and scratches. Trim the cat's front nails if possible. Wear long sleeves and gloves in early interactions. If medications are needed, use liquid medicine in moist food or crush tablets into baby food.

Steps involved in taming a feral kitten:

1. Containment in a cage – A small cage, just large enough to hold a litter box, food dish and water dish is needed. If need be we have many different sizes of crates. Separate the kittens from each other so that they count on the foster parent for socialization. Kittens can be tamed in just a week if separated from their litter, but can take a year if their strongest attachments are to their litter mates. For the first 2-7 days, visit and talk to the kittens but do not attempt to handle them. Allow them time to settle in and feel safe. Leave a TV or radio on in the room so they get used to human voices. A consistent feeding and cleaning schedule helps establish a routine. If a kitten escapes from a container, do not grab it with bare hands. Even the friendliest kitten will bite when scared and running. Allow the kitten to stop running and to settle then slowly at the kittens level, talking softly reach and grab by the scruff. Place it back in the cage and allow it to calm down before attempting any other interaction. Sometimes a trap baited with food is needed to catch the kitten.

2. Periodic handling – After 2-7 days, use a plastic back scratcher and scratch the kittens behind the ears and under the chin. Within a few days, move your hand up the scratcher until you are scratching with your hand. Place a small towel over the kitten and pick it up in the towel. If the kitten stays calm, pet it on the head from behind. Hands can frighten the kitten, so an approach from behind the head is less threatening than approaching the face. If the kitten is still calm, lift the kitten by the nape (scruff) of the neck and place it on a towel on your lap. Stroke the kitten's body while speaking softly, then release. The contact should be brief. Repeat the process with each kitten individually. Offer a tasty treat after they have all been handled. Once the kitten is emaciating contact and consistently coming to the front of the crate for attention you are ready for the next step

3. Containment in a small room – Within 1-2 weeks the kittens should have made considerable progress. Males become tame more quickly than females. Open the door to the crate and allow the kittens to explore one small room (here again the bathroom is the best). Play with the kittens often. Approach them slowly using a soothing voice. Do not chase the kittens – this will elicit the predator/prey response and trust will be lost. If one kitten remains wild or starts to regress, separate that kitten from the rest of the litter by placing the kitten back in the crate in a different room and start over with periodic handling.

4. Exposure to other humans and cats- If the feral kittens can be around another calm, friendly cat, it will help the training process. Kittens are “copycats” and will follow the tame cat's behavior. The kittens may be more likely to approach a cat that is purring while petted. When the kittens can be trusted to not bite, encourage other people to handle them often. Because feral cats have a limited ability to trust, they bond with just one person. Exposing them to several other people might help them to socialize, and that will help with the adjustment to the adoptive home.

Caring for Orphaned Kittens

Kittens that have been orphaned require special care. The foster parent needs to perform all of the tasks the mother would have performed such as feeding, cleaning, nurturing, and socializing the babies.

What the foster parent will need:

- Crate or box
- Towels for bedding
- Soft wash cloths or cloth diapers for cleaning
- KMR Milk Replacer for Kittens
- Small syringes
- Bottles and nipples
- Bottle brush to clean bottles and nipples
- Heating pad or heating disc
- Pie tin or low sided feeding dishes
- Low-sided litter box
- Cat Country cat litter
- Kitchen scale
- Weight chart

Keeping Kittens Warm - Kittens should be nested in a crate or box with a heat source (heating pad or disc) under most of the container but allowing a space for the kitten to crawl away from the heat source if it is too hot.

Feeding Kittens - Orphaned kittens require a special kitten formula called KMR. It must be mixed precisely to avoid malnutrition and digestive disorders. KMR should be mixed 1 part powdered formula to 2 parts warm water. The temperature of the formula should be warm enough to be palatable but not so hot that it burns the kitten's mouth – usually about body temperature. The milk can be tested by sprinkling a few drops on the wrist. The hole in the nipple should be big enough for the formula to drip out when the bottle is turned upside down. If the milk comes easily, the kittens won't tire while eating. To bottle feed the kitten, set the back legs on the lap of the person feeding and front paws on the hand with the bottle. The paws can knead the palm while the kitten sucks, just like when they nurse. The kittens might scratch during a feeding, so it might be helpful to trim their claws. Sometimes it is helpful to direct the kitten's head while it suckles. Do not put kittens on their backs to eat – it can cause them to aspirate the milk and will potentially cause pneumonia. As the kittens get older, they will reach toward the bottle with their front paws while they stand on their back legs. They are sometimes quite frantic and disorganized when they start drinking. Be persistent with positioning the kitten correctly and offering the nipple at the front of the kitten's mouth. Position the bottle slightly tilted so that the milk doesn't rush out but also so that the kitten doesn't swallow air. If they suck faster than they can swallow, milk will come out of their nose. Remove the nipple to calm the kitten and resume feeding when the kitten is ready. When the kitten acts full, gently stroke the belly to elicit a burp, much like you would a baby.

Mixed KMR formula should be used in 24 hours. Ideally, formula is mixed fresh for each feeding. Formula that is contaminated with cat saliva from a previous feeding can

harbor bacteria and should be discarded. Formula left at room temperature for more than an hour is a breeding ground for bacteria. If it is impractical to mix formula several times during the day, refrigerate the unused portion of formula after a feeding and warm it with warm tap water before the next feeding. Do not use hot water or the microwave to warm the formula – it may get too hot or have hot spots in the milk. Kittens 1-7 days old need to be fed every 2-3 hours 24 hours a day. After the first week, they should be fed every 3-4 hours around the clock. At two weeks, they can sleep 8 hours at night if they are fed every 3-5 hours during the day. Kittens require a total of about 2 tablespoons of KMR for every 4 ounces of body weight. Therefore, if a kitten weighs 8 ounces he should be fed a total of 4 tablespoons of milk over a 24 hour period.

Kittens will need to be awoken to feed even though they might sleep during the feeding. A kitten can starve if feedings are missed. A kitten with a mother will alternately nurse and sleep but an orphaned kitten does not have this luxury. When a kitten is full, the belly will look rounded. Most will stop sucking when they are full. Some kittens will over eat, so be cautious about the volume given. Newborn kittens usually weigh about 90gms. They should gain 7-10gms per day. Recording a weight every other day can be helpful in demonstrating a consistent weight gain and can be a guide for how much milk to offer. Realize that, as kittens grow, they will need a little more milk each day. To clean the bottles and nipples after feeding use a bottle brush with dish soap and hot water and allow to air dry.

Stimulating Kittens to Pee and Poop - Young kittens need to be stimulated to pee and poop. Use warm water and a soft cloth or cotton balls to gently stroke the kittens belly, genitalia, and anus. This task should be done after feedings. The mother cat would normally do this by licking while she nurses. Care should be taken to dry and warm the kitten after cleaning. Orphaned kittens may only poop every couple of days. Be aware that KMR can cause constipation and the kitten may need an enema if the belly becomes hard and distended. Keep the mouth and eyes free of formula and foreign matter by cleaning with warm water and a clean soft cloth. Always return the kittens to a heat source when finished feeding and cleaning. Bedding will need to be changed often to keep it clean and dry. Keeping the kittens well fed, clean, and dry will help keep them healthy and emotionally content.

Transitioning to Solid Food - Weaning a kitten from bottle feeding is a gradual process. At about 4 weeks, start offering a gruel made of kitten formula and canned cat food or Babycat dry food. As they accept it, increase the amount of canned food each day. At first, offer it on fingers or a spoon. When they learn to take it well, offer it in a shallow dish like a pie plate. Gradually increase the amount of food in the pie tin and decrease the bottle feedings. At about 6 weeks of age, kittens will start to eat dry kibble kitten food.

Sick Kittens - Kittens are very vulnerable to illness. If a kitten appears to be ill, medical attention should be immediate. Dehydration kills a kitten quickly but can be quickly remedied. Please note the guide under “Veterinary Care” for contacting the veterinarian.

Socialization - Orphaned kittens should not be fostered by themselves. At least two kittens fostered together bond and learn appropriate social skills from each other.

Fostering a Pregnant Cat or a Mother Cat and Her Kittens

The first requirement for fostering a pregnant cat is to provide a private place for her to deliver the kittens. She will prefer a quiet, dark, contained area. A large dog crate nestled into a closet with the door open only far enough for her to get in would be perfect. If she is allowed the run of a large room, she might hide the kittens and it can be very difficult to find them. Provide plenty of soft bedding for a nest. As always, food, water, and a litter box need to be available and clean at all times. Because a pregnant or nursing cat needs extra calories, feed her kitten food. The cat may show signs that she is about to deliver by howling and pacing and she may even try to escape. Most cats have no problems delivering kittens and they need no human intervention. If she delivers without problem and seems to be nursing well, do not disturb her or the babies for a few days. Assess the health of the kittens after the first few days. They should feel plump and warm.

Call MR for the following concerns:

- She has contractions or dark green or bloody discharge but does not produce kittens within a couple hours.
- She delivers the kittens but is not interested in feeding or caring for them.
- The kittens appear skinny or have a low body temperature.

Unsupervised children should not be allowed to handle the kittens until they are about 4 weeks old. Adults should handle and examine the kittens daily after they are a week old. Use extreme caution with a mother cat. Mother cats can be unpredictable in their attempt to protect their babies.

Offering a bottle to nursing kittens should only be done with the advice of MR. The mother's milk is obviously the most nutritious food for the kittens and supplementing with formula can interfere with the mother's milk supply. A foster parent can assess weight gain by keeping a weight record. Record the weight every couple days. Kittens should gain 7-10 grams per day.

The Process for Adoption

Cats are ready for adoption when they:

- Are healthy and fully recovered from surgery and illness.
- Are weaned from their mother.
- Are over 2 ½ pounds or 9 weeks old and spayed or neutered.
- Have been successfully socialized.
- There is room at an adoption facility.

After cats are spay/neutered, vaccinated, and tested for feline diseases, they are ready for their "forever home". The foster cats should be returned to MR, which will decide if they are to be held at the rescue center or if they should go to a different adoption facility.

Adoption events are generally held monthly. The foster parent can bring cats into Missy's Rescue for just the day or the weekend of these events then take them back to the foster home to spend the night in familiar surroundings. Cats are sometimes advertised for adoption on Petfinder.com. Sometimes foster parents find people interested in adopting their foster cat. If that is the case, the potential adoptive parent must be screened by MR and all fees must be paid to MR before the cat leaves MR or the foster parents care. Foster parents should not place the foster cats with adoptive families before the adoption process is complete nor can the adoption process start to take place until after the animal has been spayed or neutered, micro chipped and has recuperated. Only at that point should the foster parent and the prospective adopter make arrangements to complete the adoption. Potential adopters can be very excited and over zealous about wanting to take their cat home. Trying to rush things is not in the best interest of the cat. Also at no time should a foster parent ever feel pushed into allowing potential adopters to come to their home. It is your home and your time and should be at your discretion. Also we will never give out your phone number to adopters without your permission.

Remember to return dishes and litter boxes borrowed from MR when the cat is returned to MR if you won't be fostering for awhile. Everything should be sanitized with a 10% bleach solution and ready to be used by another foster cat. If you are just taking a short break just keep them safe.

MR is seeking "forever homes" for the rescued cats. The criteria for an adoptive parent are:

- The cat will be indoors only.
- The adopter can make a 15 – 20 year commitment.
- There are no people with allergies to cats in the household.
- The adopter lives in an apartment or house that allows pets.
- Kittens are ideally adopted in pairs unless there is a suitable companion pet already in the home for the kitten to play with. In special cases (very unlikely), MR may make an exception to this rule.

It is possible for foster parents to adopt their foster cats. They must meet the criteria mentioned above and pay all applicable fees. Foster parents always have the first choice to adopt the cats they foster.

Every year we come across other things that should be mentioned.

1. Foster parents cannot foster out their kittens without MR approval.
2. Foster parents & volunteers cannot accept animals into MR without prior approval. We have over 200 foster parents and volunteers and a lot of us come across situations everyday. Our first concern is for those animals within our rescue, the second are the general public's animals and lastly the individual rescue persons rescue animals. Unfortunately just because a person fosters or volunteers with us, does not insure that we can take all the rescue situations they come across.