

Jefferson County Humane Society

Dog Foster Care Manual

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Section 1: Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering pets for Jefferson County Humane Society. By opening up your home to foster pets, you're not only helping to save lives, you're providing the individual attention and love these dogs desperately need.

Once you have completed your foster application we will get in touch with you to sign you up to go over this manual and answer any questions you have about the program.

Our dog foster program is designed to help adult dogs get a second chance at finding a home — a chance they may not have received at a shelter. Many of the dogs who need foster homes require extra care and attention, which shelters often don't have the staff or resources to provide. But in a loving foster home, every dog can get the individual attention he or she needs to find a forever family.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the dogs including feeding according to size and needs, exercise according to energy levels, and lots of play time and positive socialization.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping many different types of dogs find the families they've been longing for.

Frequently asked questions

What do foster families need to provide?

Foster families need to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment for their foster dogs
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach dogs positive family and pet relationships
- Lots of exercise and positive stimulation to help them develop into great dogs

How much time do I need to spend with a foster dog?

As much time as you can. With that said, the amount of time will vary depending on the energy level and needs of the dog you are fostering. It is ideal to spend around two hours a day exercising and playing with your foster dog to ensure that he or she receives adequate socialization and stimulation.

Can I foster dogs even if I have a full-time job?

Yes. If you have a full-time job, we will match you with a dog who may be OK alone during the workday. You would then just need to provide ample exercise before or after you go to work.

Can I foster a dog if I don't have a fenced yard?

Yes. Even if you do have a fenced yard, we request that you supervise all outdoor activities with the foster dog. And we ask that you always keep him or her on a leash when you're on walks.

How long will the dog need to be in foster care?

Ideally, foster dogs stay in their assigned foster homes until they get adopted.

Will I need to give medicine to my foster dog?

Almost all of the dogs that we have in our foster program are rescued from shelters and have been exposed to shelter illnesses. While we do our best to ensure that we are aware of all the conditions that a foster dog may have prior to going home, many illnesses have incubation periods, meaning symptoms can arise after you take a dog home. So while some dogs do not require any medicine, others may. If your foster dog needs medications, we can show you how to administer them before you take the animal home.

Can I let my foster dog play with my personal pets?

There are a few guidelines that we ask foster families to adhere to regarding their personal pets. While foster dogs playing with other pets is often fine, we advise that you consult with your veterinarian before fostering to ensure that all of your personal pets are healthy and up-to-date on all vaccines.

What if I want to adopt my foster dog?

If you want to adopt a foster dog, you will need to complete an adoption application and follow the full adoption process.

Who will take care of my foster dog if I need to go out of town?

If you have travel plans while you are fostering a dog you will need to contact us so we can make arrangements to bring the dog back to the shelter while you are out of town.

What if my foster dog is not working out?

You are not required to continue to foster a dog if you feel it's not working out.

Section 2: Preparing for your foster dog

When you take your foster dog home, he may be frightened or unsure about what's happening, so it's important not to overwhelm him. Prepare a special area for the foster dog to help ease his adjustment into a new home environment. Sometimes it is better to confine the foster dog to a small room or area at first, to let him adjust before giving him free rein in your home. This area should be large enough for an appropriately sized crate for the dog and should allow the dog access to his food and water dishes and toys. We will work with you on the best place to house your foster dog.

During the first couple of weeks, minimize the people and pet introductions to your foster dog, so that she is only meeting immediate family and your personal pets. If you have other pets at home, it is especially important to give your foster dog a space of her own where she can stay while getting used to all the new sounds and smells. Don't leave your foster dog unattended in your home with your personal pets until you are comfortable that all of the animals can interact safely.

Supplies you'll need

We will provide you with any supplies that you may need. However, we greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for your foster dog. Here's what you'll need to help your foster dog make a smooth transition to living in your home:

- At least one bowl for dry food and one for water: Stainless steel or ceramic work best.
- A supply of dry dog food: All dogs are fed dry food unless a special diet is needed. We will supply food.
- A collar with an ID tag and a leash: Even though foster dogs are microchipped, they still need an ID tag. We will supply these.
- A soft place to sleep: Old towels or blankets work well.
- A crate: The crate should be large enough for the dog to stand up and turn around in, but not much bigger than that. We will supply a crate if necessary.
- Dog treats: Giving treats is a good way to help train and build a positive relationship with your foster dog.
- Dog toys: Make sure the toys are durable and appropriate for the size of your foster dog.
- Grooming supplies: A well-groomed dog has a better chance of getting adopted.

Dog-proofing your home

Foster dogs come from a shelter environment, and even if they have previously lived in a home, we don't always know how they will react in a new home. So, before bringing home a new foster dog, you'll want to survey the area where you are going to keep your foster dog. Remove anything that would be unsafe or undesirable for the dog to chew on, and latch securely any cupboards and doors that the foster dog could get into. People food and chemicals can be very harmful if consumed by dogs, so please store them in a place that the foster dog cannot access.

Never underestimate your foster dog's abilities. Here are some additional tips for dog-proofing your home:

- Make sure that all trash cans are covered or latched and keep them inside a closet. (Don't forget the bathroom trash bins.)
- Keep the toilet lids closed.
- Keep both people and pet food out of reach and off all counter tops.
- Move house plants or secure them. Some dogs like to play with them and may knock them over.
- Make sure aquariums or cages that house small animals, like hamsters or fish, are securely out of reach of your foster dog.
- Remove medications, lotions or cosmetics from any accessible surfaces.
- Move and secure all electrical and phone wires out of reach. Dogs may chew on or get tangled in them.
- Pick up any clothing items that have buttons or strings, which can be harmful to your foster dog if consumed.
- Relocate knickknacks or valuables that your foster dog could knock down.

Section 3: Bringing home your foster dog

Taking care of a foster dog requires a commitment from you to make sure the dog is happy and healthy. Thank you so much for opening your heart and your home to these dogs who desperately need your help. Without you, we could not save as many as we do.

Choosing a foster dog

We will work with you to select a foster dog who meets your specific requirements. We will always do our best to match you with a dog who fits with your lifestyle and schedule.

When we have decided on a foster dog, an appointment will be scheduled so you can pick up the dog and any supplies that you will need.

Dog introductions

If you have personal pets who are dogs, you'll want to introduce them to your foster dog one at a time and supervise their interactions at first. It's a good idea to introduce them outside in a large yard or on a walk, keeping all the dogs on leash and allowing them enough space to get adjusted to one another. If you can, it works best to schedule a time for your personal dogs to meet the foster dog at the shelter before you take the foster dog home.

Cat introductions

We can't ensure that a foster dog has been "cat-tested," so if you have personal pets who are cats, you'll need to make the introduction to the foster dog carefully and safely. Start by keeping them separated at first. You can either keep your cats in a separate room (equipped with food, water, litter boxes and beds) or confine your foster dog to a room. Over a one- to two-week period, let the dog and cats smell each other through the door, but don't allow them contact with one another. Exchanging blankets or towels between the dog's area and the cats' area will help them get used to each other's smells.

After a week or two, do the face-to-face introduction. Keeping your foster dog on leash, allow your cat out in the same area. (If you have more than one cat, introduce one cat at a time.) Do not allow the foster dog to charge or run directly up to the cat. Try to distract the dog as best you can so that the cat has the chance to approach without fear. Watch the body language of each animal closely and don't continue the interaction if either pet becomes over-stimulated or aggressive. The idea is to keep the interactions positive, safe and controlled. Finally, never leave your foster dog unsupervised with any cats in your home.

Children and dogs

Since we don't always know a foster dog's history or tolerance level for different types of people and activities, please teach your children how to act responsibly and respectfully around your foster dog. We will do our best to place you with an appropriate animal for your home situation, but you should still supervise all interactions between children and your foster dog. Key things to remind your children:

- Always leave the foster dog alone when he/she is eating, chewing or sleeping. Some dogs may nip or bite if bothered while eating or startled while sleeping.
- Do not take away a toy or prized possession from the foster dog.
- Do not tease the foster dog.
- Don't chase the foster dog around the house or run quickly around the foster dog; it may scare him.
- Pick up all your toys. Some dogs may not be able to tell the difference between what is theirs and what belongs to the kids.

Do not allow young children to walk the foster dog because they may not be strong enough or experienced enough to handle encounters with other dogs or cats who cross their path.

Section 4: Daily care

Feeding

All foster dogs should be fed a diet of dry dog food, unless otherwise specified by us. Feed your foster dog once or twice daily; the amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster dog. Make sure the dog always has access to fresh, clean water.

You can give your foster dog treats of any kind (unless he/she has known allergies, of course); giving treats helps you and your foster dog to bond with each other. Most dogs like to chew on things, so try Greenies, Nylabones or Dentabones. Keep in mind, though, that not all dogs like to share, so only give these treats when your foster dog is confined to his/her own area.

When you first take your foster dog home, take care not to overwhelm her with too many new experiences all at once. Sometimes, too much stimulation can cause a dog to behave unexpectedly toward a person or animal, which is why it's a good idea to keep introductions to a minimum during the first couple of weeks after you bring your foster dog home. It's also important to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings, potty breaks and walk times. Dogs take comfort in having a routine they can count on.

Also, on a daily basis, be aware of your foster dog's appetite and energy level. If she's not eating well or seems listless, something may be wrong medically. You might want to record your observations to make it easier to notice any health issues.

House-training

It's unlikely that your foster dog will be perfectly house-trained when you take him or her home. Most of the dogs in the foster program have lived in a shelter for a while, At the very least, be prepared for an adjustment period until your foster dog gets used to your schedule.

Because a dog has a better chance of being adopted if she is house-trained, please help your foster dog to perfect this skill. Take your foster dog outside to go potty multiple times per day (3-6 times daily, depending on age). Initially, you may need to take her out more frequently to remind her where the door to the outside is and to reassure her that you will take her out for potty breaks. Most dogs will give cues — such as standing near the door or sniffing the ground and walking in small circles — to indicate that they need to go out. Keep the dog in a crate or confined when you are not available to supervise her indoors.

If your foster dog has an accident inside the house, don't discipline or punish her. It will only teach her to fear and mistrust you. Clean up all accidents with an enzymatic cleaner. Nature's Miracle and Simple Solution are two products containing natural enzymes that tackle tough stains and odors and remove them permanently.

Crate training

Crate training, done in a positive way, can be an effective component of house-training. A crate can be a safe place for your foster dog to have "down time" and can also limit his access to the entire house until he knows the rules. A crate should never be used as a form of punishment and a dog should never be left in a crate for an extended period of time.

You can prevent problems with crate training by setting your foster dog up for success. He should only associate good things with the crate, so start by putting treats and/or toys in the crate and encouraging him to go in. Some dogs warm up to the crate slowly. If he is afraid to go in, place a treat in the crate as far as he is willing to go. After he takes the treat, place another treat a little farther back in the crate. Keep going until he is eating treats at the very back, then feed him his next meal in the crate with the door open, so that he can walk in and out at will.

Crate training a fearful dog can take days, so be patient and encouraging. If a crate is properly introduced and used, your foster dog will happily enter and settle down. For more details, read

Grooming

A clean and well-groomed dog has a better chance of getting adopted, so bathe your foster dog as needed and brush him regularly if he has longer hair or requires more frequent grooming. Contact us if you feel that your foster dog needs to see a professional groomer. If you are comfortable with it, you can trim his nails. But please be careful because you can cause pain and bleeding if you trim the nails too short.

Mental stimulation and exercise

Depending on your foster dog's age and energy level, he or she should get at least two 30-minute play sessions or walks with you per day. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, rope toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster dog prefers. Remember to discourage the dog from playing with your hands, since mouthing won't be a desirable behavior to adopters.

Safety requirements

Foster dogs need to live indoors, not outside. Please do not leave your foster dog outside unsupervised, even if you have a fenced yard. We ask that you supervise your foster dog when he is outside at all times to ensure that he doesn't escape or have any negative interactions with other people or animals. Your foster dog is only allowed to be off-leash in an enclosed backyard that is completely fenced in.

When walking with your foster dog, please keep her on leash at all times. This means that your foster dog is not allowed to go to off-leash dog parks or other off-leash dog areas. We do not know how your foster dog will act in these situations, or how other dogs will react, and we need to ensure that all animals are safe at all times. In addition, we don't know if the other dogs they encounter are vaccinated appropriately or carry diseases, so it is best if your foster dog does not meet any unknown dogs. Having recently come from a shelter setting, foster dogs can be vulnerable health-wise.

Also, your foster dog cannot ride in the bed of an open pickup truck. When you're transporting foster dogs, please keep them inside the vehicle.

Section 5: Helping your foster dog get adopted

As you get to know your foster dog, we ask that you stay in contact with us so that we can update the foster animal's biography online to reflect accurate information about the dog's preferences and quirks. Some people write their own biography for their foster dogs, which we encourage, though they may be edited. We also welcome any quality photos that you take of your foster dog in your home. Please send the info about your foster dog and photos to jfcountypets@gmail.com.

We take our dogs to Petsmart in Topeka on most Saturdays and welcome our fosters to bring their foster dogs and join us.

Section 6: Medical and emergency protocols

If you are fostering a dog who is on medications, please make sure that he/she gets all prescribed doses. Do not end medication early for any reason. If your foster animal has not responded to prescribed medications after five days (or in the time instructed by a veterinarian), please contact us.

Veterinary care

We provide all medical care for our foster animals. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster dog's well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for foster dogs.

If your foster dog needs to go to the veterinarian, please notify us and we will schedule the appointment and make arrangements to take the animal to the vet.

Signs of illness and what to do next

Dogs generally do a good job of masking when they don't feel well, so determining if your foster dog is under the weather will require diligent observation of the dog's daily activity and appetite levels. It's a good idea to keep track of these levels in a journal. You'll also want to record any of the following symptoms, which could be signs of illness.

Eye discharge. It is normal for dogs to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if your foster dog has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, you need to contact us to schedule a vet appointment.

Coughing and nasal discharge. Coughing can be common if your foster dog is pulling on leash. If the coughing becomes more frequent, however, watch for discharge coming from the nose. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed, but check with us to find out if a vet appointment is necessary.

If the discharge becomes colored, make a vet appointment because the dog may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the dog's breathing. If the dog seems to struggle to breathe or starts wheezing, call us immediately. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the dog's eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating.

Loss of appetite. Your foster dog may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. But if the dog hasn't eaten after 24 hours, please us. Also, if the dog has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, call us and we will set up a vet appointment. Please do not change the dog's diet without contacting the foster department. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

Lethargy. The activity level of your foster dog will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log and journal will help you notice whether your foster dog is less active than he normally is. If the dog cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it's an emergency, so start the emergency contact protocol.

Dehydration. Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the dog's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the dog is dehydrated. Please call us to schedule a vet appointment.

Vomiting. Sometimes dogs will eat too quickly and will immediately throw up their food. Occasional vomiting isn't cause for alarm, but if your foster dog has thrown up two or more times in one day, please notify the foster department. It could be indicative of infection.

Pain or strain while urinating. When a dog first goes into a foster home, he or she may not urinate due to stress. If the dog hasn't urinated in more than 24 hours, however, please contact us. Also, if you notice the dog straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact us immediately because it may be indicative of an infection or an obstruction.

Diarrhea. It is important to monitor your foster dog's pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking a dog home, most likely caused by stress and a change in food. If your foster dog has liquid stool, however, please contact the foster department so that an appointment can be scheduled to ensure that the dog doesn't need medications. Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the dog, so be proactive about contacting the foster department. If your foster dog has bloody or mucoid diarrhea, please contact us immediately.

Frequent ear scratching. Your foster dog may have a bacterial or yeast infection (or, in rare cases, ear mites) if she scratches her ears often and/or shakes her head frequently. These conditions can be treated by a veterinarian, so please call us.

Swollen, irritated ears. If your foster dog has irritated, swollen or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, he may have an ear infection called otitis. This type of infection is more common in dogs who have very floppy ears, like basset hounds or Labradors. These dogs may need to have their ears cleaned more often to ensure that the infection does not re-occur.

Hair loss. Please contact the foster department if you notice any hair loss on your foster dog. It is normal for dogs to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm, dermatitis or the early stages of mange. It is important to check your foster dog's coat every day.

If your foster dog is displaying one or more of these signs, please contact us.

Criteria for emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a dog? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you would call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of parvovirus: bloody diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, high fever (above 103.5 degrees)
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry mucous membranes, weakness, vomiting, tenting of the skin (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours

If your foster dog is displaying one or more of these signs, please contact us immediately at (785)945-6600 or (785)766-3838

Section 7: Behavior support

One of your goals as a foster parent is to help prepare your foster dog for living successfully in a home. So, we ask that you help your foster dog to develop good habits and skills through the use of positive reinforcement training, which builds a bond of trust between you and your foster pet. The basic idea is to reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.

You must not punish a dog for a behavior that you find undesirable because punishment is ineffective at eliminating the behavior. If the dog is doing something undesirable, distract him or her before the behavior occurs. It is also important for every human in the foster home to stick to the rules established for your foster dogs, which will help them to learn faster.

When interacting with your foster dog, refrain from wrestling or engaging in play that encourages the dog to be mouthy and “play bite” on your body. Also, try to refrain from inviting dogs up on the couch or bed. Not all adopters find this habit acceptable.

Some foster dogs will have behavioral issues, which we are aware of at the time of their rescue. Some of these behavior challenges are separation anxiety, destruction of property, fear issues or aggression toward other animals. We will only place dogs with behavioral issues with a person who feels comfortable working with the dog on his/her particular issues. We will provide that person with all the necessary information so that proper care and training can be given to the foster dog.

If you feel unable to manage any behavior that your foster dog is exhibiting, please contact us to discuss the issue. We will guide you and help in every way that we can.

Thank you so much for opening up your heart and your home to foster pets.