



Foster Care Essentials for Cats

WVC Animal Shelter

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This manual is supplementary to the **Foster Care Manual**. Please ensure that you have completely read and understood **the Foster Care Manual and Foster Agreement**, as it includes important information about the WVC Animal Shelter foster program that applies to you as a foster caregiver.

SECTION 1: PREPARING FOR A FOSTER CAT

Taking home a new foster cat is exciting! Not only does it prevent cats from overstaying in an animal shelter, but it also adds value to a foster cats' social, emotional, and physical well-being, and provides valuable information to interested adopters looking for a new cat to add to their family. Keep in mind, though, that humans can see the benefits of foster care immediately, but foster cats may initially be unsure or even about what exactly is happening.

In this section, we help prepare you and your home for the foster cat, so you are ready to go. Let's get started.

Supplies you'll need:

We greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for fostering a cat. Here's what you'll need to help the foster cat make a smooth transition to living in your home:

- At least one bowl for dry food and one for water and one for wet cat food: Stainless steel or ceramic tend to work best.
- A supply of wet and dry cat food: All cats are fed dry food unless a special diet is needed. It's also important to include wet food because it is higher in protein and hydrating. Wet cat food should be fed once a day minimum for cats over 1 years old.
- A soft place to sleep: You don't need to invest a lot of money in bedding. Cats generally get creative and find a comfy spot. Just put out blankets or towels in the areas where you prefer the cat to sleep.
- Uncovered litter box: Be mindful of the cat's size when selecting a litter box.
- Litter: The shelter uses pine pellet litter, but clumping can be used if preferred unless the cat requires an alternative type of litter and it's recommended to avoid scented litter as this can cause breathing issues.
- Scratching posts or trays: Try different types (e.g., cardboard, carpet) to see the cat's preference. Providing places to scratch helps deter cats from scratching on furniture.
- Cat treats: Giving treats is a good way to build a deeper bond with the foster cat.
- Cat toys: Cats can make playthings of everyday items, such as a cardboard box or a crumpled piece of paper. You can also purchase cat toys they may enjoy.

The shelter will provide basic supplies as needed but a supply checkout will need to be signed, and the equipment will need to be returned after each foster cat so the shelter can clean the equipment and use it for the next foster animal.

5 Essential Resources That Each Cat Needs

1. **Safe Places:** Each cat should have their own hiding spots, high-sided cat beds, and elevated perches.
2. **Resources:** Provide one litter box, water bowl, food bowl, high-sided bed, and scratching post per cat, plus one extra, in a private but accessible space. Each resource should be visually separated from the others.
3. **Simulated Hunting and Play Opportunities:** Engage your cat's hunting instincts by using a variety of toys for playtime and puzzle feeders for mealtimes, which helps reduce boredom and prevent undesirable behaviors.

4. **Positive Human Interaction:** Provide regular, positive, and predictable social interactions with your foster cat.

5. **Respect Sensory Needs:** Use feline synthetic pheromones (e.g., Feliway Optimum); avoid loud, sudden noises; prevent exposure to undesirable smells (e.g., perfumes, strong-scented cleaning products).

First 48 hours

You have the foster cat, so now what? Here are some pointers for the first 48 hours:

- Set up the foster cat in a small area (a bathroom or small bedroom) and gradually open up the rest of your home. Letting foster cats have the full run of your home in the beginning can be overwhelming for them.
 - Food can be the way to a cat's heart. Make sure you have extra-delicious treats and wet food on hand.
 - Be mindful of the cat's body language and allow the cat time to settle in and adjust to the new environment. How long that takes will vary, depending on the cat's confidence level, but it's important to be patient and let the cat set the pace.
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Cat-proofing your home:

Before bringing the foster cat home, there are a couple things you can do to cat-proof your home to help keep the cat safe and prevent your valuables from being damaged. Here are some tips to help keep your foster cat from getting into mischief:

- Relocate any knickknacks or breakable items that a cat could knock down.
- Move houseplants out of the cat's reach. Many houseplants can be toxic to cats.
- Protect any aquariums or cages that house small animals. Keep in mind that cats are hunters by nature.
- Move electrical and phone wires out of reach. Cats may chew on or get tangled in them.
- Keep the toilet seat down and keep the lids on trash cans and on food containers. Cats love to explore.

****Remember: Cats are clever. Never underestimate their abilities. ****

Resident pets

WVC Animal Shelter strongly recommends that you keep your resident pets separate from foster animals for the health and safety of all the animals. Please be aware that cats often come to WVC Animal Shelter with unknown histories and if your cats are young or not fully vaccinated, they may be at risk of being exposed to a disease. In these cases, we recommend that you wait 10-14 days before introducing the foster cat to your resident pets. If one of your pets becomes ill or injured, WVC Animal Shelter cannot provide medical care for your pet.

If you do decide to introduce your resident pet to the foster cat, we have some guidance on the best steps to take to keep everyone safe and promote positive interactions. (See below).

Cat-to-cat introductions

Even social cats need a **slow, positive introduction**. Do not rush—moving too quickly can create long-term stress or conflict. Only move to the next step when **all cats are relaxed and comfortable**.

Before the Foster Arrives

- Set up a **separate transition room** (bathroom or spare bedroom) with food, water, litter box, bedding, toys, scratching post, wet food, and a safe hiding spot.
- Make sure resident cats have access to their usual resources and a comfortable space away from the transition room.

Step 1: Settle In

- Bring the foster cat directly to the transition room in a covered carrier so the cats do not see each other right away.
- Give the foster time to adjust. Keep resident cats away from the door if the foster seems fearful. Stay at this stage until the foster is eating, using the litter box, and exploring the room comfortably. This may take several days.

Step 2: Exchange Scents

- Once the foster is settled, swap bedding, toys, or soft items between cats each day.
- Wait until the cats can investigate the new scent without stress before moving forward.

Signs of stress: hissing, growling, pacing, avoiding the item, litter-box accidents, or changes in normal behavior.

Step 3: Closed-Door Play

- Encourage calm, short play sessions on opposite sides of the closed-door using toys or treats. Keep sessions positive and end while the cats are still interested.
- If either cat hisses or growls, calmly end the session and give them more time apart. ***Never punish a cat for showing stress.***

Step 4: Supervised Home Exploration

- Place resident cats in a separate, preferred room with treats and toys. Allow the foster to briefly explore shared areas, then return them to the transition room.
- Exploration time can gradually increase over several days if there are no signs of stress or fear.

Step 5: Visual Introductions

- Allow the cats to see each other through a secure barrier, such as a screen door, tall pet gate, glass door, or partially covered carrier (only if the cat is already comfortable in the carrier).
- Keep visits short, supervised, and positive with treats or play. If tension appears, separate them and return to scent or closed-door activities for a few more days.

Step 6: Supervised Time Together

- When the cats are calm at the barrier, begin short, supervised visits in a larger room. Use treats, wand toys, or calm play to build positive associations.
- Keep a towel, cardboard, pillow, or blanket nearby to block their view if tension develops. **Do not reach between stressed cats**, as redirected biting can occur.
- Increase time together gradually over several days. Continue supervision until the cats can comfortably share space without signs of stress.

Dog-to-cat introductions

Introducing a Foster Cat to Your Dog

Some dogs can safely live with cats, while others cannot. Even if a dog has lived with cats before, each new dog-and-cat match is different. Go slowly, supervise closely, and do not force interaction.

The goal is not necessarily for them to become friends—it is for both pets to feel safe and able to calmly share the home.

Never leave the them alone together.

Watch Their Body Language

Move forward only when both pets are calm and relaxed.

Pet	Signs of Comfort	Signs to slow down or separate
Dog	Loose body, soft eyes, responds to name, takes treats, can look away from cat	Stiff body, hard staring, stalking, whining, barking, lunging, chasing, or ignoring
Cat	Normal posture, eating, exploring, resting, ears forward or neutral	Pinned ears, swishing tail, hiding, hissing, growling, raised fur, or refusing food

A dog can seriously injure a cat in seconds. Do not allow a fixated dog to get close to the cat. A dog that is intensely focused on the cat may have a strong prey drive.

Step 1: Create Separate Safe Spaces

Before the foster cat arrives, set up a cat-only area with:

- Food and water
- Litter box
- Bed and toys.
- Hiding places
- Vertical space, such as a cat tree or shelf
- A secure door, tall gate, or other barrier
- The cat should always have a safe way to get away from the dog. Do not allow the dog access to the litter box, cat food, or the cat's resting areas.
- For the first few days, keep the foster cat and dog fully separated while the cat settles in and learns the household routine.

Step 2: Introduce Scents First

- Once the foster cat is settled, swap bedding, toys, or soft items between the cat and dog each day.
- Feed meals or offer treats on opposite sides of a closed door.
- Keep the experience positive and low-pressure.
- Let the pets become familiar with each other before they meet through a barrier.
- If either pet avoids the door, refuses food, or becomes tense, increase the distance and give them more time.
- Wait until the cats can investigate the new scent without stress before moving forward.
- **Signs of stress:** hissing, growling, pacing, avoiding the item, litter-box accidents, or changes in normal behavior.

Step 3: Controlled Viewing Through a Barrier

- When both pets are comfortable with each other's scent, allow short visual introductions through a secure barrier, such as a tall pet gate, screen, cracked door with a second barrier, or glass door.
- **Always** keep the dog on leash.
- Start far enough away that the dog can notice the cat but still respond to their name and take treats.
- Reward the dog for calm behavior, looking away from the cat, or checking in with you.
- Allow the cat to choose whether to approach or leave.
- Keep sessions short—usually just a few minutes at first.

- If the dog stares, stiffens, barks, lunges, or stops responding to you, calmly move the dog farther away and end the session. Return to scent work and try again later.

Step 4: Teach the Dog to Look Away

- Help the dog learn that calm behavior around the cat is rewarding.
- When the dog notices the cat:
 - Say “yes” or use a clicker.
 - Give the dog a high-value treat.
 - Reward the dog again if they look back at you or turn away from the cat.
 - Practice at a distance where the dog can remain relaxed. If the dog cannot take treats or respond to their name, they are too close and need more space.

Step 5: Supervised Time in the Same Room

- Only begin in-room introductions when the dog is calm at the barrier and can reliably focus on you.
- Have two adults present, one focused on the dog and one on the cat.
- Keep the dog on a loose leash.
- Let the cat enter, leave, hide, or observe freely. Never carry or force the cat toward the dog.
- Use treats, a mat, or a familiar cue such as “sit,” “down,” or “place” to help the dog stay calm.
- Keep the first meetings very short and end on a positive note.
- Do not allow chasing, rough play, cornering, or prolonged staring. If either pet becomes tense, calmly separate them and return to earlier steps for several days.

Special Considerations

- Multiple dogs: Introduce each dog to the cat separately.
- Kittens: Use extra caution. Their quick movements can trigger chasing, even in dogs that are calm around adult cats.
- Puppies: Puppies may accidentally injure a cat through rough play. Use gates, leashes, and active supervision.
- Other rooms or settings: A dog who is calm in one room may chase or stalk a cat in another setting. Continue close supervision in every new setting.
- No unsupervised access: Keep the dog and cat separated whenever no adult is actively watching.

When to Contact the WVC Animal Services Foster Team:

Keep the pets separated and contact the WVC Animal Services foster team if the dog:

- Repeatedly stares, stalks, lunges, or tries to chase the foster cat.
- Cannot be redirected with treats, toys, or cues.
- Has attempted to harm or has harmed a cat.
- Becomes more reactive instead of improving with slow introductions.
- **Do not punish either pet for fear or stress.** Calmly separate them, reduce exposure, and give both animals more time to adjust.
- **If time to adjust isn’t working.** The animals may need to remain separated, or the foster cat can be returned if there is a safety concern and long-term separation is not possible.

**The idea is to keep all animal-to-animal interactions positive, safe, and controlled. **

Children and cats

Cats in our care may have an unknown history, and it can take time to understand their personality, comfort level, and boundaries. Before your foster cat arrives, talk with your children about being calm, patient, and respectful. Helping children understand these expectations can make fostering a safe and enriching experience for everyone.

Important Reminders for Children

1. Give the cat space to adjust.

Cats can be startled by sudden movements, loud voices, or unexpected touching. Let the foster cat sleep, eat, use the litter box, and rest without interruption; especially during their first few days or weeks in the home.

2. Let the cat choose when to interact.

Encourage children to sit or read out loud quietly nearby, allowing the cat to approach when it feels ready. Do not allow children to chase or corner the cat, pull it from hiding places, or reach into its carrier or bed to pet the cat.

3. Use safe, respectful play.

Show children how to use wand toys, balls, or other cat-safe toys. Drag or move a wand toy along the floor to encourage the cat to chase and “hunt.” Keep hands, feet, and fingers away from play so the cat does not learn to bite or scratch people.

4. Pet gently and watch for signals.

Teach children to use gentle strokes on the cat’s head, cheeks, or back. Stop petting if the cat walks away, flicks their tail, flattens their ears, growls, hisses, or swats. These are signs that the cat needs a break.

5. Not every cat likes to be held.

Some cats enjoy being picked up, while others may only tolerate it briefly—or not at all. An adult should always supervise when children are handling the foster cat to make sure the cat is supported properly and allowed to get down when they want.

6. Keep doors and windows secure.

Foster cats may be scared in a new environment and can slip outside quickly. Remind children to check that exterior doors, windows, and screens are closed completely.

7. Always ask an adult for help.

Children should tell an adult if the cat is hiding, not eating, acting scared, hissing, growling, scratching, or seems sick or injured. **Never punish the cat**, give them space and let an adult help.

Emergency Contact Protocol

In any emergency, contact the Foster Team using the phone numbers provided during foster orientation and listed on the Foster Care Contact Sheet. Keep this sheet accessible at all times.

Non-Life-Threatening Emergency:

For urgent concerns that do not appear immediately life-threatening:

1. **Text and call the Foster Team** until you reach a staff member.
2. The Foster Team will assess the situation and direct you to the appropriate veterinary provider.
3. During normal business hours, you may be directed to a local veterinary clinic.
4. After hours, the Foster Team may direct you to one of the following emergency clinics, depending on the time and circumstances:

Sanctuary Veterinary Emergency

801-996-8983
8785 Jordan Valley Way
West Jordan, UT 84088

MedVet

385-341-4444
331 W Bearcat Dr
Salt Lake City UT 84115

Do not take an animal to a veterinary clinic unless directed by the Foster Team, except when the animal is in immediate danger of dying.

Life-Threatening Emergency:

A life-threatening emergency is any condition in which an animal may die or suffer permanent harm without immediate veterinary care. Examples include:

- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours
- Refusal to eat for more than 24 hours, particularly when paired with vomiting, lethargy, diarrhea, dehydration, or other signs of illness.
- A suspected urinary blockage, especially in cats
- Difficulty breathing, labored breathing, or not breathing.
- Unconsciousness or inability to wake the animal.
- Extreme weakness, collapse, inability to stand, or abnormal lethargy.
- Severe dehydration, including dry or pale gums, weakness, vomiting, no urination, or skin tenting.
- Major trauma, such as being hit by a vehicle, dropped, stepped on, or attacked.
- Broken bones or suspected fractures
- A large wound or heavy bleeding that does not stop with firm, direct pressure.
- Cold body temperature or being cold to the touch.

If the Animal Is in Immediate Danger of Dying:

1. **Go immediately to MedVet in Salt Lake City.** Do not wait for a return call before seeking emergency care.
2. **Call and text the Foster Team continuously while traveling and upon arrival** until someone responds.
3. If you have not received a response from the Foster Team within **one hour**, contact the **Animal Services Director** using the contact information on the Foster Care Contact Sheet.

When possible, bring the animal's foster paperwork and provide the veterinary clinic with the Foster Team's contact information.

SECTION 2: DAY-TO-DAY CARE

Having a routine for the foster cat's day-to-day care will help to ensure that the cat is happy, healthy and comfortable.

Feeding

A balanced diet includes both wet and dry cat food, unless otherwise specified by WVC Animal Shelter. Here's some guidance on feeding:

- Always leave out fresh, clean water and dry food.
- Offer the cat 1/4 of a can of wet food once or twice a day.
- Giving treats is a sure way to win the foster cat's heart and encourage bonding with you.
- The WVC Animal Shelter avoids foods without dyes. Dyes can sometimes cause gastrointestinal upset such vomiting or diarrhea.
- If WVC Animal Shelter or a veterinarian recommend different guidelines on feeding, please follow those instructions.

Foster-Friendly Litter Box Basics

A clean, easily accessible litter box helps your foster cat feel safe and can prevent accidents. Because cats prefer privacy and a clean place to use the litter box, please keep the following tips in mind:

How Many Boxes?

- Use one litter box per cat, plus one extra.
- Example: If you have 2 cats, provide 3 boxes.

Where Should They Go?

- Place a litter box in a quiet, low-traffic area with easy access where cats will not feel trapped or cornered.
- Keep boxes away from food and water.
- In homes with multiple floors, place at least one box on each level.
- For multiple cats, put boxes in separate locations—boxes side-by-side may feel like just one box.
- If a cat has an accident, add a box near that area temporarily.

Box Size and Style

- Bigger is usually better. The box should allow the cat to enter, turn around, dig, and eliminate comfortably.
- Large storage totes or concrete mixing trays can work well.
- Senior cats or cats with mobility concerns need a low-sided entry.
- Covered litterboxes can be unpleasant for most cats, and many cats prefer uncovered litterboxes with liners. Although shy cats may prefer a covered litter box, but litter box issues may occur if the litterbox is not kept clean.

Best Litter

- Most cats prefer soft, unscented clumping litter.
- Avoid scented litter, deodorizers, and very dusty or sharp-textured litter, which can bother sensitive cats and people.
- Cats that were previously declawed before coming to the shelter, cats with sore paws, or cats with mobility issues may need a softer litter.

Cleaning

- Scoop at least once daily and add litter as needed.
 - Wash the box every 1–4 weeks with hot water and mild soap only.
 - Do not use strong chemicals or ammonia-based cleaners.
 - If using non-clumping litter, fully replace it at least weekly.
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Grooming

Cats can generally be low-maintenance pets in terms of grooming. They do not require bathing, as they typically clean themselves and they do not enjoy baths. Getting cats acclimated to being brushed is beneficial for their future adopters and for when they get a little older and sometimes have a harder time with grooming themselves. Older cats may have a harder time maintaining their grooming routine, so we recommend brushing older foster cats more often. Contact WVC Animal Shelter if you feel the foster cat needs to see a professional groomer.

We recommend keeping your foster cats claws trimmed. (See below for the Nail Trim Basics). If you are uncomfortable with trimming claws, please feel free to let foster team know so we can assist. The shelter **DOES NOT** condone declawing.

Foster Cat Nail Trim Basics

Nail trims can be stressful, especially for a new foster cat. Go slowly, use treats, and stop before the cat becomes upset. It is okay to trim only one or two nails at a time.

Set Up for Success:

- Work on a non-slip surface such as a towel, rug, or yoga mat.
- Choose a quiet time and have small, high-value treats ready.
- Use sharp cat nail clippers or a quiet nail grinder. Dull clippers can pinch and hurt.
- A calming feline pheromone product, such as Feliway®, may help some cats relax.
- Help your cat get comfortable first.

Before trimming, practice these steps over several short sessions:

- Let the cat see and sniff the clippers or grinder; offer a treat.
- Gently touch the shoulder, then slowly move down the leg to the paw; treat.
- Briefly hold a paw and gently press one toe to extend the nail; treat.
- Touch the clipper to one nail without cutting; treat.
- When the cat is calm, trim only the sharp tip of one nail; treat immediately.
- Move to the next step only when your foster cat is relaxed with the previous one.

Safe Trimming Tips:

- Trim only the thin, pointed tip of the nail.
- Avoid the pink area inside the nail, called the quick—it contains blood vessels and nerves.
- Take tiny slivers off rather than one large cut.
- If using a grinder, touch the nail for only a few seconds at a time to prevent heat buildup.
- Stop if your cat pulls away, freezes, flattens ears, growls, hisses, swats, or becomes tense.

Important Reminders:

- Never force, restrain, punish, or “push through” a stressful nail trim.
- Do not feel pressured to complete every nail in one session.

- If you accidentally cut the quick and the nail bleeds, apply styptic powder or cornstarch with gentle pressure. Contact the foster team if bleeding does not stop promptly.
 - If your foster cat is very fearful, reactive, or difficult to trim safely, contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team for help or veterinary/grooming support.
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Enrichment: Mental stimulation and exercise

Enrichment gives cats safe ways to play, explore, climb, scratch, hunt, and relax. Think of it as giving your foster cat “hobbies.” It can reduce boredom, stress, furniture scratching, excessive meowing, and rough play.

Simple Enrichment Ideas:

- **Play:** Offer short daily play sessions with wand toys, balls, toy mice, or feathers. Let the cat catch the toy at the end.
- **Food fun:** Try puzzle feeders, treat balls, lickable treats, or scatter a small amount of kibble for the cat to “hunt.” Foodpuzzlesforcats.com has inexpensive ideas, and the shelter may be able to provide puzzle toys as needed.
- **Scratching:** Provide sturdy vertical and horizontal scratchers, including cardboard and sisal.
- **Climbing and resting:** Offer a cat tree, perch, open carrier, box, or cozy bed.
- **Exploring:** Rotate safe toys and add simple items such as cardboard boxes, crumpled paper, or paper bags with handles removed.

Find Your Cat’s Favorites:

Try different toys—balls, feather toys, fake mice, and cardboard—to see what your foster cat enjoys. Toys do not need to be expensive; many cats love simple household items.

Keep It Safe:

- **Hands are not toys.** Do not allow play biting or wrestling with hands or feet; redirect the cat to a toy.
- Supervise new enrichment activities, especially anything with string, ribbons, small parts, or chewable material.
- Put wand toys away after playtime.
- In multi-pet homes, offer food and high-value enrichment separately if resource guarding is present.

Your foster cat does not need constant entertainment—rest is important, too. A few minutes of safe, enjoyable enrichment several times each day can make a big difference in comfort, confidence, and well-being.

Foster Cat Housing & Safety

Foster cats and kittens must be kept **indoors at all times** to protect their health and safety. Outdoor risks include exposure to feline diseases, attacks by larger animals, and traffic injuries.

Exceptions may be considered for unsocialized community cats participating in a working cat program. These cats may be housed in an outdoor enclosure only when it provides appropriate shelter from weather and other elements. All outdoor housing arrangements must be reviewed and approved by WVC Animal Shelter staff before the foster animal is brought home.

If you are unsure whether your home or proposed housing arrangement is appropriate, contact a WVC Animal Shelter staff member before accepting the foster animal.

For safe transportation, always use a secure carrier when taking a foster cat to or from appointments. Cats that are comfortable wearing a properly fitted harness and leash may be taken outside only in a secure, enclosed area under direct supervision. Harness and leash training must be approved by WVC Animal Services Foster Team.

Carrier Training Your Foster Cat

Most cats are more comfortable with a carrier when it becomes a familiar, positive part of the home—not something that only appears before a vet visit or transport.

Make the Carrier a Safe Place:

- Leave the carrier out in a quiet area with the door open or the door removed.
- Add a soft blanket, bed, or familiar-smelling item.
- Place treats, toys, or small meals near and eventually inside the carrier.
- Never force the cat into the carrier during training.

Take It One Step at a Time:

Keep sessions short—about 1–2 minutes—and use high-value treats.

1. Reward the cat for approaching the carrier.
2. Reward one paw inside, then all four paws, then calmly sitting inside.
3. Once comfortable, briefly move and close the door, then immediately open it and reward.
4. Gradually increase the time with the door closed.
5. When the cat is comfortable, gently lift and carry the carrier for a few steps.
6. Go at the cat's pace. If the cat becomes fearful, stop and return to an easier step.

Helpful Tips:

- If possible, use a carrier with a removable top or large opening.
 - Soft treats such as squeeze treats, tuna, or wet food can be especially helpful.
 - Practice regularly, ideally once or twice a day.
 - Short, positive car rides can also help reduce stress before necessary trips.
 - Carrier training supports safer transport for veterinary visits, transfers, and emergency evacuations.
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Scruff-Free Cat Handling

Do not scruff cats in foster care. Scruffing is gripping the loose skin at the back of a cat's neck, sometimes while lifting or tightly restraining the cat. It must not be used to move, hold, punish, or control a cat.

While a cat may become still when scruffed, this does not mean they are calm or comfortable. Adult cats may freeze or shut down because they feel unable to escape. This fear-based response, sometimes called tonic immobility, can be mistaken for cooperation.

Never lift, carry, or suspend a cat by the skin of the neck.

Why Scruffing Is Not Safe:

Cats cope with stress by moving away, hiding, or creating distance from what frightens them. Scruffing takes away that choice and can cause pain, fear, panic, and distress. It may also make a cat more difficult—and less safe—to handle in the future.

Scruffing can:

- Cause pain and increase fear by removing the cat's sense of control.
- Trigger panic, freezing, or shut-down behavior.
- Increase defensive biting, scratching, struggling, and escape attempts.
- Reduce the cat's trust in people and create handling sensitivities.
- Create negative associations with carriers, veterinary visits, grooming, medication, and routine care.
- Increase eye pressure in some cats, restrict blood flow, and worsen head, neck, or spinal injuries.

A mother cat may carry very young kittens by the scruff for a brief period early in life. However, this does not make scruffing an appropriate handling method for older kittens or adult cats.

Use Gentle, Low-Stress Handling:

Use the least amount of restraint needed to safely care for the cat. Gentle handling reduces stress and helps protect both the foster and the animal.

Whenever possible:

- Move slowly and speak quietly.
- Give the cat time and space to settle before attempting handling.
- Allow the cat to choose a comfortable position when practical.
- Avoid chasing, cornering, or pulling a cat from a hiding place unless there is an immediate safety concern.
- When lifting a calm cat, support both the chest and hindquarters. Hold the cat securely and close to your body, then place them on a stable surface promptly.
- Use treats, familiar bedding, and calm reassurance to create positive experiences.
- Pause and give the cat a break if they become fearful or distressed.

Moving or Containing a Frightened Cat:

If a cat must be moved or contained, use one of the following safer options:

- **Carrier:** Whenever possible, allow the cat to enter a carrier voluntarily. Place familiar bedding, treats, or food inside when appropriate.
- **Towel or blanket:** For a frightened or injured cat, gently use a large towel or blanket to cover or loosely wrap the cat for safe transport. Do not put pressure on the chest, neck, or abdomen, and do not restrict breathing.
- **Safe room:** If immediate handling is not necessary, confine the cat in a quiet, enclosed room—such as a bathroom or spare bedroom—until you can contact the Foster Team.
- **Foster Team assistance:** Contact the Foster Team if you cannot safely move, medicate, contain, or transport the cat.

Signs of Fear or Distress:

Stop handling and reassess if a cat displays any of the following:

- Flattened or sideways-facing ears
- Dilated pupils
- Hissing, growling, spitting, or yowling
- Swatting, biting, or rapid tail movement
- Crouching, freezing, hiding, or attempting to escape.
- Panting or open-mouth breathing

If a cat is injured, severely distressed, or cannot be safely handled, follow the emergency-contact protocol and contact the Foster Team for direction.

Building Positive Handling Skills:

Help foster cats become more comfortable with routine care through short, positive sessions. Gradually introduce gentle touch, carrier time, nail-trim tools, and other handling while pairing the experience with treats or other rewards.

Never use force or punishment. For cats with significant fear, handling sensitivity, or a history of biting, contact the Foster Team before attempting grooming, medication, or other hands-on care.

SECTION 3: MEDICAL AND EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS

Vaccines and Deworming:

All handleable cats and kittens are vaccinated before going into foster care. Foster families may be asked to bring their foster pet in for booster vaccines or additional deworming.

Vaccine/Treatment	Who Receives It	Schedule
FVRCP vaccine	Kittens under 16 weeks	Every 2 weeks until 16 weeks of age
FVRCP vaccine	Cats 16 weeks and older	Initial vaccine, then a booster 2 weeks later
Feline Bordatella	Kittens over 8 weeks	Initial vaccine, then a booster 2 weeks later
Feline Bordatella	All cats	Initial vaccine, then a booster 2 weeks later
Rabies vaccine	Cats 4 months and older	One vaccine; valid for 1 year
Pyrantel dewormer	All cats	At least one dose before foster placement
Pyrantel dewormer	Kittens	Every 2 weeks, for up to 3 doses or until adoption

FVRCP vaccination protects against three common feline illnesses:

- Feline viral rhinotracheitis (FVR): A contagious upper respiratory virus.
- Calicivirus (C): A contagious virus that can cause upper respiratory symptoms and mouth ulcers.
- Panleukopenia (P): A serious and highly contagious viral illness, sometimes called feline distemper.

Feline Bordetella Vaccine:

- The feline Bordetella vaccine helps protect cats against Bordetella bronchiseptica.
- A contagious bacterium that can cause respiratory illness.
- It is considered a non-core vaccine, meaning it may be recommended based on a cat's exposure risk and housing environment.

Please keep all scheduled vaccine appointments so your foster cat or kitten can stay current on needed vaccines and treatments.

Spay and Neutering Surgery

If your foster cat is already sterilized, skip this step!

Our vet is at the shelter on Mondays and Wednesdays. We will offer dates to bring in the cat for their spay and neuter surgery at the shelter or we may schedule the surgery at Angel Paws Clinic.

Shelter Surgery:

- On the scheduled date, you will bring your foster cat to our shelter for surgery.
- Drop off is between 8:30 AM – 9:00 AM.
 - Call the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team when you arrive to be let in.

- Pick up is between 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM. Please show up at the shelter before 5:30 to pick up the foster cat from surgery if you do not receive a call for pick up.

Please let WVC Animal Services Foster Team know if you are running late. Please let the foster team know if you need to reschedule the surgery 48 hours in advance. Our surgery space is limited, and other animals can use that space.

Angel Paws Surgery:

- On the scheduled date, you will bring your foster cat to Angel Paws Clinic.
- Address: 2361 E. 3300 S. Millcreek UT 84109
- Drop off is usually between 8:30 AM – 9:00 AM. Angel Paws will notify us if the time is different.
- The staff at Angel Paws will let you know when you are able to pick up.

Please let the foster team know if you need to reschedule the surgery 48 hours in advance. Their surgery space is limited, and other animals can use that space.

Getting your foster pet ready for their surgery:

- Fasting:
 - Pets under 4 months old: **DO NOT** fast and they must have access to fresh clean water.
 - Pets 4 months and older: No food after 10:00 PM the night before surgery, must have access to fresh clean water.
- Safe Transport:
 - Cats must be in a secure carrier (no exceptions)
- Multiple Cats:
 - Please bring each cat in a separate carrier. Cats may show aggression toward each other due to unfamiliar smells.
- Recovery Time:
 - Plan for up to 14 days of recovery
 - Following aftercare instructions is very important—failure to do so may delay healing.

Your foster will also receive a rabies vaccine, microchip and any other medical treatments as needed at time of surgery.

Surgery After-Care Instructions:

Your foster cat will need 10-14 days to recover.

Your foster will receive a pain medication injection that lasts 3 days after surgery.

Anesthesia Recovery: Your foster pet may be drowsy or uncoordinated for up to 24 hours after surgery. Keep them away from stairs, furniture, or any high places where they could fall.

Feeding: Offer food as usual. Some foster pets may not eat for 24 to 48 hours. Contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team if your foster pet hasn't eaten after 48 hours.

Temperature & Indoor Rest: **Foster cats must remain inside.** They are not able to regulate their body temperature for 3 days. Keep the indoor temperature between 70 and 75°F.

Activity Restrictions (10 Days): Keep your foster animal calm and restrict activity for 10–14 days after surgery. Do not bathe the animal or allow the incision to get wet. Prevent jumping, running, rough play, and other strenuous activity. Keep the animal separated from pets that may play roughly or lick the incision. Do not allow breeding, as it can cause serious injury or even death.

Incision Care: Check the incision daily for redness, swelling, discharge, or signs of pain. Do not clean the incision or apply creams or ointments. If your foster pet was sent home with a cone (e-collar), keep it on for 10 to 14 days and make sure they're not removing or working around it. Female cats will develop a small walnut sized lump under the incision sometimes; this is normal if no other signs of irritation or pain are present.

Handling Tips: Support your foster pet under the chest and rear when lifting, do not lift under the belly, do not let legs dangle.

Call the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team If Your Foster Pet Has: No appetite after 48 hours, redness, swelling, discharge or pain at the incision site, lethargy lasting over 24 hours, or any other recovery concerns.

Emergency Care Needed If Your Foster Pet Has: Pale or white gums, excessive bleeding, collapse or unconsciousness, uncontrollable vomiting, seizures, or trouble breathing.

Vet Appointments and Shelter Vet Appointments

WVC Animal Shelter coordinates and authorizes all medical care for foster animals. If your foster cat needs veterinary attention, contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team before seeking treatment. The foster team will assess the situation, schedule an appointment if needed, and provide instructions for next steps.

Depending on the animal's needs, some care may be provided at the shelter. If diagnostic testing or additional treatment is needed, the shelter will schedule an appointment with an approved veterinary clinic listed on your foster contact sheet. To help coordinate the appointment, please provide several days and times when you are available.

West Valley Animal Shelter partners with a nonprofit organization that helps cover medical expenses for shelter animals. Because care is funded through this partnership, the veterinary clinic must receive authorization from the shelter before providing treatment. Do not authorize, schedule, or pay for veterinary treatment without prior approval from the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV): Foster Cat Basics

FIV is a virus that affects a cat's immune system. It only affects cats—people, dogs, and other pets cannot catch FIV. Many FIV-positive cats live long, happy lives with routine veterinary care.

How FIV Spreads:

FIV is most commonly spread through deep bite wounds during serious cat fights. It is not commonly spread through normal household contact such as sharing food/water bowls, litter boxes, grooming, or petting cats back-to-back.

FIV-positive and FIV-negative cats may live together safely if they get along and do not fight. Follow the WVC Animal Services Foster Team's instructions before introducing cats.

What to Expect:

Some FIV-positive cats have no symptoms for years. Because their immune system may be weaker, they can be more likely to develop:

- Dental disease or mouth inflammation
- Upper respiratory infections
- Skin problems or ringworm
- Weight loss, poor appetite, diarrhea, or other infections

Report any changes in appetite, energy, breathing, mouth health, stool, weight, or behavior to the WVC Animal Services Foster Team or veterinarian promptly.

Foster Care Tips:

- Keep the cat indoors and prevent access to unfamiliar cats.
- Provide a consistent routine, good nutrition, clean litter boxes, and a low-stress environment.
- Do not give medications, supplements, or special diets unless approved by the foster team or veterinarian.
- Keep veterinary appointments and follow the care plan. Regular checkups help identify problems early.

Testing:

FIV is diagnosed with a blood test. Kittens younger than 6 months can sometimes test positive from their mother's antibodies, so they may need repeat testing when older.

FIV is manageable, not a reason to fear or isolate a cat from people. With good care and monitoring, FIV-positive cats can be wonderful foster cats and pets.

Feline Herpesvirus (FHV-1): Foster Cat Basics

Feline herpesvirus is a common upper respiratory infection (URI) in cats. It affects cats only—people and dogs cannot catch it.

Common Signs:

- Sneezing, congestion, or runny nose
- Watery, yellow, or green eye/nose discharge
- Red, swollen, or squinting eyes.
- Decreased appetite, low energy, or fever.
- Eye pain, keeping an eye closed, or cloudy-looking eyes.
- Some cats carry the virus for life and may have flare-ups during stress. Many cats recover well and live normal lives with appropriate care.

How It Spreads:

- FHV-1 spreads between cats through saliva and eye/nose discharge, including shared bowls, litter boxes, bedding, toys, and hands. Keep affected foster cats separate from other cats as directed by the WVC Animal Services Foster Team.
- Wash hands after handling the cat, clean shared items, and avoid sharing supplies. The virus does not survive long once secretions are dry, and routine cleaning is helpful.

Helping Your Foster Cat Feel Better:

- Keep the cat in a calm, warm, low-stress space.
- Gently wipe eye and nasal discharge with a warm, damp cloth.
- Use a humidifier or sit with the cat in a steamy bathroom for 10–15 minutes, if tolerated.
- Offer warmed, strongly scented wet food to encourage eating.
- Monitor food intake, water intake, energy, breathing, and eye or nasal discharge.

Contact the WVC Animal Services Foster Team:

Contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team promptly if the cat has eye squinting or pain, thick yellow/green discharge, poor appetite, dehydration, lethargy, trouble breathing, or symptoms that worsen. Do not give medications, eye drops, or supplements unless specifically approved.

Vaccines help reduce the severity of illness but do not always prevent infection.

Medications

It is common for foster cats to require some type of medication during their stay in a foster home. When fostering a cat on medications, please make sure:

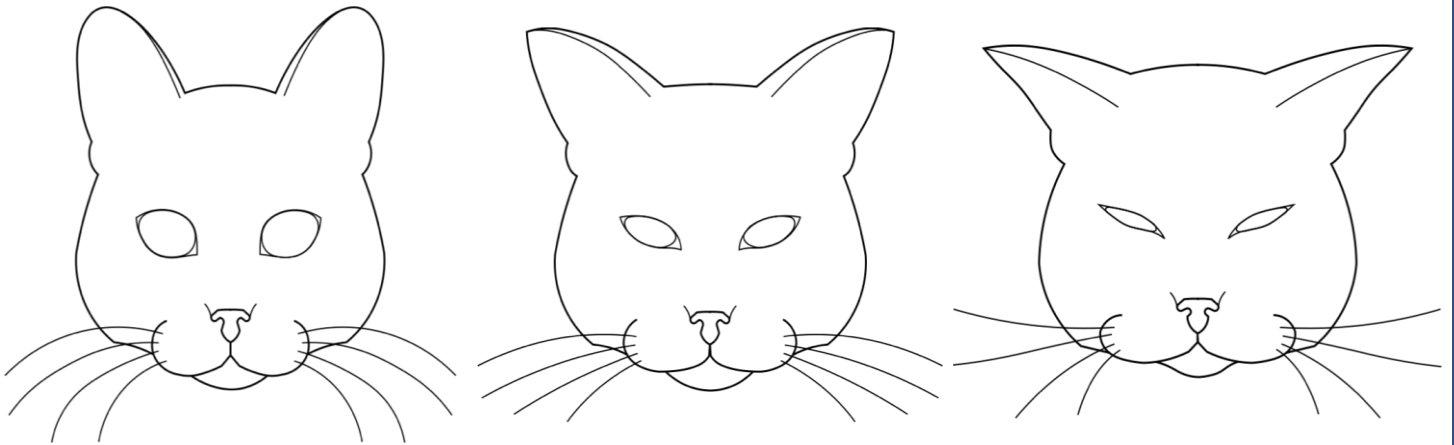
- You give the medication as instructed.
- You give all the prescribed doses and do not end medication early unless directed by WVC Animal Shelter, or under the guidance of a veterinarian working with WVC Animal Shelter.

If the foster animal has not responded to prescribed medications after five days (or in the time instructed by a veterinarian), please contact WVC Animal Shelter for guidance.

Feline Grimace Scale

Feline facial expressions of pain in cats.

FELINE GRIMACE SCALE



Rate each action unit from 0 to 2:

0 = action unit is absent

1 = moderate appearance of the action unit, or uncertainty over its presence or absence

2 = obvious appearance of the action unit

If the action unit is not visible, please mark the option “not possible to score”

Ear position



0 = absent



Ears facing forward



1 = moderately present



Ears slightly pulled apart



2 = markedly present

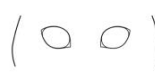


Ears rotated outwards

Orbital tightening



0 = absent



Eyes opened



1 = moderately present



Partially closed eyes

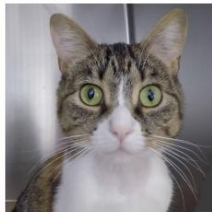


2 = markedly present



Squinted eyes

Muzzle tension



0 = absent



Relaxed (round shape)



1 = moderately present



Mild tension



2 = markedly present



Tense (elliptical shape)

Whiskers change



0 = absent



Loose (relaxed) and curved



1 = moderately present



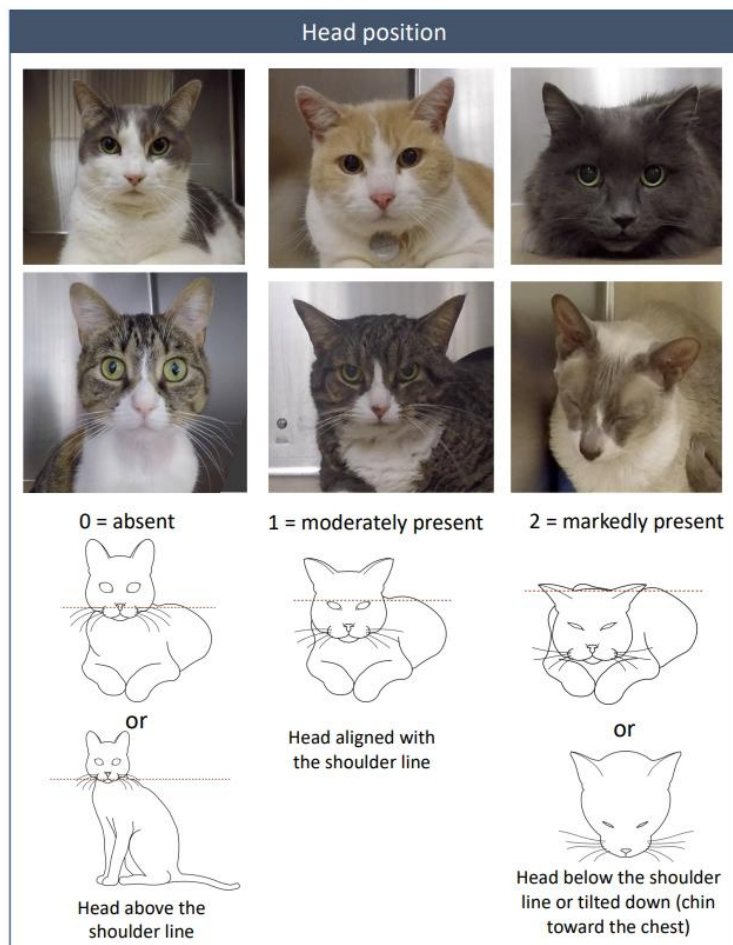
Slightly curved or straight (closer together)



2 = markedly present



Straight and moving forward (rostrally, away from the face)



Signs of illness and what to do next

Cats from unknown circumstances who have spent time in an animal shelter environment may suffer from common, non-life-threatening ailments. Common conditions include infections, parasites, or diarrhea. If the cat is displaying one or more of the symptoms listed below, please follow the instructions given and contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team using the foster contact sheet provided to you. If the animal is displaying a concerning symptom not included here, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team for guidance.

**Reminder: If you seek alternative/emergency veterinary care for the foster animal without the authorization of WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team, you will be responsible for any costs incurred.*

Appetite loss or not eating.

The foster cat may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. Allow the cat time to adjust to the new environment. But if the cat hasn't eaten after 24 hours, please notify WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team. Also, if the cat has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, contact WVC Animal Shelter. Please do not change the cats' diet without contacting WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

Dehydration

Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the cat's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the cat is dehydrated. Please call WVC Animal Services Foster Team within 24 hours.

Diarrhea

Monitor your foster cat's stool and litter box habits each day. Soft stool can be normal during the first two to three days after arriving in foster care, as stress or a change in food may cause temporary digestive upset. A probiotic may be added to the cat's food to help support digestion.

If the soft or loose stool does not improve, or if the cat has liquid diarrhea for more than one week, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team so an appointment can be scheduled to determine whether medication or additional care is needed.

Diarrhea can quickly lead to dehydration. If the stool is bloody or contains mucus, follow the emergency contact protocol and contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team right away.

Discharge: eyes and nose

It is normal for cats to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if the foster cat has yellow or green discharge or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for them to open their eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team.

Sneezing can be common in a cat recovering from an upper respiratory infection. If sneezing becomes more frequent, watch for discharge coming from the nose. You can try nebulizing the cat to relieve their discomfort. Nebulizing can be done in two ways:

1. Place the cat in the bathroom with a hot shower running to make steam. **(Do not place the cat in the shower.)** Steam can help clear out the discharge.
2. Put the cat in a small room, with a humidifier and a comfy bed.

If the eye or nose discharge stays clear and the cat is acting normal, continue to monitor the cat. If the discharge becomes colored, however, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team.

Be sure to monitor the cat's breathing. If the cat starts to wheeze or breathe with an open mouth, follow the emergency contact protocol. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the cat's eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating. If needed, gently clean face with a soft warm wet cloth.

Ears: scratching, swelling or irritation

If the cat is scratching their ears frequently and/or shakes their head often, they may have ear mites. When you look in their ears, you may see a dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds. Ear mites are easily treatable, please contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team.

If the cat has irritated, swollen, or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, they may have an ear infection called otitis. It's more common in dogs, but some cats do get it. If you see any of these signs, please contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team.

Hair loss

Please contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team if you notice any hair loss on the cat. It is normal for cats to have thin fur around their lips and eyelids and in front of their ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair is not normal. It is important to check the cat's coat frequently.

Ringworm is a skin fungal infection that can cause hair loss. While it does not cause serious illness, ringworm is contagious to both other pets and people. If you see hair loss on the foster cat, we recommend keeping him separated from your own pets, and washing your hands after any handling until the foster cat has a medical evaluation. Ringworm generally shows on the face or toes first and appears as a round scaly patch of skin.

Lethargy

The activity level of the cat will vary depending on age and personality. Lethargy appears as an abnormal drop in energy, alertness, or activity. They can seem sluggish, dull or unresponsive. Keeping an activity log will help you notice whether the cat is less active than usual. If the cat cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it's an emergency, so start the emergency contact protocol.

Urinary and Litter Box Concerns

Monitor your foster cat's litter box habits daily. If a cat has not urinated for more than 48 hours, contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team.

Other signs of a possible urinary or medical concern include:

- **Straining to urinate or defecate:** The cat remains crouched in the litter box for an extended period and appears to be trying hard to eliminate.
- **Blood or discoloration:** You see pink, red, brown, or bloody urine; blood in the stool; or only a few drops of urine.
- **Frequent litter box visits:** The cat repeatedly goes to the litter box but produces little or no urine.
- **Vocalizing while eliminating:** The cat meows, yowls, cries, or appears painful while in or near the litter box.
- **Litter box avoidance or accidents:** The cat avoids the box or urinates on smooth, cool surfaces, such as tile, a bathtub, or a sink.
- **Excessive licking:** The cat frequently licks the genital area, which may indicate irritation, burning, or pain.
- **Changes in stool:** Hard stool, soft stool, diarrhea, or difficulty passing stool may also require monitoring and follow-up.

Sign	Stress / Behavioral	Medical Issue
Frequency	Won't go near the box; holds it for 24+ hours.	Repeatedly visits the box but produces little or nothing
Vocalizations	Quiet, silent, hiss if approached.	Crying, howling, or groaning while trying to eliminate.
Urine Volume	Large puddles (when they finally feel safe enough to go).	Tiny droplets, squirts, or zero urine output.
Physical Signs	Normal posture when they finally go.	Tense posture, straining, excessive belly/genital licking.

When in doubt, contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team for guidance.

A cat that is straining to urinate, making frequent trips to the litter box with little or no urine produced, or crying while trying to urinate may have a urinary blockage. This is an emergency—follow the emergency contact protocol immediately.

If a medical exam is normal yet the cat continues to have litter box issues, see the information pertaining to that topic in “Section 4: Behavior Support.”

Vomiting and Hairballs: Foster Cat Guidance:

Vomiting is not considered normal in cats—even if it seems occasional or includes hair. Please notify the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team or a veterinarian so the cat can be assessed.

Seek Veterinary Care Urgently If Your Foster Cat Has:

- Sudden or repeated vomiting
- Vomiting plus lethargy, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, or hiding
- Hacking/retching without producing anything.
- Possible exposure to a toxin, string, toy, plant, or other foreign object
- Vomiting that continues or the cat cannot keep water down.

These signs can indicate a blockage, poisoning, or another serious illness and may worsen quickly.

About Hairballs

Hair swallowed during normal grooming should usually pass in the stool. Repeated hairballs are not normal and can be linked to excessive grooming, fleas or skin irritation, stress, digestive problems, or rarely a blockage.

A true hairball is usually a firm, cigar-shaped clump of fur. Liquid or foam with strands of hair is still vomiting and should still be documented and reported.

What Foster Families Should Do

- Record each episode: date/time, what it looked like, how often it happens, appetite, water intake, stool, and behavior.
- Take a photo if possible and share it with the foster team or veterinarian.
- Do not change food, give over-the-counter hairball products, or give human medications unless approved by the rescue or veterinarian.
- For cats prone to shedding, gentle daily brushing can reduce loose hair. Use flea prevention and report excessive grooming or skin irritation.

Early reporting helps the WVC Animal Services Foster Team or veterinary team identify and treat the cause before it becomes more serious.

Criteria for emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a cat? 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:

- Urinary blockage (which can be life-threatening for cats)
- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Extreme dehydration: dry gums, pale gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or inability to stand.
- Unconsciousness or inability 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 the cat displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency contact protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea but is still active, eating and drinking, continue to monitor the cat. If the vomiting or diarrhea continues for more than 48 hours, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team.

SECTION 4: BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

If you encounter behavioral concerns with the cat, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team using the contact information provided to you. We ask that you work through these issues to the best of your ability with the assistance of WVC Animal Services Foster Team and consultants. If you feel that the cat's behavior is beyond your ability to manage, please notify WVC Animal Services Foster Team to discuss the best next steps.

Common behavioral concerns and what to do next:

Excessive Vocalization

Increases in vocalization are common when there are changes in a pet's environment, such as a move to a new place or a change from being an outdoor to an indoor pet. In these cases, the increases in vocalization may be temporary. But if it continues, the most common cause of excessive vocalization is attention-seeking, a learned behavior. You should try increasing the cat's mental and physical stimulation by increasing interactive play and using a food puzzle, especially during the night.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If additional guidance is needed.

- **What it Looks Like:** When your cat meows at you to get your attention. This often happens at predictable times, such as when you return home.
- **Why it Happens:** The cat's needs may not be met, especially in areas where play and positive, consistent human-cat interaction can benefit. Some diseases can also increase vocalization, including hyperthyroidism, hypertension, pain, sensory loss (such as hearing loss), and cognitive dysfunction.

What You Can Do

- Create a routine for positive and predictable human-cat interactions at similar times each day. Consider a routine that works for your schedule (e.g., before work, after work, before bedtime).
- Provide [interactive play](#) at least twice daily, regardless of the cat's age. Offer several short play sessions instead of a single, long session to help mimic their hunting instinct.
- Reward calm and quiet behaviors with your cat's preferred treats and attention.
- If your cat vocalizes at specific times, redirect this behavior before it starts by offering an alternative activity, such as interactive play.
- Call your veterinarian if vocalization continues to rule out any medical conditions.

Older cats still enjoy playtime, but it might look different compared to when they were a young adult (e.g., toys they don't have to chase, puzzle feeders, watching the movement of toys, or using interactive toys like feather wands that can move more slowly).

High energy

Younger cats have boundless energy. They need positive and enriching ways for them to discharge some of that energy safely through play in an environment that offers stimulation as well as places to relax. An increase in energy can also be a result of boredom, and the solution is the same, increase the cat's mental and physical stimulation. Add more physical activities to the cat's routine and switch toys out each week. If you need more ideas for mental or physical stimulation, contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If it's too challenging a lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental and physical stimulation to help with high energy.

Overstimulation

Cats may bite or scratch when they become overstimulated. This is usually a signal that they are uncomfortable, overexcited, or need a break—not that they are being “bad.” Respecting these boundaries helps build trust. There are 2 main kinds of overstimulation for cats: petting-induced overstimulation and/or play-induced overstimulation.

Petting-Induced Overstimulation

Petting-induced overstimulation can occur in cats who didn't grow up with littermates or didn't get socialized with other cats or kittens when they are young and some cats are simply sensitive and only enjoy brief petting. To respect a cat's boundaries, it's important to pay attention to body language.

Watch for warning signs:

- Purring suddenly stops.
- Tail swishing, twitching, or thumping
- Skin rippling along the back.
- Ears turning back or flicking.
- Stiffening, changing position, or turning toward your hand.
- Growling, swatting, or pulling away.

What to do:

- Stop petting at the first sign of discomfort and give the cat space.
- Keep petting short and gentle, especially early in foster placement.
- Focus on less-sensitive areas: cheeks, chin, head, and neck.
- Let the cat decide whether to stay, approach, or leave.
- Do not force cuddling or pick up the cat unless they clearly enjoy it.
- Over time, short positive petting sessions paired with a small treat may help some cats tolerate touch longer. Always stop before the cat becomes upset.

Play-Induced Overstimulation

Play is essential for a cat's physical and emotional health, but some cats become too aroused during play. Hunting and prey behavior starts as soon as kittens are old enough to stand. Kittens will “stalk” their littermates and pounce on them. Some cats can become too aroused during play and need toys and stimulation that mimics “prey.”

Provide safe outlets:

- Use wand or fishing-pole toys that let the cat stalk, chase, pounce, and catch.
- Offer several short play sessions each day.
- Let the cat “catch” the toy at the end of the session.

- Follow play with a small amount of regular food or a cat-safe treat.
- Never use hands or feet as toys. What seems cute with a kitten can become painful behavior in an adult cat.
- **Do not use Laser pointers.** They may also frustrate some cats because there is nothing to catch.

When Playing with your foster cat watch body language for overstimulation cues and stop play if you see:

- Ears flattening or turning back (“airplane ears”)
- Growling or escalating hissing
- Hard biting, intense staring, or a tense body
- Tail lashing or sudden rough behavior

When this happens, calmly end play, step away, and redirect your attention. Resume later when the cat is calm. Reward calm, appropriate play with treats or praise.

Important Reminder

Never punish, yell at, or spray a cat for biting or scratching. Punishment can increase fear and make the behavior worse. Contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team or veterinarian if the behavior is frequent, severe, sudden, or accompanied by signs of pain or illness.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting or starts to be unmanageable.

Litterbox issues due to behavior:

Litter Box Concerns

Litter box issues are often a cat’s way of communicating that something is wrong. Medical conditions, stress, conflict with other animals, or an unsuitable litter box setup can all contribute to accidents or marking behavior. If a foster cat is having urinary concerns, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team for guidance and to determine whether a medical evaluation is needed. If medical causes have been ruled out, review the following environmental and behavioral factors.

Start With the Litter Box Setup

Cats generally prefer a clean, large, open litter box in a quiet and easily accessible area. (**See Day-to-day care section**).

Consider Stress and Social Conflict

A foster cat may avoid the litter box or begin marking when stressed by changes in the household or competition for resources.

Potential stressors include:

- Outdoor cats visible through doors or windows
- New people, pets, sounds, routines, smells, or diets
- Visitors, active children, or household changes
- Another cat guarding, intimidating, or blocking access to the litter box.
- A frightening or uncomfortable experience near the box, such as being startled, trapped, medicated, or handled there.

Help reduce stress by providing:

- A quiet safe room, particularly during the adjustment period
- Safe hiding spaces and elevated resting areas
- Daily interactive play and enrichment
- Multiple food and water stations, scratching posts, toys, resting areas, and litter boxes.

- Individual attention and playtime for each cat in a multi-cat household

Never corner, handle, or give medication to a cat in or near the litter box area.

Urine Marking vs. Litter Box Accidents

Urine spraying, rubbing, scratching, and occasionally leaving feces uncovered or in visible locations may be scent-marking behaviors rather than litter box accidents. Marking can increase when a cat feels insecure or detects unfamiliar animals or scents.

Common marking locations include:

- Doors and windows where outdoor animals are visible.
- Shoes, bags, backpacks, or other unfamiliar-smelling items
- Hallways, stairways, doorways, and shared household spaces

Spaying and neutering significantly reduces hormone-related marking. Notify the WVC Animal Services Foster Team if marking or new litter box issues begin so potential medical and behavioral causes can be evaluated.

Responding to Accidents

Litter box issues can be frustrating, but patience is essential.

- **Never punish or discipline a cat** for an accident. Punishment can increase stress and damage trust.
- Clean accidents thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner to remove odors that may attract the cat back to the same location.
- Products such as Nature's Miracle and Simple Solution are examples of enzymatic cleaners.

When to Contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team

Contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team if urinary signs are present, accidents continue after litter box and environmental changes, marking begins suddenly, or you need additional guidance and support.

Resource Guarding

While it may not be as common in cats as it is in dogs, resource guarding can happen — especially in multiple-cat households. Resource guarding can be caused by a number of things, including adjustment to an in-home lifestyle, past experiences and the need for safe boundaries.

To help eliminate a cat's resource guarding, the goal is to create safe boundaries around feeding time. Always feed the resource-guarding cat separately and away from other pets or children. Try to be patient and *don't ever punish the cat*. Work toward creating that safe space to build trust.

Have multiple food and water bowls, one for each cat. During feeding times feed the cats a distance away from each other and block their view whether it be a couch, kitchen island or blanket. This will help alleviate any stress while eating.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If the behavior is redirected toward you or anyone else in the household, if the behavior doesn't seem to have a cause or if resource guarding is not manageable with separation.

Rough Play and Play Biting.

These behaviors are usually due to an animal having excess energy or being bored. Engaging the cat and teaching them proper play skills will help provide appropriate outlets for their energy, which will prove beneficial when they go to their adoptive home.

One general rule is to avoid using your hands to play with the cat. If you find the cat focusing on your hands like playthings, redirect their attention to a toy. If redirection does not work, stop engaging them in play.

Managing Rough Play and Play Biting in Foster Cats

Play biting, pouncing, and ankle attacks are common in kittens and young cats. It is usually normal hunting play, but it can become painful if the cat learns that hands and feet are toys.

Provide Safe Play Outlets

- Offer 2–4 short play sessions daily.
- Use wand toys, balls, tunnels, and toys the cat can chase and catch.
- Provide a soft kicker toy for grabbing, biting, and back-foot kicking.
- Add scratching posts, climbing areas, and food puzzles to prevent boredom.
- Let the cat catch the toy at the end of play, then offer a small treat or meal.
- Keep Hands and Feet Out of Play
- Never use hands, fingers, feet, or moving ankles under blankets as toys. Keep a toy nearby to redirect the cat when they become playful.

If the Cat Bites or Scratches

- Freeze briefly—do not yank your hand or foot away.
- Calmly end attention and step away for a break.
- When the cat is calm, redirect to an appropriate toy.
- Be consistent: everyone in the home should follow the same approach.
- Never yell, hit, spray, or punish the cat. This can increase fear and worsen biting and WVC Animal Shelter does not condone punishment.

Watch for Overstimulation (See previous section on Overstimulation)

- End petting or play if you see tail twitching, skin rippling, ears turning back, stiffening, growling, swatting, or the cat turning toward your hand.
- Keep petting short and focus on the head, cheeks, chin, and neck. Avoid the belly, paws, tail, and rear end unless the cat clearly enjoys it.

Ask for Help

Contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team if biting is sudden, severe, breaks skin, continues despite redirection, or occurs with signs of pain or illness. If a bite or scratch breaks skin, wash it well with soap and running water and seek medical advice.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting or starts to be unmanageable. If it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental and physical stimulation or if the bite breaks skin, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team immediately.

Separation anxiety and isolation distress

Cats can form strong bonds with people and other animals and may become anxious when separated from familiar companions. Signs of separation-related stress may include excessive meowing, overgrooming, or urinating on items that carry a person's scent, such as pillows, laundry, or bedding.

A feline pheromone product, such as Feliway®, may help some cats feel more relaxed. After arriving in foster care, a cat may need time to adjust to its new surroundings, establish trust, and become comfortable with your household routine. Provide a quiet, safe space where the cat can settle in at its own pace.

You can also help build your foster cat's confidence by offering mental and physical enrichment, such as food puzzles, interactive play, and simple trick training. If the cat appears to experience separation-related stress, keep arrivals and departures calm and low-key rather than making them a major event.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If you need additional resources, If the cat is hurting itself or if it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental or physical stimulation.

Shy or fearful cat

Helping a Shy or Fearful Foster Cat Feel Safe

Shy, frightened, or traumatized cats need time, routine, and choice. Some settle in within days; others need several weeks or longer. Let the cat set the pace—progress is not always linear.

Create a Safe Room First

Start the cat in a quiet, low-traffic room such as a bathroom or small bedroom. Keep other pets, children, and visitors out at first.

Provide:

- Food and water, placed away from the litter box.
- A clean litter box
- Comfortable bedding
- A sturdy scratching surface and a few quiet toys
- Safe hiding spots, such as a cardboard box, covered bed, or open carrier
- Block unsafe or inaccessible hiding areas, such as under beds or inside furniture. However, do not pull a fearful cat from a hiding place unless there is an immediate safety or medical concern.

A safe room should feel predictable. Try to feed, clean, and visit at about the same times each day.

Build Trust Through Calm, Short Visits

Short, frequent visits are usually more helpful than long or intense interactions. Spend time sitting quietly in the room, reading, working, or talking softly.

Use a considerate approach:

- Sit or kneel at the cat's level, about 1–2 feet away when possible.
- Do not lean over the cat or put your face in the cat's face.
- Turn slightly sideways instead of facing the cat directly.
- Avoid prolonged eye contact; look briefly, slow blink, and look away.
- Keep your voice low and movements slow.
- Keep hands below the cat's eye level.
- Do not reach into the hiding spot or lean over the cat.
- Initially, your main goal may simply be for the cat to eat, use the litter box, and observe you without becoming more fearful.

Use Food and Play to Create Positive Associations

- Treats can help a cat learn that people bring good things.
- Start by placing or gently tossing a treat near the cat, then step away.
- Use small portions of a familiar, cat-safe treat or wet food.
- Gradually remain nearby for a few seconds while the cat eats.
- Try a wand toy moved slowly along the floor; do not wave it directly at the cat's face.
- End interactions before the cat becomes overwhelmed.

- Not all cats will accept food when stressed. If the cat refuses treats, freezes, growls, or lunges, give more distance and try again later. Do not use food to pressure a cat into being touched.

When to Begin Touching

Only attempt petting after the cat is comfortably eating near you, approaching voluntarily, or showing relaxed body language. Start with a brief, gentle touch on the head, cheeks, or back of the neck.

Avoid the belly, paws, tail, and rear end at first. Stop immediately if the cat:

- Crouches, freezes, flattens ears, or widens pupils.
- Growls, hisses, swats, or attempts to bite.
- Lashes their tail, pulls away, or returns to hiding.

Do not attempt to pick up or hold the cat until they consistently welcome touch. Many formerly fearful cats may enjoy petting but still dislike being held; respect that preference.

Signs of Progress

Celebrate small wins, including:

- Eating or grooming while you are in the room.
- Using the litter box normally
- Looking at you without fleeing
- Taking a tossed treat
- Playing with a wand toy
- Coming out of hiding for short periods
- Slow blinking, relaxed ears, or a tail held up.
- Approaching or rubbing against you

A setback such as hiding after a loud noise or a visitor is normal. Return to the last step where the cat was comfortable.

Introducing the Rest of the Home

Expand the cat's space only after they move confidently around the safe room and are eating, drinking, and using the litter box normally.

- Open one additional room or area at a time.
- Keep the safe room available so the cat can retreat.
- Cat-proof new areas and block inaccessible hiding places.
- Allow exploration during quiet times, often in the evening.
- Do not chase the cat or force them out of a hiding place.

Introducing People and Resident Pets

Introduce people gradually. Ask visitors to ignore the cat at first. If the cat comes out, visitors may toss a treat but should not reach toward, pet, or pick up the cat.

Only introduce resident pets if approved by the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team. Begin with scent exchange—such as swapping bedding—before allowing visual contact through a secure barrier. Move slowly and separate the animals if either appears stressed. (See cat to cat info and dog to do info in section 1: preparing for a foster cat)

When to Contact the WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team:

Contact the WVC Animal Services Foster Team promptly if the cat:

- Does not eat for 24 hours or eats very little.
- Has vomiting, diarrhea, or sudden litter-box changes.
- Seems lethargic, painful, or unusually withdrawn.

- Is repeatedly growling, lunging, or attempting to bite.
- Escapes the safe room or may have access to an unsafe area.
- Shows no improvement after an extended adjustment period.
- Sudden behavior changes can be caused by stress, but they may also be signs of illness.

Important Reminders

- Never punish, yell at, spray, corner, or force a fearful cat to interact.
- Do not use hands to play; use a wand toy instead.
- Keep doors and windows secure. Frightened cats can slip through small openings quickly.
- Wash hands between handling foster cats and resident pets, especially before medical clearance.
- Keep notes on appetite, litter-box use, behavior, and milestones to share with the foster team.

Trust is the goal—not speed. Consistent, respectful care can help a fearful foster cat become more comfortable, confident, and ready for the next step in their journey.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: if additional guidance is needed or if the behavior escalates or starts to be unmanageable.

Helping Your Foster Cat Scratch in the Right Place

Scratching is a normal cat behavior. Cats scratch to stretch, maintain their claws, play, and leave scent marks. The goal is not to stop scratching, it is to give your foster cat safe, appealing places to scratch.

Set Up Good Scratching Options

- Provide at least one sturdy scratching post that will not tip over.
- Choose a post tall enough for the cat to fully stretch. Many cats prefer sisal, rope, or cardboard over carpet.
- Place scratchers near sleeping areas, since cats often scratch after waking up.
- Offer more than one type—vertical posts, horizontal cardboard scratchers, or cardboard boxes—to learn the cat's preference.
- Encourage use with catnip, toys, praise, or a small treat.

Protect Furniture While They Learn

- Put a scratching post or cardboard scratcher next to the furniture the cat is targeting.
- Cover the area temporarily with hard plastic, or another cat-safe barrier.
- Keep young kittens in a smaller, cat-proofed room at first, with appropriate scratching options.
- A feline pheromone product, such as Feliway Classic®, may help reduce repeat scratching in problem areas.

Important Reminders

Never punish, yell at, or spray a cat for scratching. This can increase stress and does not teach them where to scratch.

Reward your foster cat when they use the scratching post or cardboard scratcher.

When to contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: If scratching suddenly becomes excessive or your cat is damaging their claws.

THE SPECTRUM OF Feline Fear, Anxiety, and Stress



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SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/ AGGRESSION (FAS LEVEL 5)

- Offensive aggression: pupils constricted or dilated, cat leaning forward, ears forward, moving forward, whiskers forward, tail is an inverted L (first inch of tail is horizontal with ground then the tail drops down), rump raised higher than front (on tip toes), staring, may be growling
- Defensive aggression: ears back, pupils dilated, hunkered down, tail tight or tucked or tail thrashing, whiskers back, hissing, lips pulled back, staring, furrowed brow, could be swatting

SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS LEVEL 4)

- Flight: actively trying to escape, pupils dilated, ears back, whiskers back, tail down and bottle brushed, fleeing, turning to look at stimulus
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, dilated pupils, body flattened and tense, tail tucked, increased respiratory rate, ears back, staring, whiskers back

MODERATE SIGNS (FAS LEVEL 2-3)

- Ears further to the side, more pupil dilation but not completely dilated, increase in respiratory rate, brow furrowed, looking at stimulus instead of looking away, tail tight to body, possible tip of tail moving some, whiskers back, body crouched and leaning away

MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS LEVEL 1)

- Avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, partially dilated pupils, head held just slightly down, slight brow furrowing, whiskers slightly back, ears partially to the side, body shifted slightly away, tail closer to body with possibly some slight flicking

PERKED/INTERESTED/ ANXIOUS? (FAS LEVEL 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up and winding, mouth closed with loose lips, ears perked forward, whiskers forward, slight pupil dilation

RELAXED (FAS LEVEL 0)

- Sleeping
- Neutral: ears in neutral position, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed with relaxed lips, body loose, tail carriage U-shaped, pupils normal dilation
- Friendly greeting: tail up and winding, may elevate rear end slightly by standing on toes, ears neutral, forward, or slightly back, might have squinty eyes, brow relaxed, might cheek mark or rub on person or object

FAS LEVEL 4-5

FAS LEVEL 2-3

FAS LEVEL 0-1

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The Power of Treats: Helping Foster Cats Feel Safe

Treats can help foster cats feel safer, reduce fear and stress, and build positive associations with people. Used thoughtfully, they are an important enrichment and training tool.

Choose the Right Treat

Keep a few options available—cats have different preferences. Save a cat’s favorite high-value treat for stressful or important moments, such as handling, carrier time, meeting new people, or building trust.

Good cat-friendly choices:

- Canned cat food, plain canned chicken, or tuna in small amounts in water not oil
- Lickable cat treats or soft food on a spoon or plate
- Temptations, Pounce, Friskies, or similar treats
- Freeze-dried meat treats
- Use tiny pieces—pea-sized or smaller—so the cat can eat quickly and stay engaged.

How to Use Treats

- Reward calm, curious behavior and voluntary approaches.
- For shy cats, toss a treat nearby and walk away. Avoid staring, reaching, or forcing interaction.
- As trust grows, remain nearby for a few seconds while tossing treats.
- Sit or stand sideways and speak softly.
- If the cat will not eat, they may be too stressed. Give them space and try again later.

Why Treats Matter

Treats are more than “snacks.” They can:

- Provide enjoyable daily enrichment.
- Help cats connect people, carriers, handling, and new environments with positive experiences.
- Support reward-based training and behavior change.
- Give foster families a simple, positive way to interact with and comfort cats.

Preventing Upset Stomachs

- Use only cat-safe treats and foods.
- Keep treat types fairly consistent rather than frequently introducing new foods.
- Give small portions and avoid overfeeding; treats should not replace regular meals.
- Follow any special-diet instructions from WVC Animal Services Foster Team or veterinarian.
- If a cat has diarrhea, vomiting, poor appetite, or other illness signs, notify the WVC Animal Services Foster Team. Do not assume treats are the cause.
- Avoid unsafe foods, including onions, garlic, chocolate, grapes/raisins, alcohol, and products containing xylitol.

Goal: Help your foster cat learn that people and new experiences predict good things—at the cat’s own pace.

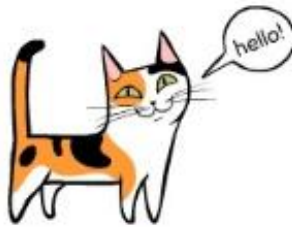
Cat Body Language

You can learn a lot about cats simply by observing their body language. The illustration below depicts what cats are trying to communicate to us. It is helpful to know what cat body language means in order to respect their boundaries.

CAT LANGUAGE



INTERESTED



FRIENDLY



ATTENTIVE



RELAXED



TRUSTING



FRIENDLY, RELAXED



CONTENT



CONFLICTED, CAUTIOUS



PLAYFUL



EXCITED



"THIS IS MINE"



ANXIOUS



PREDATORY



WORRIED



FRIGHTENED



THREATENED



TERRIFIED



SUPER TERRIFIED



IRRITATED



DISGUSTED

Understanding Feline Language

Foster cats may need time to adjust to a new home, people, routines, and other animals. Learning to recognize their body language can help you respond appropriately, reduce stress, and build trust.

A cat's feelings are communicated through a combination of vocalizations, eyes, ears, body posture, and tail movement. Consider the full picture rather than relying on one signal alone.

Vocalizations

Sound	What It May Mean	Appropriate Foster Response
Meow	Greeting, request for food or attention, objection, or communication with people	Check the cat's basic needs and observe their body language.
Chirp or trill	Friendly greeting or invitation to follow	Often means the cat wants attention or is leading you to something, such as food or a favorite area.
Purr	Often contentment; may also be self-soothing when stressed, painful, or ill	Look at the cat's overall body language and appetite. Do not assume purring always means the cat feels well.
Hiss, growl, or spit	Fear, discomfort, irritation, or a warning to increase distance	Stop interacting, give the cat space, and avoid reaching toward or cornering them.
Yowl or prolonged howl	Distress, fear, separation, disorientation, pain, or—if unaltered—mating behavior	Locate and observe the cat. Contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team if the behavior is sudden, persistent, or accompanied by signs of illness or pain.
Chatter or chitter	Excitement or frustration, often while watching birds or wildlife	This is usually normal. Ensure windows and doors are secure.

Ears, Eyes, Tail, and Body Posture

Ears

- **Forward:** Alert, interested, relaxed, or friendly.
- **Swiveling:** Listening closely or monitoring the environment.
- **Turned sideways or back:** Uncertain, irritated, or anxious.
- **Flattened against the head:** Frightened, defensive, or highly upset.

Eyes

- **Soft eyes or slow blinks:** Relaxed and comfortable. A slow blink from you can be a calm, non-threatening signal.
- **Dilated pupils:** May indicate excitement, playfulness, fear, stress, or defensive behavior. Consider the rest of the cat's posture.
- **Very narrow pupils with a tense body:** May signal agitation or aggression.

Tail

- **Upright with relaxed fur:** Friendly, confident, or interested.
- **Upright and quivering:** Excitement; in an unaltered cat, it may also precede urine marking.
- **Low or tucked:** Fear, insecurity, or anxiety.
- **Rapid twitching or thrashing:** Irritation or overstimulation. End the interaction and give the cat space.

- **Puffed fur:** Fear or defensive aggression.

Body

- **Relaxed body, resting comfortably, or kneading:** Usually content and secure.
- **Back arched with relaxed fur while approaching you:** Often an invitation for gentle petting.
- **Crouched low, hiding, or moving close to the floor:** Nervous or fearful.
- **Arched back, puffed fur, flattened ears, or growling:** The cat feels threatened. Do not approach.
- **Lying on the back:** This can mean relaxation, but it is not always an invitation to touch the belly. If the cat is tense, growling, or has dilated pupils, give them space

Common Foster Behaviors

Rubbing

Cats rub their face, chin, and body on people, furniture, and objects to leave their scent. This is a normal way of claiming familiar spaces and building social connection. When a foster cat rubs against you, it often indicates that they are becoming more comfortable.

Kneading

“Kneading,” sometimes called “making biscuits,” is when a cat rhythmically presses their paws into a soft surface. It is commonly associated with comfort, relaxation, and positive social bonding.

Flehmen Response

A cat may sniff an item, lift their head, slightly open their mouth, curl back their lips, and appear to squint. This is called the **Flehmen response**. It is normal behavior that helps cats gather detailed scent information.

Recognizing Mood and Responding Appropriately

What You May See	Likely Mood	Foster Response
Ears forward, tail up, soft body, relaxed eyes	Comfortable or social	Allow the cat to approach; offer calm attention or gentle play.
Ears forward, whiskers forward, crouching before a pounce, playful tail movement	Playful	Use wand toys or other appropriate toys. Avoid using hands or feet as toys.
Tail twitching, ears turning back, dilated pupils, skin rippling, sudden biting during petting	Overstimulated or irritated	Stop petting immediately and allow the cat to move away. Keep future interactions shorter and gentler.
Low posture, tail tucked, hiding, ears sideways or back	Nervous or anxious	Provide a quiet safe space, hiding options, predictable routines, and time to adjust. Do not force interaction.
Flattened ears, arched back, puffed fur, hissing, growling, or spitting	Frightened or defensive	Do not touch, corner, or attempt to pick up the cat. Reduce noise and activity, give space, and allow the cat to settle.
Staring, growling or yowling at another cat, stiff body, fur raised	High tension or possible aggression	Separate the animals safely, if possible, without putting yourself at risk. Notify WVC Animal Services Foster Team for guidance before further introductions.

Foster Program Reminders

- Give new foster cats a quiet, secure space to decompress, particularly during their first days in your home.
- Allow the cat to choose the pace of interaction. Do not force handling, petting, or introductions to people or resident animals.
- Use calm voices, predictable routines, enrichment, and interactive play to help foster cats feel safe.
- Never punish hissing, growling, hiding, or accidents. These behaviors usually reflect fear, stress, or unmet needs.
- Do not attempt to handle a cat that is actively frightened, defensive, or aggressive.

When to Contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team: Contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team if a foster cat shows sudden or ongoing changes in behavior; persistent hiding or fear; frequent aggression; new yowling; possible pain; loss of appetite; or difficulty adjusting to the foster home.

Monitoring Foster Cats for Social Stress and Compatibility

When fostering more than one cat, observe each cat daily for signs of comfort, stress, and conflict. Cats can experience significant fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) without obvious fighting. In many cases, the most important warning signs are subtle, including hiding, avoiding shared spaces, or not participating in normal daily activities.

Early recognition and separation of incompatible cats can prevent injuries, illness, litter box problems, and declining welfare.

Signs of Healthy Social Interaction

Cats living comfortably together should be able to move freely and access food, water, litter boxes, resting spaces, and people without being watched, blocked, or intimidated.

Positive signs include:

- Relaxed body posture when near other cats
- Comfortable movement throughout the home
- Eating, drinking, grooming, resting, and using the litter box normally
- Restful sleep in shared or nearby spaces
- Playful, balanced interaction
- Mutual rubbing, grooming, or resting together.

Cats that are bonded may choose to sleep together, groom one another, rub against each other, or engage in reciprocal play. These behaviors can indicate social harmony, but cats do not need to be bonded to coexist successfully. Peaceful coexistence—without fear, avoidance, or competition—is the goal.

Subtle Signs of Social Stress

Social stress is not always loud or dramatic. A cat may be distressed without hissing, growling, or fighting.

Watch for cats that:

- Withdraw from people or other cats.
- Hide frequently or remain in one location for long periods.
- Stay on a perch, under furniture, or in a separate room.
- Appear constantly alert or watchful.
- Avoid walking through shared areas.
- Seem to “sleep” much of the time but remain tense or vigilant.
- Eat less, groom less, or do not sleep restfully.
- Wait until other cats are distracted or people enter the room before using food, water, or litter boxes.

When assessing a foster cat, consider both what you see and what you do **not** see. Ask: *Is this cat able to eat, rest, play, explore, groom, and use resources normally? If not, what may be preventing them?*

Red Flags for Incompatibility or Conflict

The following behaviors may indicate unacceptable tension between cats and should be addressed promptly:

- Repeated staring, stalking, or following another cat.
- Blocking access to doorways, hallways, litter boxes, food, water, or resting areas
- Repeatedly approaching or bothering a cat that is trying to move away or hide.
- Ignoring another cat's avoidance signals
- Territorial marking, including urine spraying.
- Urinating or defecating outside the litter box.
- Growling, hissing, swatting, chasing, or fighting.
- A more confident cat controlling access to important resources through staring, posturing, intimidation, or aggression.
- A less confident cat becoming increasingly isolated, fearful, inactive, or unable to access resources.

Passive or covert aggression is common. A cat does not have to physically attack another cat to create a stressful environment. Intense staring, silent guarding, body blocking, and occupying access points can be enough to prevent another cat from eating, resting, or using the litter box.

What Foster Homes Should Do

To reduce competition and social stress:

- Provide **separate, plentiful resources** throughout the home.
- Offer multiple food and water stations, litter boxes, scratching surfaces, beds, hiding spaces, toys, and elevated resting areas.
- Place resources in different areas so one cat cannot easily guard them all.
- Ensure every cat has a safe route away from shared spaces and cannot be trapped in a corner.
- Provide new foster cats with a separate, quiet decompression space before introductions and follow the cat-to-cat introduction in Preparing for your foster cat section.
- Supervise introductions and allow cats to progress at a comfortable pace.
- Do not force cats to share beds, food bowls, litter boxes, carriers, or attention.
- Do not punish hissing, hiding, growling, or avoidance. These are important warning signals.

If a cat is being intimidated or appears unable to access resources comfortably, separate the cats and return to a slower introduction process.

When to Contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team

Contact WVC Animal Shelter Foster Team promptly if you observe repeated intimidation, resource guarding, persistent hiding, reduced appetite, litter box accidents, urine marking, chasing, fighting, or escalating tension between foster cats.

The shelter can help determine whether cats need a modified introduction plan, separate housing within the foster home, or reassignment to a different foster placement.

Emergency conditions

If the foster cat is exhibiting extreme behavior that puts another animal or a person at risk or has resulted in bites or severe injury, contact WVC Animal Services Foster Team immediately using the emergency contact protocol provided to you when you picked up the cat. Behavioral emergencies include:

- Biting, aggressive lunging, attempting to bite
- Fighting with and/or biting other animals
- Unexpected guarding behavior (as opposed to a known condition for which a behavioral modification plan has been provided) or guarding behavior under treatment that escalates rapidly

SECTION 5: THE FOSTER CAT'S FUR-EVER HOME

Adoption Promotion, Meet-and-Greets, and Finalizing Adoptions

A key part of fostering is helping your foster cat find a safe, loving permanent home. West Valley City Animal Shelter will promote foster animals through its adoption platforms, and foster caregivers play an important role by sharing accurate information about the animal's personality, behavior, preferences, and progress in a home environment. Unless the Foster Team instructs you otherwise, foster animals may be promoted for adoption, even if they are not yet ready to go home because of age, medical treatment, spay/neuter status, vaccinations, or other shelter requirements.

Promoting Your Foster Cat

Foster caregivers are encouraged to help promote their foster cat through appropriate personal and community connections. You may:

- Share clear photos and short videos on social media.
- Tell friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers about your foster cat.
- Post an appropriate flyer at work, school, or other approved community locations.
- Share the cat's personality, favorite activities, socialization progress, and home behavior.
- Keep adoption posts honest, simple, and focused on the cat's individual needs and strengths. Helpful details may include whether the cat is playful, calm, cuddly, independent, curious, comfortable with children, or friendly with other animals, when known.

Protect your privacy and the animal's safety. Do not post your home address, personal schedule, or private contact information. Do not promise an adoption, collect adoption fees, or finalize an adoption independently. Direct interested adopters to West Valley City Animal Shelter or the Foster Team for the official adoption process.

Adopets

West Valley City Animal Shelter uses Adopets, an online adoption platform that automatically displays eligible shelter animals on the shelter's website and may share listings with other adoption websites.

Once your foster animal is sterilized, vaccinated, and otherwise approved for adoption, you may receive an email invitation to join Adopets. Through the platform, foster caregivers may be able to:

- View applications submitted for their foster animal.
- Review potential adopters' contact information and application responses.
- Add internal notes for shelter staff.
- Recommend an applicant for consideration.
- Communicate with approved applicants to arrange a meet-and-greet.

Foster caregivers provide valuable input because they know the animal's behavior in a home setting. However, West Valley City Animal Shelter staff retain final authority to approve or deny all adoptions. Contact the Foster Team directly if you have questions or concerns about an applicant, application, or proposed adoption.

Potential Adopters and Screening

Friends, relatives, coworkers, and other personal contacts may apply to adopt your foster animal. All interested adopters must complete the shelter's adoption application and follow the same adoption process as other applicants.

When speaking with a potential adopter, share accurate information about the cat and encourage them to consider the long-term commitment involved. Cats may live 15 to 20 years or more. Potential adopters should be prepared for the animal's ongoing needs, including veterinary care, housing changes, travel plans, behavior adjustment, and appropriate daily care.

Foster caregivers should also be clear about any known needs or limitations, such as:

- The cat's comfort level with adults, children, cats, dogs, or other animals.
- Medical or dietary needs.
- Litter box habits, scratching behavior, or other normal feline behaviors.
- Whether the cat needs a quiet home, gradual introductions, or continued socialization.
- Explain requirements for indoor-only housing.
- If you are not comfortable discussing a potential adoption or screening an interested person, refer them to the Foster Team or shelter staff.

Meet-and-Greets:

Meet-and-greets help potential adopters learn whether a foster cat may be a good fit for their household. Because cats may be stressed or behave differently in unfamiliar settings, foster caregivers should help set realistic expectations with potential adopters.

For safety and privacy, meet-and-greets with people you do not know should generally take place at West Valley City Animal Shelter or another shelter-approved location. A meet-and-greet may take place in your home only when the interested adopter is a friend, relative, or other person you know and trust, and only when you are comfortable doing so.

When arranging a meet-and-greet:

- Coordinate with the Foster Team or follow shelter instructions.
- Use a secure carrier for transportation.
- Keep unvaccinated kittens out of contact with public floors and shared surfaces.
- Avoid forcing interaction; allow the cat to approach at its own pace.
- Share the cat's normal routine and behavior, while explaining that the cat may be shy or stressed in a new environment.
- Notify the Foster Team promptly after the meeting to discuss next steps.

When You Identify an Adopter

If you identify a potential adopter—or if you decide that you would like to adopt your foster animal yourself, notify the Foster Team as soon as possible.

Foster caregivers may recommend an applicant and provide feedback based on their interactions with the potential adopter. Shelter staff will complete the final review and approval process. Adopters must complete all required paperwork, pay applicable fees directly to the shelter, and meet all adoption requirements before taking the animal home.

No foster animal may be transferred to a new home until West Valley City Animal Shelter has confirmed that the adoption is approved and complete.

Kittens must meet the shelter's minimum age, weight, vaccination, medical, and spay/neuter requirements before adoption. There are no exceptions unless specifically authorized by shelter management or a veterinarian.

If You Wish to Adopt Your Foster Animal

Foster caregivers may apply to adopt their foster animal. You must complete the required adoption application and follow the shelter's adoption process. Foster caregivers may receive consideration because they know the animal well, but all adoptions remain subject to shelter approval and applicable requirements but usually get first choice at adoption.

Saying Goodbye

Saying goodbye can be difficult, but successful adoption is an important outcome of fostering. Each foster animal placed in a permanent home creates space and resources for West Valley City Animal Shelter to help another animal in need.

If appropriate and mutually agreed upon, you may provide adopters with a way to share updates about the cat's transition. Updates can be rewarding, but foster caregivers should respect the adopter's privacy and should not expect ongoing contact.

Thank you for helping foster animals prepare for adoption and find safe, permanent homes.

Ready for Another Foster Animal

After your foster animal has been adopted, please take time to rest, reset, and celebrate the difference you made. If you would like to continue fostering, West Valley City Animal Shelter would be happy to help match you with another foster animal when you are ready.

Please contact the Foster Team to let them know:

- When you may be available for another foster animal.
- What type of animal you are able to foster, such as kittens, adult cats, animals needing socialization, or animals recovering from medical care.
- Any changes to your household, schedule, housing, resident animals, or foster preferences.
- Whether you need additional supplies before accepting another foster placement.

There is no pressure to accept another foster animal immediately. Every successful adoption helps create space for another animal in need, and we appreciate your continued support whenever you are ready to foster again.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

The following organizations, programs, and publications informed the development of this foster manual. Information has been adapted for use by West Valley City Animal Services. Foster caregivers must follow all current West Valley City Animal Services policies, instructions, and veterinary guidance when those directions differ from an external resource.

- Austin Pets Alive! (n.d.). Foster program resources and foster handbooks. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- ASPCApro. (n.d.). Foster animal health care and foster-program resources. American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Best Friends Animal Society. (n.d.). Foster-program, animal-care, and behavior resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Cats Protection. (n.d.). Cat care, behavior, and welfare resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Cat Friendly. (n.d.). Cat-friendly care and handling resources. Feline Veterinary Medical Association. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Fear Free Shelters. (n.d.). Fear Free Shelter Program and educational resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Feline Veterinary Medical Association [FelineVMA] (formerly American Association of Feline Practitioners [AAFP]). (n.d.). Feline practice guidelines and cat-friendly care resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Humane Colorado. (n.d.). Foster care, animal behavior, and enrichment resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- International Cat Care (formerly Feline Advisory Bureau). (n.d.). Feline health, behavior, and welfare resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Stanford Cat Network. (n.d.). Foster-care resources. [Confirm the exact organization name and source title before publication.]
- The Cat Network. (n.d.). Foster-care resources. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Woodard, S. (n.d.). Canine behavior and foster-care guidance. Best Friends Animal Society. Accessed September 9, 2026.
- Evangelista, M. C., Watanabe, R., Leung, V. S. Y., Monteiro, B. P., O'Toole, E., Pang, D. S. J., & Steagall, P. V. (2019). Facial expressions of pain in cats: The development and validation of a Feline Grimace Scale. *Scientific Reports*, 9, 19128. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-55693-8>

External resources are provided for supplemental education only. They do not replace direction from West Valley City Animal Services, a licensed veterinarian, or applicable Utah law. If a foster caregiver observes illness, injury, pain, significant behavior change, or an emergency, they must contact West Valley City Animal Services promptly and follow current program instructions.