



# Volunteer Kitten Foster Manual

*Tips, tricks and time-honored advice for raising  
healthy and happy kittens*



# Before Proceeding...

## IF YOU'VE FOUND KITTENS

- Don't move them unless they are in immediate danger.
- Is mom with them? She might be out hunting for food. Kittens need to stay with their mom for at least four weeks.
- Leave some food nearby and keep an eye on them for 24 hours.
- Call ARF at **(631) 537-0400, ext. 202**, so we can help rescue the family and keep them together.

# Introduction

The Animal Rescue Fund is always in need of new kitten foster families. What's better than caring for a furry baby for a few weeks? Taking part in our kitten foster program is not only a rewarding and heart-warming way to give back, but also saves lives.

When kittens are socialized from a young age, they tend to be friendlier with people and make better pets, giving them a jumpstart at adoption and a forever home. On the other hand, kittens that are not rescued grow up feral, often having kittens themselves by 6 months old. ARF wants to stop this cycle with our Operation Cat free spay and neuter program and our kitten foster program.

As a kitten foster, you will raise one or more kittens until they reach an adoptable age and weight. Our program includes neonates (bottle babies) as well as kittens that have transitioned to kitten food. While fostering kittens, especially bottle babies, is a commitment that requires special care and responsibility, we find it to be a highly fulfilling way to volunteer and it frequently draws return volunteers!

# Kitten Foster Supply List

## Bottle Babies:

- Carrier
- Towels/ Washcloths
- Blankets
- Heating Disc
- KMR Kitten Formula
- Bottles
- Nipples
- Syringes (if needed)
- Stuffed Animal

## Weaned Kittens:

- Food (dry and wet)
- Paper Food Trays
- Towels
- Blankets
- Playpen
- Disposable Litter Boxes
- Litter
- Toys

# Bringing Home Your Fosters

If you've gotten this far, congratulations! You're the beginning of an exciting adventure. The next step is finding a cozy space for your fosters in your home. Remember, foster kittens should be kept in a separate temperature-controlled room, away from other animals, which includes animals owned by the foster. They are not allowed to be kept outside and are not allowed outdoors. The best place to keep a kitten can be determined by age and stage of development, as follows:

- Kittens 1-3 weeks old can be kept in a carrier. The temperature in the bedding area should be 80-90 F. Supplemental warming can be supplied by plastic warming discs or an approved heating pad set on low (NEVER medium or high). For approved heating pads, check with the ARF Medical Team. Please ensure there is an area for kittens to move away from the heat source if they get too warm. NEVER allow kittens to lie directly on a heating pad/warming disc; there should always be a towel between them and the heat source. Small litters of kittens may have a more difficult time staying warm, whereas a larger litters can sleep all together to keep warm.
- Kittens 3-4 weeks old can be kept in a medium/large-size crate or carrier. This is a controlled environment that allows the kittens room to move around and still be safe.
- Kittens 5-7 weeks old can be kept in a cat/kitten playpen, which allows space to play and also allows supervised exploration in the room they are kept in, as long as the room is small, safe and kitten-proofed. Please make sure there are no exit points that a kitten can fit into and escape the room from. It may be helpful to get on your hands and knees and inspect the room for any kitten hiding spots (under/behind the washer/dryer or refrigerator, behind a bookcase/shelves, under/in the couch, etc.). Please cover any outlets, lock cabinets and remove electrical wires that kittens may come into contact with.

While in foster, kittens should be handled as much as possible, to get them comfortable with people and being held. Make sure to hold their paws so they get used to having them touched for when they need nail trims when they are older. Also, fostering is a great time to expose them to normal household sounds (TV, vacuum, dishwasher, laundry, etc.).

NOTE: There may be adjustments in the above guidelines for individual kittens with medical needs.

# Bringing Home Your Fosters (continued)

Once a comfortable, “age-appropriate” location has been found in your home for your fosters, you may wonder, if there are other cats/pets in the house, what is the protocol for socialization?

Unfortunately, foster kittens should not be introduced to any other animals during their time in foster. These kittens' immune systems are not fully formed and are fragile; they are very susceptible to viral, bacterial, parasitic and fungal infections. Also, the majority of the time, the kittens that are going into foster are coming from the outside world and may have an infection that could be communicated by direct or indirect contact. It is for the safety of the kittens and of your other animals that we require that they be kept separate.

# Feeding and All That Comes After

Now that your foster kittens are settled in their new environment, they are probably tired and hungry after an exciting day. Next step, feeding time! At pickup, you will have been told by ARF's Medical Team where your litter is on their journey to being weaned (if they are bottle babies), and you will have been provided with whatever nutrition they may need. See below for feeding and "bathroom" recommendations.

## Bottle Feeding

- Nursing kittens should be fed roughly every three hours, unless recommended otherwise by the ARF Medical Team.
- ARF will provide kitten-specific formula and appropriate bottles/nipples for the kittens.
- Never feed a kitten while it's lying on its back.
- Never force a kitten to bottle feed and never squeeze the bottle while feeding the kitten. This could cause the formula to go into the lungs instead of the stomach.
- If the kitten is refusing to bottle feed, it could be that the kitten is too cold and/or the formula is too cold. The kitten can be warmed with a warm dry towel or with a towel-wrapped plastic heating disc or heating pad. Make sure there is space for the kitten to move away from the heat source if it gets too warm. To warm the formula, place the bottle in a warm-water bath and test the temperature of the formula with a few drops on the inside of your wrist. If too cold, keep in the water bath longer; if too hot, wait for the formula to cool.
- If the kitten is coughing or formula is coming out of its nose, stop feeding immediately and reassess the position of the kitten and reduce the bottle nipple size.

# Feeding and All That Comes After (continued)

## How to Bottle Feed a Kitten

There are many potential approaches when trying to bottle feed a kitten, and many “right answers” as to how. Below you will find an approach that has worked for longtime ARF fosters.

**Step 1:** Stimulate the kitten.

**Step 2:** Mix up KMR formula, fill a clean bottle and attach nipple.

**Step 3:** Set up and place the kitten on a towel, lying on its belly. The kitten should be stretched out with neck extended upward toward the bottle.

**Step 4:** Bring the bottle’s nipple to the kitten’s mouth. If the kitten doesn’t latch, gently rub the nipple on the kitten’s gums.

**Step 5:** Once the kitten begins to nurse, let it feed until it’s full (kittens often get squirmy or fussy when they are finished feeding). Kittens may need a break while feeding before they finish.

**Step 6:** When the kitten has finished feedings, softly rub/massage its back to burp if needed.

**Step 7:** Wait 10 minutes after the kitten has finished feeding and stimulate the kitten again.

## Stimulation

Kittens require stimulation to urinate and defecate after each feeding (and sometimes before as well) during the first few weeks of life. Use a warm wet washcloth to gently wipe the hind end to stimulate urination and defecation. Please be sure to clean and dry the kitten following stimulation.



# Emergencies

Kitten fostering can be an incredibly rewarding experience, giving you the gratification of knowing that the kittens you've fostered have blossomed into loved and loving family pets. Fostering requires a great deal of responsibility, practicality and a level head, and can occasionally be a confusing or scary undertaking. When kitten fostering, it's important to know what constitutes as an emergency requiring immediate action and what (after hours) can wait till the next morning. Below you will find a list of situations that require immediate action.

## Immediate Action Required

- Unresponsive kitten (unconscious, unable to be roused/brought around)
- Trauma (broken bones, actively bleeding, etc.)
- Open-mouth breathing, struggling to breathe (open mouth, extended neck, exaggerated abdominal breathing)
- Continuous diarrhea (more than 24 hours)
- Vomiting after every meal, not holding any food or water

NOTE: If a kitten is active/playful, is eating and drinking but has intermittent vomiting or diarrhea it can most likely wait up to 24 hours to receive care, if the ARF adoption center is closed.

# Emergencies (continued)

## IF an Emergency Requiring Immediate Action Occurs:

During ARF's Hours of Operation (Monday-Saturday, 8:30am-4:00pm), call The ARF Medical Team, (631) 537-0400, ext. 204.

If unavailable, or on Sundays, call

The ARF Receptionist, **(631) 537-0400, ext. 202.**

If unavailable, call

The ARF Adoptions Team, **(631) 537-0400, ext. 203.**

### After ARF's Hours of Operation:

Call the East End Veterinary Center (open 24/7) at **(631) 369-4513**. All kitten fosters will be given a proof-of-fostering letter when first picking up their kittens at ARF. In case of an emergency, if you do bring your kitten to the EEVC, please show the staff your proof-of-fostering letter and let them know that the kitten is from ARF.

# Non-Emergencies

Now that you have a better idea of what constitutes an emergency situation requiring immediate action, we can take a look at non-emergency situations.

Non-emergencies, while not as dire as emergencies requiring immediate action, should still be monitored. Report the below symptoms or any other concerns to ARF's Medical Team at (631) 537-0400 ext. 204.

- Sneezing or coughing (but otherwise acting normally)
- Vomiting or diarrhea for less than 24 hours
- No bowel movement in 24 - 48 hours
- Discharge from the eyes or nose
- Food aversion
- Hair loss and/or skin lesions

# A Letter from ARF

Dear fosters,

Whether this is your first or fiftieth foster kitten, we cannot thank you enough for your time, patience and open hearts. Our organization, like these kittens, relies on your efforts to help take these tiny, vulnerable and often wild creatures and care for them through their transition to becoming beloved pets and family members. It's often said that "it takes a village to raise a child," but we at ARF believe that this maxim holds true for all new and helpless beings, and we are ready to provide support and guidance through every step of this journey. Know that opening your home to the kitten in your hands will change lives, two-legged and four-, in ways that you cannot imagine.

Yours in rescue,

The Animal Rescue Fund