



# Weaned Puppy Foster Care Manual

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**Ithaca, NY 14850**

**(607) 257-1822 (main number)**

**(607) 257-1874 (answered by staff during business hours)**

**(607) 592-6773 (after hours)**

**Medical contact:**

**(607) 257-1874 ext. 240, [medical@spcaonline.com](mailto:medical@spcaonline.com)**

**Volunteer Coordinator**

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# Welcome to the Canine Foster Program of the SPCA of Tompkins County!

## Expectations

The goal of the SPCA of Tompkins County is to find homes for as many shelter animals as possible. Some animals require more specialized care before adoption than we can provide at the shelter. These include puppies who are too young for adoption. These pets benefit greatly from our foster parents' love and attention. We are grateful to each and every one of our foster parents for the vital role you play in providing the individual care required by some of our puppies.

Foster parents will receive training and full support in order to make fostering the rewarding and wonderful experience it should be.

Fostering animals requires a significant time commitment. We ask that individuals interested in fostering puppies be available for a minimum of 1-2 weeks but may be longer in rare instances. We understand that you may have certain months or times of year that you are unavailable.

Foster parents are limited to caring for one litter of puppies at a time. This is for the safety of the puppies to avoid contact with germs and diseases potentially carried by other litters. **If you offer foster services to other shelters, do not allow our puppies to mingle with any other dogs** while they are in your care.

## How do I get foster dogs?

Foster parents will be notified when dogs are in need of foster homes by a phone call or e-mail. Please check your email regularly in order to be kept informed of fostering needs and respond promptly as possible. We also have a listserv that foster parents can use to communicate with each other and other volunteers, offer support or advice, and get adoption updates. Full details and instructions on how to join the listserv are included in this manual. Any foster parents who do not wish to join the listserv or who do not have access to email may speak with the foster coordinator to establish an alternative means of communication.

## What kind of supplies do I need?

The shelter will provide all the supplies you need to care for the dog: food, blankets, toys, Kongs, crates, harnesses, etc. You will be given a basic set of supplies when you pick up your new foster. If you need replacements (ex. if your puppy shreds his toys) or a different tool (ex. the dog hates crates and you want to try a playpen instead) call or e-mail the shelter and we can set up a time for you to pick up the supplies you need to make your foster a success.

## **Preparing to become a foster**

There are a number of different reasons why we seek foster care for our animals. Most puppies come into the shelter with insufficient vaccination (and thus immunity) to safely live in the shelter environment.

## Home Visits

Home visits are not currently required, but can be performed if requested by the foster family. They are a great way to ensure your home is set up for success before taking a dog. A volunteer or staff member will come to your home and provide information on-site about getting your home ready and make suggestions on what type of dog may be best for you to foster. They will also go over the manual with you and be available to answer any questions.

## Medical Appointments

Puppies will receive basic medical care (deworming, vaccines, flea treatment) before going into foster care. Medical staff will inform you of any upcoming appointments for additional care (spay/neuter, additional deworming, etc.) that your individual foster pet will need.

**All foster puppies should be scheduled every two weeks for appointments with the medical staff at the shelter. They will be weighed, examined, receive booster vaccines and be dewormed.**

## Emergency Information

**If one your foster puppies becomes seriously ill or injured, contact the shelter immediately. During business hours (every day of the week and weekend, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), please call the shelter at (607) 257-1874.** A member of the foster program or medical staff will assist you.

Outside of normal business hours, please call **our emergency number at (607) 592-6773. This is Tompkins County Animal Control.** This number will allow you to reach a member of the staff at all hours. Based on the information you provide we will assess whether your foster can wait to be seen by a shelter veterinarian at the first opportunity or whether we need to seek emergency care at the Cornell Companion Animal Hospital. Please note that the Cornell Companion Animal Hospital is the only location where medical treatment outside of the shelter is permitted and **only with prior approval** by authorized SPCA staff. The shelter vet on call will be the one to make all of the decisions on the animals care in the case of an emergency. Foster parents are not allowed to authorize treatment.

If you are uncertain whether your foster puppy is in danger or needs medical treatment **please do not hesitate to contact the shelter**. We welcome and encourage all calls and questions about the health and safety of foster pets.

## Emotional Support

We are aware of the difficulties foster parents face when returning now-beloved pets to the shelter for adoption. We are also aware of how fragile some puppies are and how, despite your best efforts and excellent care, a foster pet may fail to thrive. We are committed to helping you with your foster experience. Providing foster care is a rewarding but sometimes difficult experience and we will provide as much help to our foster families as possible. Please reach out to other volunteers for support as well. Use the groups.io listserv and volunteer facebook page to reach people and to hear call-back updates from your foster's adopters.

## For Your Safety

Shelter animals may, on occasion, carry diseases or parasites that may be transmissible to humans or other pets. The vast majority of our puppies are imported from other regions of the country that may have higher levels of infectious disease. Our animals are medically assessed, treated and vaccinated against common ailments or serious illnesses (rabies, intestinal parasites, fleas, etc.) before they enter foster care (Puppies under 12 weeks of age are too young to be vaccinated against rabies). This eliminates some if not all of the risk posed to humans. However, it is still possible that shelter animals entering your home could potentially carry an illness that could affect your health or

the health of your animals. You will be provided with a copy of all relevant medical records at the time of pick up.

To reduce this risk, keep shelter pets apart from your own pets. Infections or illnesses carried by shelter pets are often common and highly treatable (like upper respiratory infections). Animals can remain contagious for some time after being exposed to these infections. Keeping your pets separate from shelter pets, especially for the first week or two in your home, will help keep your pets healthy.

Washing hands regularly after handling shelter animals is essential. Washing with plenty of soap and water for 30 seconds each time is the recommended method. Hand sanitizer is helpful but does not eliminate all viruses and bacteria. Limit exposure of foster pets to very young children.

After your foster pet has been returned to the shelter, be sure to carefully clean and disinfect the area(s) they have inhabited in your home before bringing in new foster animals. If a puppy was diagnosed with any serious illness while in your care, please talk to a staff member about what cleaners are appropriate for disinfecting your home after fostering.

## Bite Holds

If you or anyone else are bitten by your foster dog or puppy, and the bite breaks the skin (bleeds), **you must report the bite to the SPCA immediately!** A MANDATORY Tompkins County Health Department 10-day bite quarantine is required at the shelter to rule out the possibility of rabies. While rabies is very rare in domesticated animals, it is a very serious disease and so we err on the side of caution, by following the NYS Health Dept regulations. At that time, we will ask that you fill out a form to be submitted to the health department describing the incident. Bites must be reported even if they are non-aggressive, like an over-excited puppy playing or a dog grabbing a finger alongside her toy. Scratches done with claws, even if they break the skin, do not need to be reported, but you should immediately wash the area well with soap and water.

## Puppy Care

Please note that this manual is also available on our website as a PDF [www.spcaonline.com/foster-family](http://www.spcaonline.com/foster-family). Puppy care is not an exact science and if you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the shelter staff at any time.

Puppies' immune systems are not fully developed until they are four months old, making them much more susceptible to disease. **Under-vaccinated puppies should not go anywhere they may come into contact with adult dogs, other puppies or their germs.** There are many mild illnesses that an adult dog's immune system will fight off without showing symptoms, but a puppy's can't. This means puppies should not go to parks, play groups, pet stores or dog-owning friends' houses. See the safe socialization section below for appropriate ways to socialize your foster puppy. This is also a safety measure for owned pets as shelter animals may carry communicable infections.

We prefer that weaned puppies do not mix with your resident pets. **If you choose to do so, it is at your own risk, realizing that your pet could be exposed to parasites, fungal infections or viruses.** The SPCA will not cover any expenses accrued should your pets contract any illnesses or injuries from a shelter puppy.

Wash your hands thoroughly **before and after** you handle shelter animals to avoid exposing them to disease or infecting your resident pets.

# Providing your Puppy with an Appropriate Home

## Environmental Conditions

As a general rule, puppies must always be kept in an area that is quiet, secluded, and warm. The ambient temperature should be no less than 72° F. It is acceptable to keep the puppies in their crate on the floor, but keep in mind that floor temperatures are often colder than the air temperature, and the heat will need to be raised accordingly. **Never place crates or playpens over heating vents or ducts.**

Access to fresh air is essential, so the space should have adequate ventilation. Wherever you choose to keep them, it is important that puppies be housed in a practical space where you can get to them easily and keep their area clean. Adequate lighting is crucial, and natural lighting is preferable.

It is best to keep puppies in an area with surfaces that can be easily cleaned; tile and linoleum flooring are ideal (anything but carpet). Should you foster puppies that become seriously ill or have had an animal that has fallen ill or died recently in your home, please let us know so that we can assess the potentially infected area and suggest methods of cleaning that will eradicate any lingering pathogens.

## Preparing a Space for Puppies

Preparing an area to receive puppies can be challenging. Puppies love to explore their surroundings. Keep this in mind and store as little in your puppy space as possible to limit the possibility of them ingesting foreign objects or injuring themselves. When in doubt, remember: puppies will get into **everything**.

Bathrooms make ideal puppy habitats, but toilets should be kept closed at ALL times to avoid fatal accidents. Areas should be free from any kind of string, electrical cords, blinds, rocking chairs, and toxic substances (like some houseplants). Should you have any questions about getting an area ready to receive puppies, contact the shelter. We will be happy to talk you through any concerns you may have, help you figure out a safe set-up and provide you with crates, playpens or baby gates as we have them available. If you have concerns or questions after your initial home visit, we can visit again to help you identify potential hazards.

## A House is a Home

Once the designated area is prepared, puppies need to have a space where they can be contained within their room. Large dog crates or playpens can work very well for this purpose; sometimes it is necessary to tape off or pad gaps along the bottom for small dogs. Providing a small crate, hiding box or den can be helpful so that puppies will have a home base. Ideally, these should be made of plastic, so that they can be disinfected and easily cleaned. These boxes should be thoroughly lined with towels and blankets, which the shelter will provide.

Puppies will soil their bedding or it may become damp with humidity. Soiled bedding should be removed and laundered and replaced with fresh bedding regularly. It is very important that the puppies are not left in damp or wet bedding as it may cause them to chill. Try to leave at least one blanket or towel within their den that remains covered in their scent. The scents they leave on their bedding provide them with a source of comfort, decreasing stress.

## Health

**Weight gain:** Puppies will be weighed regularly at each medical visit. If, in between visits, your puppy is not eating please contact the shelter. Weight loss in puppies is very serious and should be addressed immediately.

**Cleanliness:** In the absence of a mother, it falls upon the foster parent to keep their puppies unsullied. Inevitably, puppies will get food and feces stuck in their fur – gently wash off any filth with a warm, damp washcloth or in the tub.

**Hydration:** Puppies should always be well hydrated. If you have concerns regarding your puppy's water intake or hydration status contact the shelter.

**Stool:** If you are concerned, please contact the shelter, and you may be asked to bring in a fecal sample and/or the puppy. We can also provide a few packets of Fortiflora. In the event of diarrhea, a pinch can be added to each feeding of food in order to help re-establish the natural gut flora.

**Urine:** Urine should always be yellow, and puppies should not strain when urinating. If a puppy appears to be straining, or if their urine is any other color than yellow – particularly if it appears to contain blood – contact the shelter immediately.

**General Health:** Should you notice the following symptoms, please monitor the puppies closely, and, should they persist, contact shelter medical staff:

- Sneezing, coughing, discharge from eyes or nose;
- Wheezing;
- Change in behavior or lethargy; loss or decrease of appetite;
- Bleeding from any part of the body;
- Straining to urinate or defecate;
- Diarrhea;
- Hair loss;
- Abnormal body movement like twitching or spasms;
- Heavy breathing;
- Not eating

## **Caring for Weaning/Weaned Puppies**

### Transitioning a partially weaned puppy to food

Some puppies will take directly to dry or wet food; others will need more coaxing. For those that are not consuming enough solid food, offer a teaspoon of A/D (a special prescription veterinary canned food) mixed with hydrated milk replacement (or a pre-mixed milk solution, available at the shelter); the resulting slurry often helps to tempt reticent puppies to begin eating. (Please note that A/D is very rich, and should be used sparingly, as it can often give them diarrhea.) Wet food that is warmed in the microwave for a few seconds can also be more appetizing, as it becomes fragrant when heated. During the weaning process, continue supplemental bottle feeding as necessary.

Once puppies are fully weaned, offer them dry puppy food and water at all times; supplement this with wet food at least twice per day. For puppies that eat ravenously all at once, feed dry food in

meal form three times daily. Separate litters of puppies and feed each puppy individually so that each one gets the nutrition they need.

## **Crate training**

Some puppies may arrive at your home already crate-trained, others may be very upset by being confined in this manner\*. If your puppy is not comfortable being crated, it is very important not to force or punish them. This creates a negative association with the crate and will ultimately lead to worsening behavior and distrust of you. Instead, you will need to use an alternate way to confine the puppy (a playpen, baby-gates, puppy-proofed room, etc.) while changing their opinion about the crate.

To start, put your puppy's meal in the crate with the door open. If your puppy is too scared to go all the way in, put the bowl/Kong near the door, so the puppy only has to put their head in. For the next meal, put it in a little further, slowly working up to the puppy going all the way inside.

When the puppy is comfortable eating their meal in an open crate, we are ready to start closing the crate briefly. Try closing it when the puppy goes in and opening it as soon as the puppy finishes. When the puppy is relaxed for that, start leaving it closed, but giving the puppy a food puzzle, a new, exciting toy, or a tasty chew. Close the door for only a couple minutes at first.

When the puppy has worked up to 15 minutes while you are standing there watching them, start closing the pup in the crate and ignoring them while staying in the same room. Set a timer or watch a clock, and spend some time reading, catching up on e-mails, folding laundry, or any other unexciting task that doesn't involve the puppy. Once again, start with short periods (5 minutes is usually a good start) and work your way up. If the pup cries, ignore them, but plan to upgrade to better distractions for the next session!

Once the pups can occupy themselves for half an hour with you in the room, start leaving the room. Again, start with just a few minutes, and slowly work up to longer periods. If at any point, the puppy becomes distressed and frantic, go back a step and stay there for a couple days.

“How do I tell if my puppy is crying from boredom/for attention vs. not being crate-trained?”

Firstly, try to make sure the pup has plenty to do in their crate. That often is enough to cure mildly fussy puppies. For more devoted criers, try to observe the puppy's body language. Are they fairly relaxed, or are they frantic or frightened? If they seem relaxed, you can try letting them “cry it out” for up to 20 minutes. If they are still barking, whining, or howling at the end of those 20 minutes, you need to start crate-training from the beginning. Either they are not trained, or they have been taught that crying for long enough will result in being let out. In either case, the cure is to start building good behavior on a solid foundation.

## **House-training**

If you have a safe outdoor area, we recommend beginning housetraining your puppy to go outdoors. This helps eliminate confusion for the puppy as s/he tries figure out why peeing in the house is allowed in certain spots. The spot you choose for your puppy must be clean, with no access by dogs other than your own, properly-immunized dogs. This is because of your puppy's weak immune system and a puppy's love of putting everything in their mouth.

If you do not have an appropriate area (for example, if loose neighborhood dogs come into your yard), you should use puppy pads or newspaper to houstrain your puppy. In this case, make sure that your puppy's bathroom area is far away from their play and eating space. Some puppies are fastidious and won't eliminate near their living space.

House-training must not involve punishment. Often the result is a puppy who thinks s/he isn't allowed to pee in front of you, without understanding that you meant they shouldn't pee in the house. If you catch your puppy eliminating in the house, say "oops!" in a friendly tone, pick the puppy up and take them to the place where they are supposed to go (pad or outside.) If they finish eliminating there, reward them with play, praise or a small treat. For additional tips and trick for housetraining your puppy, please see the links below, or contact the Behavior team.

<https://peaceablepaws.com/whats-the-best-way-to-houstrain-my-puppy/>

For trickier cases, check out Patricia McConnell's *Way to Go!* You can check to see if we have any copies available in the volunteer lending library; if you need it right away, the e-book is available very inexpensively at the following website:

<https://www.patriciamcconnell.com/store/Way-To-Go-10-eBook.html>

### **Safe Socialization**

This is an important age for socialization, the process of exposing puppies to the world. Under-socialized puppies are often fearful or timid in new situations or around strange objects, and may be this way for the rest of their adult life. Foster homes provide a chance to teach your puppy about a normal dog's life. Your puppy should have lots of positive experiences with new objects and people. Let them see you and your family wearing strange hats or noisy shoes, using a cane, or playing sports that involve equipment such as a baseball glove or a bike. Reward them for being calm when you run the dishwasher, sweep or do other household chores that can be alarming. Introduce them to new people of all ages and personalities in a positive, gentle way and have them play. Have them practice getting in the car and going for short drives. Practice doing things their new owner will need to do, like wiping off muddy paws, looking at (or even better, brushing!) their teeth, brushing long-haired dogs, and looking in their ears. Ask your mail carrier or other delivery people to give the puppy a treat. Start teaching some simple training skills, like sit.

Observe your puppy carefully; if s/he seems overwhelmed, **stop!** Socialization only works if the experiences are fun for your puppy. If you would like advice on safe ways to socialize your puppy, contact the behavior team and we'll help you develop a safe, fun socialization that fits your household and lifestyle. See the list attached the end of the manual for a checklist of different experiences.

### **Socialization to other animals**

Socialization with other animals is very important to a puppy's healthy development but must be done carefully to keep both parties healthy and safe. Ideally, your foster pup would be able to meet and greet pets in your home and in carefully-controlled situations like a friend's house. Foster puppies should **never** go to the dog park, pet stores, public hiking trails, etc. where they will be sharing the area with unknown dogs.

Any animal your puppy is meeting should be current on vaccines and show no signs of illness. It is also possible that your foster pup may be carrying parasites, kennel cough, or other, more serious conditions such as parvovirus, so be aware that there is a health risk for the other animal too. Elderly pets, pets with suppressed immune systems (such as pets taking steroidal medications or pets being treated with chemotherapy for cancer), other puppies, or any other pet who may be at high risk of illness should not meet your puppy. If your puppy has any sign of illness or is currently being treated with medication, they should not meet other pets.

Choosing play partners based on behavioral health is important too! Bad experiences during a puppy's sensitive socialization period can lead to life-long fears, so we need to make this a fun event.



Any pet with a history of aggression towards dogs or bullying other animals is not a suitable choice. Fearful or anxious pets may not be a good option either; puppies can be unpredictable and alarming to these animals, and they may feel they need to defend themselves. When conducting a first meet, both animals should be restrained. Leashing, putting up a baby gate, or meeting through a fence are good choices. Don't force the puppy to interact! It is very important to let them think about the situation and decide to greet the other animal when they feel ready. Reward both pets generously for polite behavior and separate them immediately if either pet seems uncomfortable. Remember, even if they don't want to interact much and would prefer to just watch each other, it is still a good learning experience for both animals.

Always supervise interactions that involve your foster puppy, even if they have become best friends with a pet you introduced them to. Puppies are still learning appropriate interactions, and you should always be there to help coach them. If anyone is getting teased or bullied, you should step in, not leave them to "work it out." Sometimes one animal just needs a break, other times you may need to re-direct one party to a more appropriate game. (Tug with a rope instead of each other's collars, for example.) If you are unsure how to handle a particular situation, separate them, find a way to avoid that conflict, and contact the SPCA behavior staff or foster coordinator for suggestions.

## **Policies/Expectations**

The policies in this manual have been developed in coordination with the SPCA of Tompkins County and the Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell University, using both shelter and veterinarian expertise. Please adhere to the guidelines in this manual and follow our rules of conduct. We are unable to assign foster pets to individuals who do not comply with our guidelines.

## **Thank you!**

We are grateful to our foster parents for your time and devotion to our shelter animals. Thank you for being willing to embrace the responsibility that goes with fostering pets.

## **Connect with Fellow Volunteers**

Volunteers are encouraged to join the listserv and 'SPCA of Tompkins County Volunteers' Facebook Group. These groups are for ALL volunteers, not only foster families. They are a great place to seek advice and view adoption updates on your previous fosters. You will also get shelter updates and learn of events hosted by the shelter for volunteers, such as monthly tea time and potluck suppers (often include an educational component).

### **Joining the Groups.io Listserv**

Point your browser to <https://groups.io/g/SPCA-of-TC-Volunteers>

Once you see the group, you will need to scroll down and click the blue button that says '+Apply For Membership In This Group.'

It will then ask for your email. You should receive an email from Groups.io that requires you to "Confirm account" and create a password. You will then need to wait for approval before you are able to participate.