



Unweaned Puppy and Mother 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:

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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, including orphaned bottle feeder puppies and those who are not weaned from their mother. 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 animals.

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

Fostering orphaned puppies with or without a mother requires a significant time commitment. We ask that individuals interested in fostering orphaned puppies with or without their mother be available several weeks and sometimes even months at a time. We understand that you may have certain months or times of year that you are unavailable.

Types of fostering

Un-weaned puppies (“neonates”) need to be fed every two to four hours, including through the night, for the first several weeks of their lives. Caring for neonates is intensive and usually requires foster parents to have schedules that allow frequent breaks and time to care for the puppies.

Moms with nursing puppies require patient daily attention based on their individual needs.

How do I get foster dogs?

When dogs are in need of foster homes, foster parents will be notified by phone or e-mail. Please check your email regularly in order to be kept informed of fostering needs and respond as 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. You can also request to join the ‘SPCA of Tompkins County Volunteers’ private Facebook page, which is another great place to interact with your fellow volunteers. Any foster parents who do not wish to join the listserv/Facebook page, 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 (including formula if needed), 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.

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 puppy. A volunteer or staff member will come to your home and provide information on-site about getting your home ready and

make suggestions on making it puppy-friendly and safe. They will also go over the manual with you and be available to answer any questions.

Medical Appointments

Puppies and their mother 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. You will be provided with a copy of all relevant medical records at the time of pick up.

Foster puppies, and their mother, should be scheduled every two weeks for appointments with the medical staff at the shelter. Puppies will be weighed, examined, receive booster vaccines and be dewormed. Mothers will receive their booster shots, continued deworming, and to have their mammary glands and milk production monitored

Emergency Information

If one of your foster pets 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 animal's care in the case of an emergency. Foster parents are not allowed to authorize treatment.

If you are uncertain whether your foster dog 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 dogs 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 listserv 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 and 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. 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; and dog-owning friends should not be bringing their dogs over either. Please 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 un-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. Neonates and very young puppies should be contained at all times and should only be taken out of their habitats under supervision for feeding, stimulation, and brief socialization. As they get older, the puppies will become increasingly mobile and will begin 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.

For foster parents caring for neonates, we will provide a large plastic bin with a mesh lid, which is an adequate environment for very young bottle-feeders. As the puppies grow and become more mobile, a larger nesting box with lower sides will suffice. Puppies can go in and out of the new nesting box to access food and water. Mothers with puppies should have a private, secluded crate large enough to accommodate her and her puppies with enough space that she can stretch out to nurse them.

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

Sometimes, puppies will either crawl or fall out of the nesting box and become chilled. Depending how long they are exposed, they may be very inactive and lethargic when you find them. Hold them closely to your chest, and warm them slowly. Heat the SnuggleSafe, and warm the puppy in blankets with the heating disc. As the puppy begins to warm up, you can take a pea-sized amount of Nutri-cal

and rub it gently onto the roof of the puppy's mouth. Contact the shelter for additional emergency instruction.

Important benchmarks

When puppies are **neonates** (one to four weeks old), they are very fragile and highly susceptible to physiologic stress and disease; at this age there is a very high mortality rate. It is also during the neonatal stage that puppies undergo several exciting developments: eyes open and tail wagging starts at around 10 days, and ears open and they begin to stand at two weeks. At three weeks, they start to bark and walk.

Weanlings (four to five weeks old) are, as discussed above, transitioning. During this time, they begin to eat, urinate, and defecate on their own. They will become more proficient at walking and will begin to explore their environment.

Between four and eight weeks of age, they will begin to act like true **puppies**. They will be highly explorative, mobile, and capable of wreaking havoc. It is in this stage that puppies should be actively socialized. Make sure to provide them with toys and stimulation. See weaned puppy manual for additional information.

Section One: Caring for Neonatal Puppies

Particular Environmental Concerns for Neonatal Puppies

Neonatal puppies should be kept in an enclosed den at all times, which is covered with a mesh lid. We will provide all foster parents with a 'snuggle safe' disc which, when heated in the microwave, will retain heat for up to eight to ten hours and may be reheated as often as necessary (please do *not* heat the discs beyond the maximum recommendation; they can and will explode). As discs age, they become less and less heat efficient, so make sure to check often at the beginning, to ensure your disc is providing ample warmth.

These are general guidelines for heating 'SnuggleSafe' discs; please be aware that these are not exact times, depending on the microwave and the age of the disc, so use caution when heating the discs, and test them often:

Once warm, wrap the disc (which should be hot to the touch) in a towel, and place it under a section of the puppy's blankets. ***It is essential that there be ample room, so that the puppy can move away from the heat source, if they become too warm.***

Microwave Power	Time
600-650 watts	8 minutes
700-750 watts	7 minutes
800-850 watts	6 minutes
900-1000 watts	5 minutes
1100-1200 watts	4 minutes
1300-1400 watts	2 ½ minutes

Below, find recommendations for den temperatures, according to the age of the puppies. In order to maintain a constant temperature, cover the dens with a towel or blanket. Make sure to check the temperature frequently as it is essential that the puppies neither chill nor overheat.

Age (days)	Nest Box Temperature	Normal Body Temperature
0-7	85-90° F	96-98° F
8-14	80° F	99° F
15-21	80° F	100.5° F
22-28	80° F	Same as adult dogs
29-35	70° F	Same as adult dogs

Single neonatal puppies are most vulnerable to chill. They have no body fat, and therefore have no mechanism to regulate their own temperature. Litters have the advantage of sleeping next to one another, more efficiently retaining body heat. Puppies with nursing mothers are less prone to chill, because they can derive warmth from their mother.

Feeding

Milk Replacement

The shelter will provide a form of milk replacement; it usually comes in powder form which, when mixed with water, provides neonates with ample nutrition. Follow the instructions provided on the container to properly reconstitute the powder and store it in a glass jar in the refrigerator. Most milk replacement will last only 24 hours. Please mix only as much as you will use within that time period to avoid waste.

It is very important to mix milk replacement properly! Over-concentrated milk replacement can give puppies diarrhea and under-concentrated milk replacement will not provide ample nutrition. Only the first few feedings of formula should be purposefully diluted, in order to get the puppies' systems used to feeding.

Feeding Materials

As stated above, carefully mix all milk replacement in appropriate proportion in a lidded, glass jar, which you can then shake vigorously to mix. Foster parents will be provided with bottle sets containing several bottles, funnels, bottle-cleaning brushes, and pre-cut nipples. The nipples have each had small openings made with a hot needle, which should allow a small amount of milk to slowly pass through. Please do not cut large holes; if the openings are too big, puppies can swallow too much formula at once and aspirate.

Keep all feeding materials clean. Wash everything thoroughly with soap and hot water (or in a dishwasher) and store materials in a clean area. When the formula dries, it can become crusted to the inside of the bottles, so we have provided bottle-cleaning brushes small enough to fit inside. ***It is particularly important that feeding materials be very well cleaned if they are being used between litters.***

Feeding

Because puppies can be quite difficult to hold still, it can be helpful to swaddle them in a hand towel while you feed.

- Warm milk to roughly 100°F (maternal body temperature is 101.5°F).

- Hold the puppy gently, lying with its stomach pressed against your hand, so that its feet can push off against you (think of the position in which it would naturally nurse from its mother).
- Hold the nipple at a very slight angle, mimicking the angle at which a nursing puppy would lift its head to suckle. If the puppy does not automatically receive the nipple, gently open its mouth with your fingers; sometimes moving the nipple in and around its mouth will encourage the puppy to latch on.
- The puppy will stop eating when it is full, but generally you can expect them to consume food at the rate below at each feeding:

Week 1: 12 mls of formula / **pound** of body weight

Week 2: 14 mls of formula / **pound** of body weight

Week 3: 17 mls of formula / **pound** of body weight

Week 4: 20 mls of formula / **pound** of body weight

- **Never squeeze the bottle**; let the puppy eat at its own pace.
- Avoid overfeeding, which can lead to diarrhea, vomiting, or aspiration.
- Should puppies refuse to take formula from the bottle, try gently rubbing their heads and faces. Sometimes puppies won't eat if they need to go to the bathroom, so try stimulating to pee or poop. Make sure they are warm enough. Puppies can easily become dehydrated and hypoglycemic; should they repeatedly refuse to feed, contact the shelter immediately. A shelter staff member may be able to tube feed them until they start eating again on their own. Force feeding neonates can cause aspiration, so please call us if they aren't eating on their own.
- Feeding frequency is dependent upon the age of the neonate, the volume consumed at each feeding, and the food quality.
 - Newborns should be fed 5 times daily
 - Once they are two weeks old, puppies should be fed 3-4 times a day.

Stimulation

For roughly the first three weeks, puppies must be stimulated to urinate and defecate. Using a washcloth soaked in warm water and rung out thoroughly, gently rub the lower abdomen, genitals, and rectum. Puppies will probably urinate each time they are stimulated but may not defecate for 2-3 feedings. They may also defecate a few minutes after stimulation, so be sure to check and clean them if this occurs. Sometimes gently inserting a lubricated rectal thermometer can also help stimulate defecation.

Puppy suckling

All puppies have the natural instinct to want to nurse/suckle. Commonly, especially with bottle fed orphans, they will look to each other to nurse. If you notice that your foster puppies are trying to nurse on each other, they must be immediately separated! If puppies are allowed to nurse on each other (especially the genitalia) it can cause severe damage. If allowed to continue, it could result in life threatening damage. Please separate the puppies and call the shelter for additional advice.

Weaning

At roughly four weeks, puppies will begin to wean. Do not be surprised if their first introduction to solid food results in either diarrhea or constipation; this is merely the result of introducing new elements to their digestive systems. This should be expected to clear up within a few days. It is crucial during weaning to offer puppies ample fresh water in order to keep them well hydrated.

Some puppies will take directly to dry or wet food; others will need more coaxing. For those resistant to trying solid food, offer a teaspoon of A/D 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.

Section Two: Caring for Nursing Mothers

The wonderful thing about fostering a mother with her puppies is that one's role as a foster parent is greatly simplified. If her puppies are very young, she will provide all their nutrition, stimulate them to use the bathroom, take care of the waste, and groom them. At the beginning, the foster parent's role is simply to monitor, provide warm and quiet housing, and to feed and care for the mother.

Nursing mothers and their puppies should be separated from all other pets in the household. Mother dogs are often highly protective of their puppies and should not be stressed. Ensure their nesting box is spacious but provide mother dogs with an area to move away from the puppies. (For example, a crate with a nest for her puppies in a spare room of her own. She can get up and walk around to stretch her legs, then return to the crate when the puppies need care). A mother dog should be present to feed, groom, and keep her puppies warm; monitor to ensure she is with them most of the time. If she spends more than two consecutive hours away from the puppies, there may be a problem. In such cases, contact the shelter, as we may advise you to provide supplemental feeding and warmth.

Nursing mothers require significantly more calories in their diet than a normal, adult dog: they should be provided with dry puppy food and water at all times, and their diet should be supplemented with wet food regularly (ideally twice per day). Watching her eat may encourage puppies to wean more quickly than they might if bottle fed, so watch to see when they begin trying to eat solid food (as early as three to four weeks).

Keep in mind that nursing mothers will be vaccinated and treated for fleas and worms before they enter foster care. They will need to be brought in every two weeks, with their puppies, for booster shots, continued deworming, and to have their mammary glands and milk production monitored.

General guidelines for handling adult foster dogs:

- Don't allow interactions with other people's dogs, such as going to a dog park.
- Always walk on a harness or martingale collar with a flat leash, not a Flexi.
- Leave the shelter ID tag on the dog. You can add a tag with your info as well, but we need that ID number to stay with the animal.
- Supervise your foster dog when s/he is in your yard. We often don't know how good at escaping yards s/he may be and shelter dogs may not feel that this is home, giving them no reason not to leave the yard.
- Use any additional equipment the staff provides, such as slings, Elizabethan collars, Gentle Leaders or muzzles. If you aren't familiar with how something works, just ask and we'll happily teach you.
- Know your foster's medical status. We will provide this information to you at pick-up. Has s/he had all the needed vaccines? When was the last time s/he was dewormed? Has s/he been

altered, or will you need to come in for a spay/neuter? Knowing this info can help keep you, your foster and your own pets safe. Dogs who are in foster for longer periods may need flea treatment or de-wormer again.

- Follow the shelter's training cues and policies, unless behavior staff approves another method. This cuts down on confusion for the dog, handlers and adopters.
- Don't change the dog's diet unless approved by medical staff.
- Give the dog some downtime when s/he first arrives. Keep the first few days as calm and stress-free as possible.
- Limit guest interactions. Most foster dogs don't want to be flooded with visitors. This is especially important for nursing mothers, as excessive stress can cause the mother to harm her puppies in some instances.

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.