



ANIMAL ADOPTION CENTER

FOSTER CAREGIVER HANDBOOK

Fostering: Finding the Right Fit

The mission of Animal Adoption Center (AAC) is a nonprofit, no-kill animal shelter that provides temporary shelter and medical care for rescued dogs and cats for the purpose of finding them suitable and permanent new homes. Our foster “parents” play an indispensable role within the organization, helping us to fulfill our mission.

- AAC was founded by Sid Kreitzberg and Carole Shankin in 1990.
- AAC was designated a no-kill animal shelter by the first board of trustees. This no-kill designation predated the modern no-kill movement by three years.
- Goals of AAC are to assist:

1. Pet owners forced to give up pets due to circumstances beyond their control.
2. Pet owners who, due to financial hardship are unable to provide their pets with food/supplies, and therefore may relinquish or abandon their pets.
3. Pet owners who are forced to move, and are unable to take their pets with them.
4. Local shelters faced with dangerous overcrowding.



- AAC Programs:
 1. Pets for Vets Adoption Program
 2. Seniors for Seniors Adoption Program
 3. Pet Food Pantry
 4. Spay/Neuter Information
 5. Pet Friendly Rental Service
 6. Various Volunteer Opportunities

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS REGARDING THESE PROGRAMS, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR VOLUNTEER MANAGER.



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What is a FOSTER CAREGIVER?

A Foster Caregiver is an AAC volunteer willing to foster dogs and/or cats. Foster Caregivers are responsible for providing care for their foster pet(s) until they are adopted or reclaimed. In addition to providing, food, water, shelter and a caring environment, for their foster pet(s), Foster Caregivers are responsible for the coordination of, and transportation required for, any necessary medical care (including, but not limited to, procedures such as spay/neuter, vaccinations, microchip implantation). Veterinary appointments are coordinated through AAC Staff. If a Foster Caregiver cannot provide transportation, AAC will arrange alternative transportation.



Ideally, foster homes have an “extra” indoor space (e.g. a spare bedroom, home office, etc.) available on an ongoing basis, so that their foster pets can be isolated and slowly integrated into the resident pet population. Once they’ve been integrated into the home, fosters can ensure that they stay part of

the family, including them in their daily routines so the pets become accustomed to the lives we hope for them to have once they’re adopted.

What are the requirements to be a AAC Foster Caregiver?

In order to become a AAC Foster Caregiver, candidates must first complete the online AAC Foster Application that’s provided by the staff. In addition the following requirements must be met:

- Ideally, the candidate’s pets (if any) will be spayed/neutered and have current vaccinations. (Some exceptions will be made, as in the case of senior pet that’s too old to be altered or a pet that’s too young, for example).
- The candidate’s home must have a fenced yard and the fence must be secure enough to prevent a dog from slipping out. Cats must be kept indoors or in a cattery.
- Foster Caregivers must be willing to transport foster pets to necessary vet appointments, as coordinated by AAC Staff, and must be willing to take their foster pets to a minimum 2 adoption events per month. In addition, they must be willing to meet up with applicants interested in adopting their foster pet at our facility for meet and greets and dog intros.



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General Responsibilities

All AAC Foster Caregivers are responsible for:

- Providing adequate food, water, shelter and kind treatment of the animal(s) in their care. AAC will not reimburse Foster Caregivers for the cost of food, toys, fuel used to transport pets, or other similar expenses associated with fostering. These costs should be tax deductible though so see your accountant for more information. Veterinary care for foster pets will generally be covered by AAC – see *Your Foster Pet's Healthcare* section for details.) Food and other items are often donated to AAC, and may be available to Foster Caregivers. Please contact the Foster Coordinator or AAC Staff with specific requests.
- Photographing and writing a brief profile/bio for their foster pet(s) and sending the photo and bio, via email, to the Foster Coordinator or AAC Staff. Bios and photos should be updated as necessary (e.g., behavior changes, kittens or puppies growing into young adults, etc.) This is a critical step toward getting pets adopted (see *Finding Your Foster Pet's Forever Home* section for more details).
- Notifying AAC immediately in the event a foster pet is not working out, and the foster parent wishes to discontinue fostering. Please understand that it can take anywhere from a few hours to several months to locate another foster parent able to care for the animal in question.
- Taking their foster pet(s) to as many adoption events – both regular weekend events and special events held periodically throughout the year, - as possible (see *Finding Your Foster Pet's Forever Home* section for details regarding the adoption process). Foster Caregivers are required to take their foster pet(s) to at least two adoption events each month. Please talk to your Foster Coordinator or Volunteer Manager to sign up for adoption events.

What goes in my foster pet's bio?

- How did the pet come to AAC?
- How many positive adjectives can you come up with to describe this cat/dog?
- What's unique/interesting/funny about its personality?
- Is this pet good with other cats/dogs? With children?
- Is your foster pet litter box trained/house trained/crate trained/doggy door trained?
- Are there current behavior or medical issues than an adopter should know about?

Please be sure to include the pet's name, sex, breed, weight and age.



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- Housing AAC foster pets on their own property/at their own residence. Never relocate a foster animal to another property/residence (while you're going to be out of town, for example) without prior approval from the AAC Foster Coordinator or AAC Staff.



- Knowing their limits with regard to the many responsibilities of fostering (often over and above obligations to their own pets and family). For the sake of all parties involved, please take on only what you can handle.
 - Keeping dogs away from public places (e.g., dog parks, hiking trails, etc.) until they have their vaccinations (e.g., DHLPP, Rabies and Bordatella), and are spayed/neutered.
- Keeping cats INDOORS or in an ENCLOSED cattery. AAC foster cats are not allowed outdoors, even while attended. (Exceptions can be made for leashes and enclosed strollers, carriers.)
 - Notifying AAC of any health or behavioral issues (see *Your Foster Pet's Healthcare* and *Home Sweet Home* section for details.)

Your Foster Pet's Healthcare

In addition to the general requirements outlined above, all AAC foster parents are expected to monitor the health of the pets in their care. Specifically Foster Caregivers are responsible for:

- Transporting the animal(s) in their care to and from appointments with AAC-authorized veterinarians. These vet appointments will be arranged through a Foster Coordinator or AAC Staff Member. Foster Caregivers should NOT schedule their own vet appointments – AAC pays only for medical costs approved in advance and coordinated through our network of approved veterinarians. AAC requires the following vaccinations:

- ✓ DHLPP, Rabies and Bordatella (Dogs)



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- ✓ FVRCP and a negative result on a FeLV/FIV test (Cats)
- Responding to medical emergencies related to their foster pet(s). In the event of such an emergency:
 - ✓ Keep calm and try not to panic.
 - ✓ Contact your AAC Foster Coordinator immediately. If you cannot reach the Foster Coordinator, please contact the following people in order:

Chris Harris
Leighann Henry

(602) 430.9340
(856) 571.6427

- ✓ If no AAC contact is reachable and it is a life-threatening emergency, then take your foster pet to the nearest emergency veterinary office/clinic. Call the emergency clinic in advance to let them know you are coming and about the situation.
- ✓ Carry out any procedures (e.g., first aid) advised by the veterinarian.
- ✓ Transport your pet safely to the veterinarian, as directed.



It is recommended that Foster Caregivers maintain a first aid kit for their pets. Among the items that should be included are the following (remember there may be others, such as specific meds required for the pet(s) in your care:

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| ✓ A list of emergency phone numbers | ✓ Needle-nose pliers | ✓ Hypoallergenic adhesive tape |
| ✓ A list of nearby 24-hour animal hospitals and veterinarians | ✓ Pediatric rectal thermometer | ✓ Roll gauze and gauze pads, gauze tape |
| ✓ Material to make a splint (e.g., wood, newspaper, sticks, etc.) | ✓ Grooming clippers or a safety razor | ✓ Cotton balls and swabs |
| ✓ A muzzle | ✓ Clean cloth | ✓ Exam gloves |
| ✓ Nylon leash | ✓ Bank/credit card (expired) to scrape away stingers | ✓ Epsom salts |
| ✓ Tweezers | ✓ Hydrogen peroxide | ✓ Styptic pencil |
| | ✓ Petroleum jelly | ✓ Small scissors |

Poisons



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Are you aware of how many things around your home are potentially toxic for your foster pet? Most people don't realize that the following common items can be dangerous and/or deadly:

Food Items

- Chocolate – depending on the type of chocolate, there is a possibility for severe toxicity with even small ingestions. The cause is a chemical in the cocoa called theobromine. Certain chocolates have high concentrations of theobromine, making them very dangerous to dogs. It is therefore best to avoid contact with any type of chocolate.



- Onions (and Garlic for cats) – Ingesting onions, (and Garlic for cats) even as a powder can cause serious anemia in dogs and cats. Serious cases can result on hospitalization, and even the need for blood transfusions. Should your pet ingest table scraps, be aware that even small amounts can be toxic. NOTE: onion is commonly found in turkey, chicken and other meat baby foods – which are sometimes used by people working with shy and/or fearful cats. Please read all labels carefully.
- Raisins/Grapes – For reasons currently unknown to veterinary science, raisins and grapes can cause irreversible kidney failure in dogs. Although cats may be less likely to ingest table scraps, be aware that even small amounts can be toxic.
- Mushrooms – Many mushrooms are harmless, but there are a few that are deadly, and it is extremely difficult to tell them apart. If your pet eats any portion of a mushroom contact your veterinarian or pet poison help line immediately. In such cases, an entire mushroom, or at least a good portion of one, should be placed in a labeled brown bag and refrigerated for later identification by a trained mycologist. Signs are not specific and may not develop for hours or days.

Household Items

- Over-the-Counter Pain Medicine – Many common human medications can be toxic to pets. Do not administer any human meds (including common pain relievers) to pets unless you have prior authorization from a veterinarian.
- Flea and Tick Products – Take time to read the label before applying topical flea/tick products, especially to cats. There are number of “spot-on” products



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labeled for use on dogs only. Inappropriate use of these products on cats can result in illness and death. Do not apply ANY medication to a foster pet without the prior approval from AAC of an AAC-approved veterinarian.

- Ethylene Glycol Antifreeze – Generally green in color, this odorless, sweet-tasting product – which nearly all animals find tasty – is one of the most toxic substances found in the typical garage. Small quantities ingested can rapidly result in irreversible kidney failure if no intervention occurs. Immediate treatment is critical to your pet's survival. NOTE: A safer alternative is propylene antifreeze with is nearly tasteless.
- Liquid Potpourri – Cats can be seriously injured from contact with and/or ingestion of liquid potpourri. Liquid potpourri is often displayed in an open container and curious cats may taste or play with it. Some cats may inadvertently step in it and then lick it from their paws while grooming. This can result in serious burns to the skin, mouth, and throat, requiring intense medical care.

Lawn/Garden/Plants

- Garden Fertilizers - Some contain iron, insecticides, or other compounds that can be dangerous to your pets.
- Grass Seed - Grass seed is dangerous only if eaten in large quantities, in which case the seeds may clump and result in a gastric obstruction which may in turn result in a trip to the veterinarian.
- Cocoa Bean Mulch - The rich chocolate smell is enough to entice dogs. Sadly, eating large amounts of this product (also called cocoa mulch or cocoa shell mulch) can result in signs of chocolate poisoning in many dogs. It is best to use this product in moderation and keep pets away from it.
- Snail Baits - There are many non-toxic methods to deter pests in the garden or lawn, however a large number of commercial garden molluscicides and insecticides do contain ingredients highly toxic to domestic animals. One common active ingredient, metaldehyde, causes life-threatening convulsions and seizures when eaten in even small quantities.
- Tulips - Can be irritating to the skin and - if consumed - gastrointestinal tract.





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Life-threatening toxicity is not likely, but medications may need to be administered to calm your pet's queasy stomach.

- **Holiday Plants** - If ingested, the stems and leaves of poinsettias (commonly found around Christmastime) may cause some mild gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting, but are not deadly. Any part of an Easter lily, once ingested, can cause kidney failure in cats. Initial symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, and depression. Left untreated, most cats will die of kidney failure.
- **Other Plants** - Tulips (especially the bulbs), lily of the valley, oleanders, kalanchoe, and azaleas can be deadly to pets if ingested in large enough quantities. Dogs and cats should be watched carefully when around these plants.

Environment

- **Heat and Humidity** - While not poisonous substances, the heat and humidity that are an inescapable part of New Jersey summers can be deadly to pets. Most pets don't perspire like humans, but use their lungs to dissipate excess heat (by way of panting). As the ambient temperature and humidity rise, these animals' ability to cool fails and they can suffer from heat stroke.



Common signs of heat stroke include rapid heart rate, heavy/noisy breathing, dazed appearance, glazed eyes, drooling/vomiting, and collapse. If your pet shows any of these signs, bath it with cool - not cold - water, and seek immediate veterinary care. Never leave a pet in a car on a hot day, or let them ride in the back of open trucks.

Home Sweet Home

Integrating a foster pet into a new home can be a challenge. However, by taking a few simple precautions, this can be done smoothly, without causing unnecessary stress to people and pets. It is recommended that:

- New foster pets may need to be separated from the Foster Caregiver's owned pets (or other foster pets) at least until they are "cleared" by a veterinarian (see *Your Foster Pet's Healthcare* section for details). AAC cannot be responsible for any illnesses/diseases that a Foster Caregiver's owned pet(s) contract(s) as a result of



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exposure to a foster pet.

- New foster pets, upon being “cleared” by a vet, are integrated slowly into the Foster Caregiver’s home - especially if the Foster Caregiver has another pet (or pets) and/or children in the home (see *Integration Tips* below).



Integration tips:

✓ **Consider the foster pet’s history**

Your foster may have been abandoned, abused, or surrendered by its previous family. The pet is going into a new, unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. Being gentle, considerate, kind - and perhaps most important, patient – will help your foster pet ease into its new situation.

✓ **Take it slowly**

Your foster pet may be afraid and/or unsure of its new surroundings. If they appear scared, keep them in a small, quiet area to start with - and take it slowly. Be sure to give positive reinforcement (e.g., treats, petting, etc.). Don’t allow children to bother the pet if the pet is afraid; fear can result in bites. Instead, give your foster pet plenty of time to adjust to its new surroundings, taking things one-step at a time.

When introducing a new foster pet to your family, show everybody the proper way to hold (one hand supporting its hindquarters, the other under its chest) and pet (stroking, not patting) the dog or cat. Never pick up your pet by its front paws or by the scruff of his neck. Avoid rough play/handling with your new foster pet.

✓ **Extra care with children**

When introducing your new foster pet to young children, it is important to teach the children how to properly approach and interact with the animal. It may be helpful to have the children get down on the floor - to better meet the dog or cat “on its level.” Again, take it slowly. Although you may have been told that your new foster pet is “good with children,” it is your responsibility to properly and safely introduce your pet(s) to the children in your home.



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In the case of older children, it is often a good idea to involve them in the care of your new foster pet(s).

When introducing your new foster pet to a baby, additional care/precautions must be exercised. It can be helpful to use one of the baby's blankets or an item of clothing to familiarize your foster pet with the baby's scent. Once again, the introduction should be taken slowly. Never leave a pet and a baby unsupervised.

- **Expect mistakes**

A new foster dog might eliminate in the house if not trained to use the outdoors.

Even a potty-trained dog can make mistakes in a new setting - not knowing which door to go out or how to communicate with his new foster family. Take him outside on a leash, following a schedule, and to the same spot each time.

Reward him with praise or treats. Feeding your dog on a schedule will also help with house training. Cats rarely have litter box issues, but if they do, they can often be resolved simply by switching to a different litter and giving them a litter box (which is cleaned regularly) of their own.



- **Expect a dog to act like a dog, and a cat to act like a cat**

Your foster pet had an entirely different set of rules (if any) at his previous home. He may have been allowed to sleep in the bed or beg at the dinner table. A new foster pet may jump to greet you. They (dogs and cats alike) may have the urge to chew.

It's up to you to teach them the rules. For your foster dog, consider crate training to assist with house training and minimize destructiveness. However, use this method only if you are familiar with it and know what you're doing. Crate training does not mean locking the foster pet up for 12-hours a day while you're at work and then locking him up all night when you go to bed. Please consult AAC if you are interested in learning more about this method.

Adopting Foster Pets

It sometimes happens that a foster parent is interested in adopting his/her foster pet(s). Because our foster parents know their foster pets better than anybody else does, this can often make for an excellent match between adopter and pet. Nevertheless, such situations must be handled carefully. Please be aware that fostering a pet does not automatically



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guarantee approval for its adoption. AAC works very hard to match the needs of the pet to the appropriate forever home. For this reason, we require foster parents interested in adopting their foster pet(s) to:

- Complete an Adoption Application for any foster pet he/she is interested in adopting. In general, AAC Staff will determine the adoption fee in such cases. Foster Caregivers are not guaranteed a discount on the adoption fee. Foster Caregivers interested in adopting their foster pets should begin the adoption process as soon as possible, and not wait until a prospective adopter expresses an interest in their foster pet.

Thank You and Welcome

This is a brief overview of the AAC Foster Caregiver program, and is not meant to be comprehensive. The experiences of foster parents are as different as the pets that are brought into our organization. For additional information, please consult with an AAC staff member. We are always available by email or phone to answer your questions. Thank you for joining the AAC Foster Caregiver program. We look forward to many happy foster experiences with you.

Resources

www.aacnj.org

www.aspcabehavior.org

