



**Tara Laffey**  
Community Programs Specialist  
Neonate Foster Coordinator  
(312)644-8338 ext. 8096  
[tlaffey@anticruelty.org](mailto:tlaffey@anticruelty.org)

**Neo-Natal Foster Manual**

Thank you for your participation in this lifesaving, neo-natal fostering program. These animals come to The Anti-Cruelty Society too young and frail to be spayed or neutered and will not fare well in the shelter environment. Neonate animals are in desperate need of the personalized attention and care that we just do not have the means to provide here at the shelter. These young kittens will need: a warm room free of drafts, lots of observation and care. Neonatal fosters have a very weak immune system and should not be introduced to resident animals. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out.

## Foster Responsibilities

- 1) Provide basic care, socialization, and training to assigned foster animal/s
- 2) Communicate weekly updates to Volunteer Services staff
- 3) Seek out assistance for medical or behavioral problems
- 4) Complete a detailed Foster Personality Profile on each foster animal before drop-off
- 5) Act as a community ambassador for The Anti-Cruelty Society
- 6) Follow all policies and protocols as specified in this manual and the Foster Manual

### Routine for bottle babies:

- 1) Bottle feed
- 2) Gentle stimulates to pee and poop
- 3) Wipe down face and genitals
- 4) Monitor the kitten's weight and take observational notes
- 5) Place kitten back in their warm space

## Creating a Foster-Friendly Place

Create a safe space for the mother and her kittens by choosing a quiet room that you can close off from your resident pets, if applicable. It is very important to make sure it is temperature controlled and there are no drafts as kittens body temperatures can drop very quickly. Make sure that there is a designated hiding spot so if the cat feels the need to burrow they're doing so in a safe space. Look out for furniture or fixtures where a cat can hide themselves and then have difficulty being retrieved. The cat-friendly space should also include some soft bedding, water and food bowls, a litter box and toys. It is not unusual for some mothers to be territorial about their newborns. If your foster mom is displaying offensive body language it is best to give them their space for a few days.

At around 3 weeks of age you can introduce a shallow litter box to your neonates. The litter should be fragrance free, **non-clumping** litter. Place kitten in the litter box frequently so that they remember to use it. You can also stimulate them over the litter pan to make the association. Make sure the litter box is easy to access and clean.

## Feeding

Foster parents will be provided with a bag Science Diet kitten kibble for your foster mom. Note that kitten kibble is higher in calories which makes it a great feeding option for nursing cats. This is the same food that the animals are fed in-shelter, and since they'll return this diet post-foster, it's important to keep them on it. Please follow the feeding instructions that are printed on the back of each bag. Foster parents are welcome to supplement with additional wet food as needed. Note that any change in diet – even such a minor one as switching brands of food – may cause diarrhea.

If the kittens are with their mother, and under four weeks of age, the mother should take care of the feeding. Once the kittens are about four weeks of age, you should start to notice them showing interest in their mother's food, this is an indication that they are ready to be weaned. It is not unusual for some animals to have a reduced appetite for a day or two after entering foster care. Remember that the animal is coping with a new home and new people, which can be stressful, but it is very important to make sure nursing mothers are eating an adequate amount of calories. If a foster animal develops persistent diarrhea, or does not eat after being in your care for 24 hours or more, please contact the clinic for assistance.

### **Making gruel:**

Mix 1/2 can of wet food with 1/4 can of formula per kitten. You can add a little water if the kittens seem to like a looser consistency. It's OK make gruel in bulk and refrigerate it, but you'll need to warm it before offering it to the kittens.

**Note:** Birth weight is the best predictor of a kitten's chance for survival. A healthy kitten should double in weight by day 10. Kittens who are not gaining weight at a healthy pace have a much higher mortality rate of 60%.

### **Bottle Feeding:**

Bottle-feeding neonatal kittens requires an around-the-clock commitment. Thank you so much for offering your time and attention to these fragile babies. And please remember that we are here to support you. Here's some general info about bottle-feeding.

Age	Weight	Amount Per Feeding	Schedule
0-1 week	50-150g	2-6 ml	Every 2 hours
1-2 weeks	150-250g	6-10 ml	Every 2-3 hours
2-3 weeks	250-350g	10-14 ml	Every 3-4 hours
3-4 weeks	350-450g	14-18 ml	Every 4-5 hours
4-5 weeks	450-550g	18-22 ml	Every 5-6 hours
5-8	550-850g	Weaning; offer ample wet food	Every 6 hours

Use your best judgement; if a kitten is eating less than recommended per feeding, you may need to increase the frequency of the feedings.

### **How to bottle-feed kittens:**

Kittens will bottle-feed every two to four hours, depending on their age. Steps for bottle-feeding a kitten:

- 1) Making formula: Mix two parts water with one part formula. Mix the powder and water until all clumps are gone. Remember, mixed formula only lasts for 24 hours.
  - 2) Warm the formula: Place the bottle in a bowl of hot water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.
  - 3) Ensure that your foster kitten is warm before offering food. Do not attempt to feed a kitten who is chilled\* because it can have serious health consequences.
  - 4) Wrap the kitten in a towel or blanket and position him so that his belly is toward the floor. Kittens should not be fed on their backs or in an upright position.
  - 5) Turn the bottle upside down and allow a drop of formula to come out. Place the bottle nipple in the kitten's mouth and gently move it back and forth, holding the bottle at a 45-degree angle to keep air from getting into the kitten's stomach. This movement should encourage the kitten to start eating. If at first you don't succeed, wait a few minutes and try again. Usually the kitten will latch on and begin to suckle. If the bottle appears to be collapsing, gently remove the nipple from the kitten's mouth and let more air return to the bottle.
  - 5) Weigh each kitten before and after feeding and record the weights in your journal.
- \* A kitten's ideal body temperature is 100 to 102 degrees. If a kitten feels cold to the touch, warm them up immediately. Place the kitten on an heating pad safely wrapped in two or three layers of towels. Turn the kitten side to side every 5 minutes. To stimulate blood flow, you may, ever so gently, massage the kitten with hand-rubbing.

Do not get discouraged if it takes you a while to get comfortable with bottle feeding, some kittens are naturals at it some are terrible at latching on. Please contact us if you have any questions.

## **Socialization**

As with human babies, kittens are not born understanding about the world and how to behave. The best time to teach them is during the primary socialization period, which is roughly from 3 to 12 weeks of age. This is when kittens are most open to new experiences and are thirsty to learn. After this time they become more cautious of new people and situations and their behavior is less malleable. Well-socialized kittens are more likely to grow up to be friendly adults who are easy to handle and not overly frightened or stressed. Lessons not learned by 12 weeks of age can be partially, but never fully, recovered.

Begin lightly handling you foster kittens as soon as possible. There is no truth to the idea that a mother will reject her babies if they are touched by people. However, mom needs to be okay with you petting the babies in order to avoid accidentally teaching them to be stressed by petting (if mom does seem to be too anxious for the first few days try petting them while she is out of the room or sleeping). Gentle petting and holding for just a few seconds several times each day is ideal for newborns. The babies should be picked up and held in different positions for brief periods each day by about 2 weeks of age.

As they get older, it is okay to handle them more frequently and for longer periods of time. Once they are about 5 weeks old, more people should be interacting with them. Behaviorists recommend that kittens meet as many new people as possible.

Socialization should intensify at around 4 weeks of age by:

- Introducing new textures by playing with the kittens on carpeting, tile, wood, blankets, rugs, concrete, etc.
- Exposing them to household noises such as blenders, doorbells, banging pots, washing machines, alarm clocks, stereos, etc. If there are no children living in or visiting the home, buy a cd with the sounds of children and play it frequently. Very loud or harsh noises, such as a blender, can be muffled initially by covering the appliance with a towel or making the noise while the pups are in an adjacent room.
- Placing items, such as winter boots, skateboards, and books on the floor for the fosters to investigate.
- Offering a variety of objects for the kittens or puppies to play with, including empty plastic bottles, paper towel cores, and cardboard boxes in different sizes, as well as commercial pet toys.
- Continuing to handle the fosters daily, including touching every part of their bodies.

## Medical Care

Our on-site veterinary clinic is open to all neonate foster animals that are in your care and we ask that neonate fosters should contact a member of the Shelter team prior to scheduling any clinic appointments.

Should a neonate foster need assistance after hours, they are encouraged to contact their Foster Mentor. The Anti-Cruelty Society's Foster Facebook page is a great resource for tips and support.

If you need to see a veterinarian the clinic is open from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Mondays – Fridays, call (312)644-8338 ext. 8051 to make an appointment. If you need to speak with a member of staff regarding your animal's health beyond those times, please call the main customer service line, which is staffed 9 a.m.-7 p.m. at (312)644-8338 ext. 8220.

If you feel that your kitten is fading it is of the utmost importance that you keep them warm. Wrap their entire body in a towel "burrito" leaving only their face out. Then wrap the towel in a heating pad, if you do not have a heating pad you can use tube socks and rice to make one.

Please be sure to keep your kitten warm as you do so. Fill two socks with rice and tie off the tops, microwave them for about two minutes. Carefully remove from the microwave and place them on the outside of the towel.

### **Diarrhea:**

Diarrhea can be a serious issue with neo-nates. It can be caused by stress, parasites, viruses, infections or change in diet. If your kitten has diarrhea try adding a small amount of flavorless Pedialyte to their formula to help rehydrate them. Please bag a sample and bring it in to the clinic for analysis.

## **Fading Kitten Syndrome**

Fading kitten syndrome, also known as failure to thrive, is when a kitten begins to fade with little or no warning. It is not well-defined condition and can be spurred by environment, mother's neglect, birth defects, anemia, or simply low birth weight.

Signs of fading kitten syndrome are:

- Low body temperature
- Lethargy
- Meowing/Crying
- Gasping for breath
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If you notice these symptoms the first thing you should do is keep the kitten warm by wrapping them in a towel. Once in the towel do not unwrap them, by unwrapping or adjusting the towel you will be releasing heat. See above section for rice/sock heating pad instructions.

Next you must up their blood sugar; there are a few different ways you can do this.

If you have regular sugar:

- Put a few tablespoons of sugar in warm water
- Stir it up; you want the solution to be as strong as possible while still runny.
- Use a syringe or your finger to give 3 drops every 3 minutes into the mouth

You can also rub Karo syrup on the gums, this will absorb quickly for a blood glucose spike.

If caught early kittens can possibly recover from fading kitten syndrome but considering the fact that 15%-40% of kittens under 12 weeks of age will pass, it is not likely.

\*\*As a nonprofit organization we must carefully select the cases we pour our resources into. With the likelihood of fading kittens under a pound surviving being so low, please note we are not able to reimburse emergency vet visits at this time.

### **Foster Kitten Emergency Protocol**

In response to a recent increase in emergency room visits for kittens, we've drafted the following policy to offer additional guidance to fosters who may find themselves in this position. We are working on developing a formal partnership with one of the local emergency vets, but in the meantime, please follow the protocol below.

### **Criteria for emergencies:**

What constitutes a medical emergency in a kitten? If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, we would describe this as “urgent” but not necessarily an emergency. If that is the case, call the clinic during business hours to schedule an appointment with a veterinarian.

Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of fading kitten syndrome or distemper
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Cold to the touch
- Loss of appetite for more than 12 hours

If a foster kitten displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency protocol below.

1. Between 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. call  [\(312\)644-8338 ext. 381](tel:(312)644-8338) and ask to speak with a veterinarian or shelter manager. Always indicate that you are a foster and note that it’s an emergency.

2. Before/after hours: Your goal is to stabilize the animal until he/she can be brought into our clinic. To do this, follow these steps:

1) **Body temperature:** If a kitten is too cold, you will need to slowly, and safely, get them to a comfortable temperature. Be careful, as doing so too quickly can be a shock to the kitten. Wrap their entire body in a towel “burrito” leaving only their face out. Then wrap the towel in a heating pad, if you do not have a heating pad you can use tube socks and rice to make one. Please be sure to keep your kitten warm as you do so. Fill two socks with rice and tie off the tops, microwave them for about two minutes. Carefully remove from the microwave and place them on the outside of the towel. Check on the conditions inside the towel frequently so the kitten does not overheat in the process.

2) **Blood Sugar:** Once the kitten’s body temperature is stabilized, help to increase their blood sugar levels by administering a sugar solution: Put a few tablespoons of sugar in warm water Stir it up; you want the solution to be as strong as possible while still runny. Use a syringe, or your finger, to give 3 drops every 3 minutes into the mouth

3) **Keep the foster comfortable:** Do your best to comfort the foster pet. Keeping yourself composed will help to keep the animal at ease. This way, in the worst case scenario, if the animal does not make it, their final moments will be ones of peace, and not distress.

## Thank You

We thank you again for your decision to become a neonate foster volunteer with us and for choosing to help the animals in our care. Your efforts make a significant difference in The Anti-Cruelty Society's work and our mission to find loving homes for shelter pets. Please keep in mind that you are taking on a momentous task by caring for these young kittens. Due to their sensitive nature, there is a chance your neonate foster may not survive. Still, these fragile kittens have a much smaller chance of survival here at the shelter than in your home, where they will receive the care, love and attention they need. We hope you find your foster volunteer experience at The Anti-Cruelty Society enjoyable and rewarding. If you have any questions or concerns at any time, please contact the Foster Coordinator.



*Orphan, Chatty Cathy, all warm, fed and snuggled up.*