Cats & Kittens Foster Care Handbook

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Introduction

Welcome to the RSPCA Victoria Foster Care Program!

Thank you for volunteering your valuable time to help us give animals a second chance.

Animals of all kinds make their way to our animal care centres for many reasons. Some wander away from home and get lost, while others are surrendered because their owners can no longer care for them. We also care for abandoned animals and those seized by our Inspectorate due to neglect and mistreatment.

Some animals that come into our care are not able to be adopted into their new “forever homes” straight away. They may be too young, unwell, recovering from surgery, or they may need training to improve their behaviour. While our animal care staff and volunteers work very hard to provide a comfortable and enriching environment, many of the more vulnerable animals are stressed by the experience of being in an animal care centre. These animals recover and develop much more successfully when they are fostered in a home environment until they are ready to be permanently rehomed.

The information in this handbook will help you to care for your foster cats and kittens. We hope that you will keep this handbook in a handy place and regularly refer to it. At the end of this handbook, we have included contact details for our team that supports the foster care program, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you are unsure of anything or if we can be of any help.

Thank you again for your commitment and for helping give RSPCA Victoria cats and kittens a second chance.
1. Is Fostering for You?

There are many things to consider when deciding to foster an animal. Foster carers must:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Complete a foster care application and sign a Foster Care Agreement.
- Be able to set aside time at regular intervals to bring your foster animal in to an RSPCA Victoria site for check-ups, vaccinations and spay/neuter surgery.
- Take on the responsibility for routine care in your home during the foster period.
- Isolate foster animals from existing family pets within the home (eg. laundry or spare bathroom), as required (at least initially).
- Quarantine foster animals in an isolated part of your house (eg. safe room) to prevent disease spread, as required.
- Cat and kitten proof your home to reduce potential safety hazards.
- Maintain a peaceful, loving environment for the foster animals and spend quality time socialising them (a minimum of two hours per day for kittens).
- Maintain communication with the Foster Care Network Team.
- Commit to the nominated foster period required. Advise the Foster Care Network Team if your foster care availability changes.
- Keep foster cats and kittens indoors at all times.

In addition:

- Existing animals in your home must be up to date with vaccinations and in good health.
- Every family member in the household will need to be prepared for the commitment and emotions involved with fostering.

The table below gives an indication of the time commitment that may be required by foster carers for cats and kittens. **Note: all times and hours are approximate and will vary between foster animals.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of foster</th>
<th>Foster Period Required</th>
<th>Care Hours Required Per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weaned kittens</td>
<td>1-5 weeks</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother cat and kittens</td>
<td>2-8 weeks</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats with Cat Flu</td>
<td>1-3 weeks</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats with Ringworm</td>
<td>Up to 12 weeks</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cats or kittens with behavioural problems</td>
<td>1-12 weeks but this can vary greatly depending on the problem <strong>experienced carers only</strong></td>
<td>2+ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick or injured cats or kittens</td>
<td>1-12 weeks depending on type of illness or injury</td>
<td>2+ hours (depending on type of illness or injury)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1 Your Role as a Foster Carer

As a foster carer, you will help offer RSPCA Victoria cats and kittens a second chance by providing a safe, enriching and loving home environment. You will be supported to provide high quality animal care, as well as socialisation and environmental enrichment to help RSPCA cats and kittens grow strong and healthy so they can be considered for adoption. Our Foster Care Agreement includes detailed instructions for the veterinary and general care of the animal in foster.

We couldn’t help so many animals without the valued support and commitment of our foster carers. As a foster carer, you are a valued ambassador for RSPCA Victoria. By joining our team, you are agreeing to uphold the legislation governing our work, the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds. The requirements of the Code of Practice related to foster care are summarised throughout this handbook. It’s critical that the person named on the Foster Agreement Form abides by this code as they are responsible for the foster animal’s care.

Returning your foster animals can be the trickiest part of the process and where possible, we’ll keep you informed of your animals’ progress. Please rest assured every decision we make regarding your foster animals always prioritises their welfare. As a Volunteer with RSPCA Victoria, foster carers can seek assistance from Converge International’s employee assistance program on 1300 687 327 or via www.convergeinternational.com.au should you need assistance with any issues that may arise during the animal’s foster placement.

We understand that sometimes, friends or family can fall in love with your foster animal. We certainly welcome them to express their interest in adopting your foster animal after they have been returned to RSPCA Victoria. Matching the ‘pawfect’ pet with their forever home is the responsibility of our expert adoption team, so your foster animals are in good hands!

1.2 RSPCA Victoria Foster Carers Facebook Group

RSPCA Victoria Foster carers can post and comment in the RSPCA Victoria Foster Carers Facebook group and share photos of their foster animal and their foster care experiences with other foster carers. Please be aware that some foster animals cannot be photographed or shared on social media. The Foster Care Network Team will advise you if this is the case for your foster animal.

The Facebook group provides foster carers with a support network and an opportunity to share experiences and learn from other foster carers.

To be part of this group, foster carers must abide by RSPCA Victoria’s Social Media Policy and the Code of Conduct. Members of the RSPCA Victoria Foster Carers Facebook Group who don’t comply with this Policy will be removed from the group.
Please note: this Facebook page is NOT intended for you to obtain medical advice. Any health issues experienced with a foster animal must be discussed with the Foster Care Network Team.

2. Preparing for your Cat or Kittens

2.1 Equipment List
You will be supplied with all of the equipment and products needed to care for your foster cats and kittens, including:

- Dry and canned food
- Some bedding (towels/blankets)
- Combination hide and carry box or a standard plastic carry cage
- Food and water bowls
- Scratching pad and toys (when available)
- Litter trays, litter and scooper
- Scales for weighing kittens

2.2 Preparing a Safe Environment

The safe room
It’s important that kittens have a place in which they are safe and feel secure. Choose one room in your house to be the ‘safe room’ where your cat or kittens will primarily be housed. This room will need to be kitten proofed and the kittens will spend their first few days in here. Later, the kittens may be allowed access to other parts of the house, but they must be confined to this room at night and whenever you leave the house. **No other pets should have access to this room.**

Your safe room needs to withstand litter tray accidents and any other mess the kittens may make. We suggest using a bathroom because there aren’t any large appliances they can hide under or behind, and you can easily clean the floors.

If you use a spare bedroom, consider removing legs from the mattress base or removing the bed to prevent kittens from hiding or soiling the bed.

If you use a room that is carpeted, consider buying some linoleum, which can be temporarily placed on the floor. It is easy to clean and can be disinfected and used for subsequent litters. It is best to remove breakable items from the safe room, so the kittens don’t damage them.
Remember: foster cats and kittens must be kept indoors at all times!!

Cat and Kitten-proofing
In the safe room, remember to block escape routes and remove anything that is sharp, toxic or may present a choking or electrocution hazard. Here are some tips:

- Unplug electrical devices so there are no cords to chew and block electrical outlets.
- Put away anything a kitten may get tangled in and tie up the cords from blinds.
- Block any holes or gaps that a kitten may get stuck in.
- Check that fly screens are firmly secured and in good condition.
- Make sure the toilet lid is closed and that family members are aware of the need to close it.
- Make sure drain covers in showers or on bathroom floors are secure and cannot be lifted and that vent covers for ducted heating are securely screwed in.
- Remove any medications.

Inside the safe room
When the cats or kittens come home, leave them in their carrier until you have finished setting up the safe room with the equipment you have been provided:

- Create distinct zones for sleeping, eating, toileting and playing. Put litter trays in a corner as far away as possible from their food and bedding.
- Put down a shallow bowl of water, a bowl of dry food and a bowl of wet food as outlined in your Foster Care Agreement. If you have a litter of kittens, make sure you put down enough bowls, so they don’t have to fight and compete for food. We recommend one bowl for every two kittens.
- Provide enough litter trays for the size of the litter. We recommend one litter tray for every two kittens.
- Set up a play area with a variety of fun toys.
- Establish the sleeping area. You will need to make sure the hide and carry box or their carrier cage (with door removed or wedged open) is available as a bed for them, but they will need other sleeping places close by. A cardboard box with bedding can make a good, secure sleeping place with a few modifications to allow small kittens to access it. If the kittens are in a bathroom, which may become cold overnight, so place folded towels under their beds for extra warmth.
- Never try to pull your foster animal out of hiding. Instead, use toys or treats to encourage them to come out. If the foster animal still won’t come out, let her be. Cats need time to adjust to an unfamiliar environment.
3. Collecting Your Foster Animal/s

Approved foster carers can view and select animals available for foster at http://rspcavic.org/adoption/fostering/. If the timing is right for you and we have an animal that matches your needs, we will contact you to discuss your selection/s and arrange for you to come to an RSPCA Victoria animal care centre and pick it/them up.

When you visit RSPCA Victoria, you will meet with the Foster Care Network Coordinator who will provide you with the equipment and supplies you need. They will talk through the Foster Care Agreement with you and you will be asked to sign it. You will also be asked to sign the Volunteer Agreement Form if you haven’t already signed it.

You will receive the following documents when you pick up your cat or kittens:

- Foster Care Agreement
- All relevant information about caring for your foster animal
- Hill’s Food Ingredients Guide
- Observation Report Form

3.1 Travelling Safely with Animals

In accordance with the RSPCA Victoria Safe Driving & Fatigue Management Quick Reference Guide, animals must be appropriately contained or restrained whilst travelling in a vehicle, both for the animal’s protection and the driver. Animals must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle or the front cabin of a vehicle unless contained in a suitable container (eg. cat carrier).

In hot weather, for the safety of your kittens, please ensure you have a fully air-conditioned car to transport them home.

4. Caring for Your Cat and Kittens

4.1 Introducing the foster animal/s to your home

Cats are creatures of habit and moving from the RSPCA Victoria environment to a new home represents a complete upheaval of their world.

Some simple planning will help prevent a cat from becoming stressed by a complete change in their environment. Some tips to provide to new cat owners include:
• Set up the kitten/cat in a quiet room for the first 24 hours with food, water, litter box, toys, scratching post and comfortable belongings. You can also leave a radio turned on to a soft-music station.
• The cat will learn to use the litter tray in their new room. If the tray is used in this initial period, it is safe for the kitten/cat to gradually be allowed to explore the rest of the house.
• Leave the carrier open in the designated room so they can come out in their own time to explore the room.
• Give the kitten/cat some treats so they associate something positive with their unfamiliar environment.
• Make sure doors and windows are secure so your cat doesn't accidentally escape because they won't know where they are.
• Place something with your scent such as a worn t-shirt in the safe room.
• Cats and kittens must be kept indoors at all times.

4.2 Getting Acquainted

Let your foster cat and kittens get used to you slowly. Sit in the room and bring treats with you (offered in moderation). Some cats & kittens may need longer than others to become comfortable. This is normal.

4.3 Feeding & Nutrition

The type and amount of food you should give, and how often you should feed the animals will be clearly outlined in your Foster Care Agreement. Please only feed your foster animals the food provided to you by RSPCA Victoria. We will supply you with a high-quality, nutritionally balanced diet with both canned and dry food from the Hill’s Science Diet range that is specially formulated to meet the needs of nursing mothers and growing kittens. Kittens have brand new digestive systems that can be easily irritated by introducing too many food choices. Supermarket pet food may be very palatable, but this is often because its salt content is high.

When the kittens and cats return to the animal care centre for adoption, they will be fed Hill’s Science Diet. If they become used to a different type of food while in foster care, they are likely to refuse our food at the animal care centre, which may cause them to be more susceptible to stress and disease. If a cat or kitten refuses to eat the food you were given, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator, who will help you determine whether this is a medical problem or a preference issue and advise you of the next step to take.

It is important to observe the kittens eating at least twice a day to determine whether all kittens are eating, or whether some are being bullied away from the food, or are not eating due to illness. If you think you will run out of food, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator.
4.4 Kittens without Mum

You will be provided with kitten food and instructions as to how much to feed in your Foster Care Agreement. Multiple bowls will be provided for a litter of kittens (approximately one bowl for every two kittens).

Please do not be tempted to feed more than is specified in the Foster Care Agreement. Overfeeding cats or kittens frequently results in gastro-intestinal upsets. As long as cats and kittens are gaining weight at the expected rate, their little tummies are receiving enough.

If a kitten is not eating, please contact the Foster Care Network Team immediately as this can become an emergency quickly. Please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator if the kitten has not eaten in 12 hours.

4.5 Mums with Litters

Kittens will not require food other than their mother’s milk until they are three to four weeks old. Until the kittens are this age, you will only need to provide enough food for the mother. Most adult cats moderate their intake of food effectively and can have dry biscuits available throughout the day and small amounts of canned food at meal times. Mums will be given kitten food, as it provides the additional nutrients they require while nursing.

4.6 Introducing Solid Food

Around the age of three weeks, kittens may start showing interest in their mother’s canned food. It is not necessary to provide additional food for them at this point. Allow them to taste and experiment with their mum’s food. Kittens may continue to feed from Mum whilst trying solid food and this should be encouraged.

At around four weeks of age, it will become necessary to provide additional food for the kittens and more bowls. It is not necessary to teach the kittens to eat this food – they will work it out when they are ready. They may find it easier, however, if you mix the food with a small amount of warm water to give it a smoother consistency. Do not force a kitten to eat by placing food in its mouth. Kittens will begin to eat dry food at around five to six weeks of age.

If you do not think a kitten is eating by the time it is around 450g, or if it is not gaining 75 - 100g per week, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator. If the kitten loses weight, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator immediately.
4.7 Daily Cleaning

Items such as bowls and litter trays will need to be cleaned multiple times throughout the day. It is very important that you don’t use any harsh chemical products to clean them, as they could be toxic or leave a scent that will confuse the kittens. For example, ammonia smells like cat urine and is used in products such as bleach. Hot, soapy water will be sufficient for daily cleans. Bedding can be washed or thrown out when soiled. Regular cleaning should include:

- Cleaning canned food bowls and water bowls daily and throwing out uneaten canned food.
- Scooping out faeces and wet patches from litter trays at least twice daily.
- Ensure there is one litter tray for every two kittens.
- Ensure litter trays are completely emptied and cleaned in hot water and dishwashing detergent each day. Dry the litter tray in the sun when possible.
- Keep litter trays well separated from food and water bowls.
- Cleaning up any toileting accidents outside of the trays as soon as they are observed. (Do not use ammonia-based cleaners on these).
- Checking bedding twice daily. If it is soiled, you will need to replace it with new bedding.
- Monitor for diarrhoea.

4.8 Bathing & Grooming

Unless a kitten or cat has had diarrhoea and has very dirty hind legs, there should be no need for it to be bathed. We do not recommend that kittens are bathed unless necessary.

If a bath is required, a specially formulated pet shampoo should be used. Please do not use human shampoo, as it does not have the correct pH. Use a bowl or small tub with warm water to bathe the kitten and securely hold the kitten in one hand the whole time.

Towel dry the kitten afterwards as thoroughly as possible. Keep the kitten in a warm environment until completely dry. Do not wash a kitten or cat in the afternoon, as it will be too cold overnight. If it is only the hind legs that are dirty, then just immerse this area in the water. Never use a hair dryer on a kitten.

As part of your regular handling of the kittens, it can be beneficial to gently groom them with a very soft brush or mitt.

Summary: Recommended Daily Routine

When caring for the kittens, you will need to establish a daily routine to incorporate cleaning, feeding,
health/weight checks and socialisation. The following is a suggested routine that you may wish to adapt to suit you.

**Early morning**
- Scoop out litter trays and clean up any accidents. Observe the consistency of the faeces.
- Remove any uneaten canned food and replace it with new food for their **first feed** of the day. Top up dry food. Check that each kitten is eating.
- Top up water bowls.
- Pick up each kitten individually and check its health.
- Spend a further 15 minutes playing with and socialising the kittens in the safe room.
- As the kittens get older you may wish to allow them to run around the living area to burn off some energy while you are cleaning!

**Afternoon** (can be late afternoon if you work during the day)
- Weigh each kitten. Keep a record of their weight.
- Check each kitten’s health while you weigh it.
- Scoop out litter trays and clean up any accidents. Observe the consistency of the faeces.
- Wash water and food bowls with warm water and dishwashing detergent and rinse thoroughly.
- Provide dry and canned food for the **second feed** of the day. Check that each kitten is eating.
- Spend a further 20-30 minutes socialising, handling and interacting with the kittens.
- The kittens may spend time in other parts of the house while you are at home.

**Late evening** (before you go to bed)
- Scoop out litter trays and clean up any accidents. Observe the consistency of the faeces.
- Remove any uneaten canned food and replace it with new food for their **third feed** of the day. Top up dry food. Check that each kitten is eating.
- Top up water bowls.
- Pick up each kitten individually and check its health.
- Spend a further 15 minutes playing with and socialising the kittens in the safe room.
• Ensure the kittens are confined in the safe room overnight.

**Health Checks**

When you check your kittens’ health, consider the following:

• Are they active and full of energy?
• Are their eyes and noses clear of discharge?
• Are their bottoms clean? Are there any loose stools or diarrhoea in the litter tray or anywhere else in the room?
• Is there any hair loss, lesions or scaly skin?
• Are all the kittens eating well?
• Are their collars still loose or are they getting tight?

See Section ‘5: Health and veterinary care’ for more information about signs of illness in kittens.

**5. Health and Veterinary Care**

**5.1 Developmental Progress and Weight Gain**

At birth, kittens usually weigh between 90 - 100g. You should weigh each kitten every day and record their individual weight gains. You can check the scale’s accuracy by weighing a block of butter or similar-sized food product with an identified weight. A plastic container, such as an empty takeaway container, can be placed on the scales to help contain the kitten while it is weighed. Remember to adjust the scales for the weight of the container.

Healthy, active kittens that are eating well should gain approximately 75-100g each week. If they are gaining less than that, or if a kitten loses weight for two days in a row, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator.

**Week by Week Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Behavioural Milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Kittens are born blind and deaf with their eyes closed and ears folded down. In the first week of life, kittens basically just sleep and eat. Newborn kittens are unable to regulate their body temperature and rely on their mum to keep warm. The umbilical cord remains attached for the first three days. Toileting is stimulated by the mother. After her kittens have been fed, she will lick their bellies and genital areas, eating any faeces and urine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 2 | The kittens’ eyes are beginning to open, although their vision is not very good. All kittens have blue eyes at this stage. Their sense of smell is developing. They will often have a preference for a particular nipple.

Week 3 | The kittens are becoming more aware of their litter mates. It is around this time that kittens begin to shakily move about. Their ears will be erect and their baby teeth begin to show. They can now purr. They will begin to toilet voluntarily, although their mother will still clean them.

Week 4 | The kittens are becoming more active and are interacting with their litter mates. The mother is still grooming her offspring, but they are also able to groom themselves. Their senses of hearing and smell are now well developed. If the kittens are still with their mother, it is at this time that she will begin to leave her kittens for short periods of time. In their fourth week, they may begin drinking water from a bowl and eating solid food.

Week 5 | The kittens’ sight is fully developed. Kittens are much more confident on their feet and are exploring a lot more. They are likely to be stalking and pouncing on their litter mates. They will start to use the litter tray, and if separated from their mother, most are able to eat and toilet independently. Kittens that are still with their mothers will continue to suckle.

Week 5 - 8 | The kittens are extremely active. The mother will have longer periods on her own. Kittens should be eating three - four small meals a day and, by eight weeks, should be eating mostly solids. They should have almost all of their baby teeth. The mother will gradually wean the kittens completely by eight - 10 weeks.

5.2 Worming, Flea Treatments and Vaccinations

Note: Dates of treatment required for worming, fleas and vaccinations are provided in the Foster Agreement Form.

Worms
On admission to the animal care centre, all cats and kittens are treated for worms. You may see dead worms in their stools for the next day or so. A kitten with a heavy worm burden may need a second dose, so please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator if you think your kitten still has worms. The following are signs that a kitten may have worms:

- A pot belly appearance.
- A poor coat.
- Occasional diarrhoea or diarrhoea with blood or mucus.
- They may poo or vomit out live worms.
- Coughing caused by worm damage to the lungs.

Fleas
On admission to the animal care centre, all cats and kittens are treated for fleas. Within a few hours, all fleas should be dead, but if you notice that your foster animals are still scratching, please check the coat for fleas. If you find any fleas on the animals, please contact our Foster Care Network Coordinator.

**Vaccinations**

Our cats and kittens are vaccinated using a Companion F3 vaccination. This will help to protect against:

- Feline Calici Virus: contributes to cat flu.
- Feline Rhinotracheitis: contributes to cat flu.
- Enteritis: can cause fever, vomiting, diarrhoea and is usually fatal.

Vaccinations do not guarantee that kittens will not get sick. They will reduce the chances of them becoming ill and the disease may be less severe if it is contracted.

**Progress Checks**

Adult cats going into foster care will be vaccinated when they are admitted to the animal care centre and will require a booster four weeks later. Kittens will be vaccinated and wormed every 2 weeks, until they are 16 weeks in shelter or foster. Appointments will be made for you to bring the foster animals back to our clinic at fortnightly intervals to allow for vaccinations and follow up worm treatment.

**5.3 Early Signs of Illness**

The following signs may indicate that an animal is becoming unwell:

- Failure to gain weight over a few days
- Stunting (failure to reach body sizes that are age appropriate)
- Loss of weight over a couple of measurements (daily weighing is important)
- Persistently thin condition
- Inappetence – not eating or poor appetite
- Excessive and persistent weakness or sleepiness (a low energy, listless kitten)
- Sudden death of one or more animals in a litter (could indicate an issue with the litter in general)
- Excessive thirst
• Vomiting or diarrhoea
• Runny, watery nose or eyes
• Repeated sneezing
• Bloating of the belly and/or abdominal pain
• Change in behaviour
• Becoming increasingly quiet

If any of these signs are observed, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator. Do not take the animal to an animal emergency centre.

5.4 When to Seek Help

More serious symptoms may develop over time, or present suddenly, including:

• Vomiting
• Apparent pain
• Diarrhoea
• Lameness
• Not eating for more than 12 hours
• Weight loss two days in a row
• Lethargy
• Bloating of abdomen
• Skin lesions or abscess
• Red or brown coloured urine
• Difficulty or inability to defecate or urinate
• Dull coat
• Coughing
• Thick discharge from nose and/or eyes
• Ulcers on tongue, nose or eyes

If any of these are observed, you must contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator and be prepared to bring the kittens in to be checked by a vet. If you do need to come in to the clinic, please bring all the kittens and their observation report.
If any of the following symptoms are observed, emergency veterinary assistance must be sought:

- Difficulty breathing.
- Inability to stand or walk.
- Obvious broken bone.
- Uncontrollable bleeding.
- For male cats straining to urinate with small or little release

See [Emergencies](#) for further information.

### 5.5 Cat Illnesses and Zoonotic Diseases

Although most feline infectious diseases only affect cats, some of these diseases can be transmitted from cats to people. Diseases that can be transmitted from animals to people are called Zoonotic Diseases. The most common zoonotic diseases that may be carried by cats are:

- Toxoplasmosis
- Ringworm
- Salmonellosis
- Campylobacter infection
- Giardia
- Cryptosporidium infection
- Roundworms
- Hookworms
- Cat Scratch Disease

**What’s the Risk?**

Although it’s possible to catch a zoonotic disease from a cat, it’s not likely. However, your chance of contracting a zoonotic illness does increase if you have a compromised immune system due to a pre-existing disease or medical condition.

Before cats and kittens are placed in foster care, they are carefully checked for any signs of these diseases, however it is possible for symptoms to develop after you take them home.

Examples include:

- Persons infected with HIV or suffering from AIDS
• Pregnant women
• Patients being treated with chemotherapy or radiation therapy
• Elderly people or young children
• People with chronic diseases or congenital immune system deficiency
• People who have received organ/bone marrow transplants

The following measures should be taken to reduce the risk of catching a zoonotic disease from a cat:

• Keep the cat’s litter box away from the kitchen or other areas where you prepare or store food.
• Use gloves when cleaning litter.
• It might not always be possible but ask someone who is not at significant risk for zoonotic diseases to take on litter box cleaning duty. Also, have the litter box cleaned daily. The organism that causes Toxoplasmosis, for example, takes 24 hours to become infectious.
• Use disposable litter box liners and change them each time you clean the litter box.
• Don’t dump litter. If you do, you could put yourself at risk of inhaling an infectious agent. Either pour the litter slowly into the trash or wrap the litter box liner tightly and securely.
• It is ideal to clean the litter box thoroughly at least twice per month. Use hot water and soak the litter box for several minutes. This will kill organisms like Toxoplasmosis.
• Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning the litter box and toss them after each wash.
• Wash your hands after contact with cats.
• Wash your hands after handling the kittens and again before eating.
• Be careful not to touch your mouth or face while handling the kittens. Do not kiss the kittens or let them contact your face.
• If you are scratched or bitten, immediately wash the affected area with soap and water.
• Cover any wounds or broken skin on your hands with Band-Aids. **Do not allow the kittens to lick broken skin.**
• Toxoplasmosis is a disease that may affect unborn babies. Women can be tested before pregnancy for previous exposure and immunity to toxoplasmosis.

**When to Seek Medical Attention**

Seek medical attention (all out of pocket expenses will be covered by RSPCA Victoria).
• If you are concerned that you may have contracted a zoonotic disease, you should immediately see a doctor.
• Within one hour (or as soon as reasonably practicable) of the incident occurring.

Ringworm may be treated with over the counter medications from a pharmacy. Any lesions should be kept covered by a Band-Aid or bandage. You should immediately inform the Foster Care Network Coordinator if you have a Ringworm lesion.

6. Socialisation and Handling

6.1 Guide to socialisation

For a kitten to develop into a friendly and loving pet as an adult, it must be regularly handled and exposed to a variety of different things while it is young. This process is known as socialisation. Socialisation is as important as keeping animals healthy.

If this exposure and handling does not occur during the critical socialisation period of a young cat’s life, it will never be as friendly or ‘tame’ as it could have been. Kittens have a critical period for socialisation between two - seven weeks of age. It is important that a kitten meets a variety of people during this time, as well as interacting with its mother and litter mates. The kitten should experience as much of its environment as possible and be provided with a variety of toys and other objects to explore. Kittens should receive a minimum of two play sessions daily with interactive toys.

You should ensure the kittens are exposed to the following:

• **New people:** kittens should be exposed to people other than their foster family wherever possible. If you have visitors to your home, they should be encouraged to meet and handle the kittens. A lot of people have never handled a kitten, so be sure to give some advice as to how to handle a kitten if you think it is required. See section ‘6.3: Kittens and kids’ for information about children handling kittens.

Try to socialise your kitten with the following groups:

• Women other than their foster carer
• Men other than their foster carer
• Children of all ages

**New environments:** once the kittens are relaxed in their safe room, you can expose them to other
Allowing them to explore new places will create a positive association with these novel experiences. **All external doors and windows must be closed before you let them out and be sure to carefully supervise them at first.** Close internal doors so they are limited to one or two rooms at a time. Introduce a new room every few days to ensure the experience of entering a new environment is repeated. The kittens should always be returned to their safe room when you leave the house. Try to socialise your kitten with the following environments:

- More than one floor surface (eg. carpet, tiles, floor boards, lino)
- Soft toys and balls
- Interactive toys (eg. dangling from stick, ball on a track)
- Large ball rolled past kitten
- Tunnel to run through and play in
- Walking over wrapping paper, butcher’s paper, etc.

**New noises:** it is beneficial to expose kittens to normal household noises as much as possible. The trick is to do it without traumatising them. For example, you can expose them to the noise of a vacuum cleaner by confining the kittens to their safe room and starting up the vacuum at the other end of the house. Over sessions spanning several days, move the vacuum closer to the door of their safe room.

Try to socialise your kitten with the following noises:

- Vacuum cleaner
- Television and radio
- Child’s battery-operated toys
- Hairdryer
- Objects being dropped on the floor (at a safe distance)

**Body handling:** it is important for kittens **over three weeks of age** to be frequently handled so they become accustomed to it. Each kitten should be physically handled every day. This will make them less defensive about different areas of their bodies being touched in the future and help prepare them for veterinary visits and grooming procedures.

Sensitive areas include the toes/paws, chest and belly as well as the mouth. Be sure to stroke the kittens on less sensitive areas, such as the back before progressing to these areas. If a kitten seems distressed or uncomfortable, try again after a few more days of handling.

Try to socialise your kitten with the following methods of handling:

- Touching belly, ears, tail, paws
- Grooming with a very soft brush
- Touch mouth and gently lift lips

**PLEASE NOTE:** Care should be taken when handling newborn kittens (under three weeks). They should only be handled while the mum is nearby, and handling should be minimised if the mother seems to be distressed. They must be handled very gently at this age and only for short periods. *Never put an animal at risk of danger.*

The following table outlines the socialisation, handling & enrichment requirements of kittens according to age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Environmental Enrichment</th>
<th>Socialisation</th>
<th>Handling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kittens 4-8 weeks</td>
<td>Provide with:</td>
<td>Provide daily exposure to humans via daily handling</td>
<td>Handle for a minimum of 15 minutes per kitten per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• climbing and perching areas</td>
<td>Remain with mother and littermates except under veterinary advice May begin socialisation with other animals/cats of appropriate vaccination status and temperament.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• scratch poles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• hide areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a variety of toys they can roll, pounce on, capture and bite</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• exposure to variety of items that stimulate the senses (i.e. catnip, cat grass etc)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rotate toys weekly.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May wish to provide noise simulation CDs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kittens 8-16 weeks</td>
<td>Must be provided with:</td>
<td>Provide with daily exposure to humans through handling and interactive play using toys outside of daily cleaning/feeding routine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• climbing and perching areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• scratch poles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• hide areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cats &amp; Kittens Foster Care Handbook</strong></td>
<td><strong>Adolescent and adult cat 16+ weeks</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cats/kittens – injured, ill or recovering from ailment</strong></td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Must be provided with:</td>
<td>Under guidance of veterinary practitioner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• climbing and perching areas</td>
<td>Under guidance of veterinary practitioner</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• scratch poles</td>
<td>Under guidance of veterinary practitioner</td>
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<td>• hide areas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• a variety of toys they can roll, pounce on, capture and bite</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• exposure to variety of items that stimulate the senses (such as catnip, cat grass, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rotate toys weekly.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide daily exposure to humans through handling and interactive play using toys outside of daily cleaning/feeding routine.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide opportunity to exercise/socialisation with other socially compatible animals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May include walking on a lead and harness.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handle for a minimum of 30 minutes per cat per day.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

6.1.2 **Handling under-socialised or timid kittens**

A normal, well-socialised kitten will approach you readily, and seem to enjoy being touched and played with. It should be curious around new objects and environments and be keen to explore. Kittens that have not received sufficient socialisation may be timid, frightened and can be sensitive to new environments, people and noises. An under-socialised kitten may try to run away from you.
and hide and it may not tolerate physical contact. Other kittens may not be quite as frightened but may be reluctant to approach you or seem startled by movement or noise. The pupils of their eyes may be dilated.

You may encounter a whole litter of kittens that are under-socialised, or only some of the kittens may be shy. For the first few days you will need to be very calm, quiet and relaxed with them.

Ensure there is a hide in their safe room that you can access. Do not allow a timid kitten access to other parts of the house until it is relaxed and confident.

Consider the following points when dealing with an under-socialised or timid kitten:

- Keep the socialisation sessions with the kitten short so you don’t over-stimulate it. An hour per day spread over multiple sessions is ideal.
- Make sure there are no inaccessible hiding places in the safe room. Provide a hiding spot that allows you to reach the kitten. A cardboard box with a hole cut in the front also makes a good hide, as it also allows you to access the kittens from the top flaps. Make sure there is nowhere else in the room that the kitten can hide itself. A kitten will not progress if it is hidden away.
- Avoid sudden movements and loud noises.
- Leave a radio on in the safe room at a low volume to habituate the kitten to normal human noises.
- Avoid making eye contact with a timid kitten, as this can be intimidating to cats.
- Stay in the room while the kitten eats. Move closer to the food bowl each time the kittens are fed.
- Feed the kitten a portion of its meal by hand. If you think the kitten will benefit from being hand-fed treats, you may feed commercial cat treats or small amounts of fishy canned food on your finger. This should not be done routinely with confident kittens, as it may cause digestive upsets.
- Try playing quietly with a dangling toy along the ground at a distance, to allow you to interact without invading the kitten’s space. If the kitten does not respond, don’t persist. Try again another day.
- Sometimes, separating a shy kitten from its litter mates in another room will help to quickly turn around its behaviour because it will rely on you for its social contact. This isolation is stressful, however, so please try other approaches first and allow the kitten to re-join its litter mates after a few days.
- Sometimes, wrapping a kitten in a soft towel, leaving its head poking out for 10 - 15 minutes at a time, allows the kitten to become used to being held. However, this can be stressful for a very frightened kitten, so use this only if other approaches aren’t working.
If you do not observe any improvement in a kitten’s behaviour after seven days, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for further advice.

### 6.2 Establishing Good Household Behaviours

#### 6.2.1 Litter Training

On their first day at home, regularly put the kittens in the litter tray to encourage them to use it. After a play or after they have had something to eat or drink are good times to remind kittens of where their litter is. Don’t force them to stay in the litter, just pop them in every 15–20 minutes. Never lift the kitten’s paws to imitate scratching.

**Keeping the tray clean**

Litter trays need to be kept clean, as cats don’t like using a tray that has already been used. A clean litter tray will encourage good litter tray habits and limit the kittens’ exposure to germs. As a rough guide, faecal matter and wet areas should be removed by scooping at least twice a day. This may be required more often depending on the number of kittens and trays. The litter should be removed and the tray washed around twice a week. When washing trays, avoid using strong-smelling cleaning products, as they may deter the kitten from using the tray. It is better to clean the tray with hot soapy water. If you are cleaning up an accident somewhere in the house, be careful of the products you use to clean it up. Products such as bleach contain ammonia, which smells just like cat urine to a kitten, so they will continue to toilet there.

#### Still having problems?

If you have followed appropriate steps but are still having trouble litter training the kittens, here are some things you can try:

- Keep kittens confined in a smaller space. They can be restrained in a large crate with the tray down one end and food and bedding at the other end for a few days until they are using the litter tray.
- Are there enough litter trays? If you are fostering a few kittens, offer them more than one tray.
- Try adding some dirt or mulch to the litter in the tray.
- What kind of tray are you using? Uncovered trays are the easiest for kittens to use. Covered trays, which have a hood and flap to enter, are good for confining smells but harder for a kitten to understand.
6.2.2 Appropriate Play

The best way to handle most undesirable feline behaviours is to prevent them. Kittens are curious and playful in nature, and they want to explore and test their environment. As they get older, they tend to grow out of this, so it is best to allow them to enact natural playful kitten behaviour while trying to establish good habits.

Provide a variety of fun toys for your kittens to play with. They like to climb, hide, scratch and chase. Limiting their toys means that out of boredom, they may find other things to play with, such as your furniture. Ping-Pong balls, wine corks and toilet paper tubes are great inexpensive toys. Be careful which toys you leave with the kittens, as they can get tangled or swallow parts of them.

Similarly, do not allow the kittens to climb up your legs. What can be an adorable behaviour in a five-week-old kitten is not so cute in a 1kg kitten looking for a new family! If a kitten climbs up your leg, immediately remove it. Be consistent in placing it back on the ground and the kitten will get the message.

Playing rough games with kittens can easily lead to inappropriate, aggressive behaviour when they are adults. It is important not to allow kittens to play with your hands or to mouth or bite you. Hands, feet and fingers must not be used as the focus of any games. Always have toys to play with when you play with kittens. If they persist in over-excited, rough play, leave the room and give them “time out” until they settle down.

6.2.3 Scratching Furniture

Scratching is a normal, healthy behaviour exhibited by cats. They do it to mark their territory and keep their nails clean and healthy. It is impractical and unfair to expect kittens or cats to stop scratching altogether. Instead, make a play area where the kittens can scratch, climb and play to their hearts’ content. The more fun you can make it, the more they’ll want to use it! Provide things for them to climb, hide in, play with and scratch. Discourage kittens from scratching furniture by distracting them when they start. Grab a toy on a string and lure the kitten back to the scratching area.

If you have followed the above steps but are still having trouble with kittens scratching, here are some things you can try:

- Are there enough stimulating toys for the kittens to play with? Make sure they have access to a variety of fun toys.
• Do you have a scratching post, but the kittens aren’t using it? Coax them over to use it with a toy on a string or spray it with catnip. If you can’t get any catnip spray, use the real thing.

• Consider confining the kittens to the safe room so they don’t have the opportunity to scratch furniture.

• Try cat-proofing the home. Cover the items the kittens likes to scratch with things that it will find unappealing, such as double-sided sticky tape or foil. Placing an unpleasant odour eg. diluted vinegar (1:4 water) or ground pepper on the furniture may also reduce their desire to scratch it.

• Try placing a scratching post directly in front of the area being scratched. When you move the posts, be sure to do it gradually. A sudden change in the location of the post may encourage the kittens to go back to the original scratching area.

6.2.4 Solving Problem Behaviour

There are two things you can do to stop unwanted behaviour in kittens. Firstly, distract kittens from an inappropriate behaviour and focus attention on something more positive. If you can distract a kitten beforehand, this is even better, as it will stop your kittens from seeing the distraction as a reward. You can get a kitten’s attention by using a noise, treat or toy. Secondly, you can modify the environment that your kittens are in. This may involve putting items out of the kittens reach or removing an item from the room altogether.

If you are experiencing any problem behaviours in a foster cat or kitten, please contact our Foster Care Network Coordinator, who will arrange for you to receive further advice.

6.3 Kittens and Children

Interacting with respectful children can be very helpful when socialising a kitten. Children under 12 years of age must always be supervised when handling kittens, and they must understand that the kittens should be handled gently. Please do not allow children to pick up a kitten and walk around with it, in case the kitten struggles to get free and is dropped. It is best that smaller children are shown how to interact with the kittens with toys and how to hand feed them biscuits, rather than try to hold or restrain them.

6.4 Kittens and Other Pets

Due to the risk of disease and potential injuries from fighting, your foster kittens or cat should not be allowed to have direct contact with your own cats or dogs. If you wish for the foster animals to have
some access to the house outside of their safe room, please confine your cat to another room during that time.

Foster kittens may be allowed to have contact with your dog if you are very sure from experience that your dog is safe with cats. They must be closely supervised in any interactions. Be aware that most dogs will never have seen a small kitten, even if they have been exposed to cats before. Baby animals may trigger prey drive in an adult dog, so closely watch your dog’s behaviour during the first few interactions. Initially introduce the dog while it is on a lead.

7. Mums and Kittens General Care

7.1 Mum’s care of the kittens

For the first few weeks of life, mum should do everything necessary for the kittens. After that, you can start sharing some of the kitten care duties with her, if she is willing. Below is an explanation of the normal care a mum cat gives to her kittens, with an approximate time-line, so you will know what behaviours to expect. All cats are different, with some being more attentive mums than others, but if a mum cat fails to care for her kittens in any of these important functions, please let us know as soon as possible so they can all be evaluated by our veterinary team.

Nursing

Kittens begin to nurse one - two hours after birth. Though born with their eyes closed, they can find their mother by her warmth, and she should make this easier by lying near them on her side.

The nursing/suckling relationship occurs over three stages:

- In the beginning, mum initiates each nursing episode, waking the kittens by licking them and then encircling them with her body. After a little searching, kittens quickly latch on.
- The second stage occurs after the second or third week, when the kittens’ eyes and ears are functioning, and they can interact with the mother both inside and outside the sleeping area. At this stage, the kittens also initiate some of the nursing episodes. The mother generally cooperates by lying down and taking up the nursing position.
- In the third stage, starting at about five weeks of age, the kittens initiate virtually all nursing. The mother becomes gradually more evasive and uncooperative. Near the end of this stage, the mother begins to wean her kittens by becoming less and less available. You can help in the weaning process by encouraging the kittens to eat canned and later, dry food.
Grooming

Kittens receive a lot of grooming and licking from their mothers during their first two to four weeks. This grooming stimulates toileting and the mum eats the faecal matter and urine. This helps to keep the sleeping area and kittens clean. Later, as the kittens can leave the sleeping area, the mum’s licking subsides and the kittens deposit faeces and urine nearby. At this point, providing low-sided litter trays nearby will teach them to use the litter. You generally do not need to intervene at this point.

7.2 When to separate Mum and kittens

If all members of your feline family are healthy and well socialised, there may be no reason to separate the kittens from their mum before eight weeks, or when they are returned to the animal care centre. However, sometimes there are medical or behavioural reasons to separate the kittens and mum earlier. These include:

- Mum is not taking care of the kittens. Work closely with foster and clinic staff to determine this; warning signs include not nursing, not responding to the kittens’ crying, staying away from the kittens that are under five weeks and not grooming the kittens.
- Mum is taking care of the kittens, but there are medical concerns for the mum or the kittens, which warrant separation. This is not very common; our clinic team will alert you to this if it is necessary.

7.3 Problem Behaviours in Mum Cats

Maternal neglect

A small number of kittens die from inadequate maternal care. The deaths are usually due to hypothermia if the kitten strays away and is not retrieved, or due to improper/inadequate nursing at and after birth. Maternal neglect has several causes - some cats seem to lack maternal instincts. In some cases, it is nature’s way: if kittens have birth defects or are otherwise weak at birth, the mum may ignore them. In many cases, it seems that environmental stress plays a role and thus it is very important that the environment be kept quiet, calm and with few visits. Cats should primarily be left alone for the first two weeks after birth except to feed, clean, and check in on the kittens a few brief times a day. You will need to watch daily for signs that a mother is neglecting her young, especially in the first few weeks. Please contact us if:

- She does not groom or nurse them frequently.
- The kittens cry and she seems to not respond.
- The mother spends all her time away from the kittens.
Maternal aggression towards people

Occasionally, mother cats have strong protective instincts against humans as well. They may hiss, growl or strike out if you approach the kittens. If faced with this situation, move very slowly around the mum cat and her kittens. Wear a long-sleeved shirt to protect yourself as you clean around her. Try to bribe her with tasty treats, such as chicken, meat or cat food. Speak in a soft, reassuring voice and try not to react if the mum cat hisses or growls. Do not correct the cat by spraying her with water or undertaking other types of correction. Remember, she is acting out of instinct to protect her young and if you act in a threatening manner, her behaviour may escalate.

Please contact our Foster Care Network Coordinator at the first sign of maternal aggression for individual advice and evaluation of your situation. In some cases, we may advise the return of mum and kittens, or just the mum, depending on the age and health of the kittens.

Maternal Aggression Towards Other Animals

Aggressive behaviour towards cats or dogs is very common in mum cats, as they are trying to protect their young. Please do not try to introduce a mum with kittens to other animals as this can be very stressful. Please block any avenues they may have for seeing other cats or dogs and strictly enforce separation from your resident pets. If for some reason the mum cat sees another animal and is upset, quickly remove the source of anxiety (eg. cover up the window) and leave the room. Do not attempt to comfort or reassure the mum cat or kittens. Come back in 20 minutes or so to check on them. Offer the cat or kittens small amounts of water when you arrive home.

8. De-sexing

8.1 Returning Kittens for De-sexing

You will need to return your kittens for de-sexing when the males weigh at least 800g and the females at least 850g (and approximately 8-9 weeks old). As outlined in your Foster Agreement Form, you’ll need to bring your foster animal/s to the Vet Clinic for de-sexing where their weight and health will be checked and given a booster vaccination. If the nurse feels that they’re not ready for de-sexing, you may be asked to take them home a little longer.

9. Returning Your Foster Animal/s

9.1 Observation report

When you take a foster animal home, you will be given a Foster Care Observation Report to complete. This report asks you to record your observations about the animal’s health and behaviour.
during its foster care. This information you provide is very important and will give our animal care staff a profile of the animal’s personality, so they can match it up with a ‘pawfect’ home.

9.2 Adoption process
After your foster animals are returned to the animal care centre they will receive booster vaccinations and worm and flea treatments, and any surgical sutures will be removed. All animals will undergo a veterinary and behavioural assessment to ensure they are healthy and of suitable temperament for adoption.

Our animal care team will familiarise themselves with the information you have provided in your Foster Care Observation Report and the animals may be promoted on our website with a description of their personality and requirements for care. Your animals will be housed in our adoption pens and will be available for the community to view. Our adoption officers will speak at length with prospective owners before carefully matching your foster kittens to their new homes.

9.3 Friends and family wanting to adopt
We encourage you to talk to your friends and family about your foster animals and to notify us if anyone is interested in giving one its forever home. Once your adoption kitten has passed adoption testing, your friends and family are welcome to contact our adoption team to confirm if they’re a ‘pawfect’ match.

RSPCA Victoria has a marketing strategy to help promote your foster animals to give them the best chance of finding a loving new home. Foster carers must not promote the availability of their foster animals on posters, websites or by any other means outside of their family or direct acquaintance. If you have any ideas for the promotion of your foster animal or the adoption of animals in general, you are most welcome to contact our Foster Care Network Coordinator to discuss.

10. Re-fostering
There are usually many litters of kittens needing the nurturing care of a foster carer so if you’ve returned one litter, we certainly encourage you to take another.

Before you foster again, you will need to clean and disinfect everything as thoroughly as possible. The following steps will need to be taken:

• All litter trays, bowls and plastic toys must be returned to the animal care centre for disinfection when you bring your kittens back for adoption.
• Any fabric toys and all bedding must be thrown out. Washing these will not kill the viruses that cause cat flu.
- All hard surfaces in your home, such as flooring and walls, must be mopped or wiped down with a hospital-grade disinfectant.

If you have used a piece of linoleum to cover carpet, this will also need to be washed with a hospital-grade disinfectant and be left to dry in the sun before being stored.

If you plan on continuing to foster cats or kittens, hold onto the food and kitty litter supplies but return all bowls, litter trays and plastic toys once they have been thoroughly disinfected.

If your kittens have had a contagious disease (eg. Ringworm), you may be asked to wait two weeks before fostering again.

When returning the foster animals, ensure they have their ID collars on and that you return completed Observation Sheets to assist our Adoptions Team to help them find a suitable forever home.

We have a dedicated team of staff and volunteers at our animal care centres and clinics who are here to help you on your foster caring journey.

Our Foster Care Network Coordinator is responsible for coordinating our Foster Care Program. Our Foster Care Network Coordinator provides direct support to our fabulous foster volunteers, helps match animals to carers and follows up on their progress. This staff member, and the entire Foster Care Network Team are available to provide advice to you over the phone and answer any questions you may have.

When you bring foster animals in for progress checks appointments and return them for adoption, you will be helped by staff from our veterinary clinic team.

### 11. Contacts

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Office number &amp; Mobile</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care Network Coordinator Burwood East</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>03 9224 2565 0412 601 225 for emergencies only (Monday-Friday 8am – 5pm)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Foster_Care@rspcavic.org.au">Foster_Care@rspcavic.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>9224 2222 Select option 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Shelter Supervisor</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>9224 2226</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sheltersupervisor@rspcavic.org.au">sheltersupervisor@rspcavic.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 12. Emergencies

#### 12.1 Emergency contacts

In the event of an emergency, please refer to your current Foster Care Agreement for contact details. This document was given to you when you collected your cats and kittens. A list of several Animal Emergency Centres are provided below.
12.2 Action Required for an emergency/life-threatening situation

If you have identified a life-threatening situation with a foster animal, refer to the table of symptoms below to determine next steps.

**Column A** – if your foster animal is showing symptoms that fall under Column A below, contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator to arrange a veterinary appointment in the next 12 to 24 hours.

**Column B** – if your foster animal is showing symptoms that fall under Column B below, contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator **immediately** to arrange an immediate veterinary appointment.

If outside of business hours or you cannot get in contact with the Foster Care Network Coordinator, refer to the emergency out of hours process below the symptom table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get advice from Foster Care Network Co-ordinator</td>
<td>Contact Foster Care Network Coordinator to arrange veterinary visit immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit vet in 12-24 hrs</td>
<td>Emergency - seek veterinary advice ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of appetite or lethargic for greater than 12 hours</td>
<td>Straining to urinate but unable to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lameness - unable to weight bear for 12 hours</td>
<td>Currently seizing or had a cluster of seizures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in colour or smell of urine</td>
<td>Persistent frequent vomiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneezing or coughing</td>
<td>Persistent frequent Diarrhoea or containing blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear/Yellow/ green discharge from eyes or nose</td>
<td>Bitten by snake/spider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent Scratching. Skin or ear irritation</td>
<td>Hit by Car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straining to defaecate</td>
<td>Unconscious or unresponsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black tarry faeces</td>
<td>Eaten a toxin or noxious substance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting occasionally</td>
<td>Difficulty Breathing/laboured breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea greater than 24 hours duration</td>
<td>Haemorrhage/white gum colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible seizure</td>
<td>Open wound/suspected fracture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent urination or cleaning of bottom</td>
<td>Puppy/kitten/rabbit/guinea pig not eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redness, irritation, swelling or discharge from suture line</td>
<td>Sudden swelling of body part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contact List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSPCA Burwood East</th>
<th>Epping Animal Welfare Facility</th>
<th>RSPCA Peninsula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foster Care Network Coordinator/Team</strong></td>
<td><strong>Foster Care Network Coordinator/Team</strong></td>
<td><strong>Foster Care Network Coordinator/Team</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8am to 5pm</td>
<td>8am to 5pm</td>
<td>8.30am to 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 9224 2565</td>
<td>03 8401 6605 or 0447 935 347</td>
<td>03 5978 9000 or 0428 953 307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call 03 9224 2222 for any emergencies)</td>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call 03 9224 2222 for any emergencies)</td>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call 03 9224 2222 for any emergencies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veterinary Clinic</th>
<th>Veterinary Clinic</th>
<th>Veterinary Clinic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Mon, Wed &amp; Friday</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8am – 7:45pm</td>
<td>11am to 7pm</td>
<td>9am to 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun 8am – 5:45pm</td>
<td>Tuesday &amp; Thursday</td>
<td>Sat 9am to 3:45pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 9224 2222</td>
<td>7am to 3pm</td>
<td>Sun 9am to 11:45am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun - 9am to 4pm</td>
<td>03 5978 9000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03 8401 6600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Medical Emergencies Outside of Business Hours

If a life-threatening situation occurs outside of business hours, take the foster animal to an Animal Emergency Centre (AEC) and:

- Take the Foster Agreement Form hard copy (or soft copy on phone) and foster animal to closest Animal Emergency Centre (AEC). If foster carer is not located within 40min drive of an AEC, take foster animals to local 24hr vet service (in the case of out of pocket expense we will reimburse the cost).

- AEC will provide an initial consultation (this fee will be invoiced to RSPCA Vic FCNT) to assess foster animal and provide indicative cost for treatment.

- Foster carer to obtain via the AEC advice as to whether the foster animal must be treated now or can wait until the RSPCA Victoria Vet Clinic opens.

- If AEC advise treatment is not urgent and can wait until RSPCA Vet Clinic opens, foster carer to take foster animal home and contact RSPCA Vet Clinic to make an appointment to bring foster animal to RSPCA Vet Clinic as soon as possible when next open.
• If AEC advise treatment must occur now due to life threatening conditions, AEC must call the RSPCA Victoria Chief Vet to seek advice and approval. AEC and Chief Vet to discuss situation over the phone with foster carer present.

• Foster carer to notify Foster Care Network Team of outcome with foster animal as soon as possible (irrespective of whether life threatening situation occurred during business hours or after hours).

• Comply with all Veterinary advice for the ongoing care and treatment of the foster animal.

12.3 What to do if a cat or kitten escapes

If you see a foster animal escape from your house and you are unable to catch it straight away, please immediately contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for detailed advice on what to do next. Be sure to approach a cat or kitten very slowly and quietly if it is outside so you don’t frighten it, otherwise it might run away. Also lock away any dogs if the foster animal escaped into your backyard.

If you realise a cat or kitten is missing but you have not actually seen it escape the house, don’t panic - frightened cats and kittens have been known to hide away silently for a couple of days at a time without making an appearance.

The first thing you should do if an animal is unaccounted for is to check the external doors and windows of the house to determine how likely it is that the animal managed to get outside. If there is an obvious route of escape, such as an open door, start searching outside straight away.

If it is unlikely that the animal has escaped outside, concentrate your search inside. Start searching in the safe room and check in cupboards, drawers, backpacks and suitcases, behind and underneath furniture and any other dark, quiet, confined space you can think of. Many cats and kittens will come out for food at night or when it is quiet. You can try to lure the cat or kitten out by moving the other kittens to a different room and leaving strong-smelling canned cat food in the room where you think the cat or kitten is hiding, then checking to see if it has eaten any overnight.

If, after a thorough search, you cannot find a kitten or cat, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for further advice.
12.4  What to do if an animal passes away

Kittens are very fragile creatures and sadly, not all kittens survive, even with all the care they receive in a foster home. If any of your foster kittens pass away, please immediately call the Foster Care Network Coordinator for support and advice. Only a very small percentage of kittens don’t make it compared to the large numbers that get a second chance thanks to the dedication of foster carers at RSPCA Victoria.

In the unlikely event that this should happen, wrap the kitten in a towel and remove it from the other kittens. Please contact us immediately and keep the kitten until you have received advice from our team.

13. Top Tips for Cat & Kitten Care

The five fundamental needs of cats and kittens that need to be met by a foster carer are:

- Keep kittens warm
- Provide cats and kittens with adequate nutrition
- Keep cats and kittens clean
- Provide socialisation
- Do your best to protect them from infectious disease

Additionally, the following foster carer tips may also assist you:

- Your cat or kitten will come with a paper collar. Collars placed on kittens must be checked regularly to ensure that they are snug but not too tight (fit one finger between the collar and the kitten’s neck), particularly as the kitten continues to grow.
- The general rule is to have 1 food bowl, 1 water bowl and 1 litter box for every 2 kittens.
- Always make sure your kittens are dry! Wet kittens can rapidly lose body temperature.
- Young kittens may try to suckle on each other. If this becomes problematic, the kittens must be separated to prevent larger medical concerns.
- Remember to thoroughly wash your hands after being in contact with your foster animal, especially between handling resident animals and foster animals.
- Track your foster pet’s progress on the observation reports found in Appendix B or Appendix C.
- Appetite and energy are the two most important things to monitor. A lack of interest in food or a drop in energy can indicate a serious medical issue, even if no other symptoms are present.
- Daily weight gain is crucial for growing kittens. Weigh kittens at the same time daily to ensure adequate weight gain. Kittens should gain about 14 grams per day or 113 grams per week.
If your cat seems sick, check immediately for dehydration by pulling the skin up just a little lower than the back of the neck. It should be taut and snap back down. If it stands up or takes some time to go back down, the cat may be dehydrated. Please contact the Foster Care Network Team (as per the numbers available in Contacts) for further instructions.
Appendix A: Giving Oral Medications to a Cat

https://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/outreach/Pet-Health-Topics/categories/procedures/cats/giving-oral-medications-to-your-cat

Source: Washington State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
CAT LANGUAGE

INTERESTED

FRIENDLY

ATTENTIVE

RELAXED

TRUSTING

FRIENDLY, RELAXED

CONTENT

CONFUSED, CAUTIOUS

PLAYFUL

EXCITED

"THIS IS MINE"

ANXIOUS

PREDATORY

WORRIED

FRIGHTENED

THREATENED

TERRIFIED

SUPER TERRIFIED

IRRITATED

DISGUSTED
Understanding cat behaviour

YOUR CAT’S BODY LANGUAGE CAN HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY ARE FEELING

A happy cat

These cats are relaxed and happy.

1. Cat is standing, has a relaxed body posture, ears are in a natural position, tail is held upright with the tip of the tail curved, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.

2. Cat is lying down, belly is exposed, body posture is relaxed, body is stretched out, ears are in natural position, eyes may be partly closed, mouth is closed.

3. Cat is sitting, body posture is relaxed, tail is held out loosely from body, ears are in natural position, eyes are a normal shape, mouth is closed.

A worried cat

These cats are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don’t want you near them.

1. Cat is in a crouched position, muscles are tense, body is held tightly, tail is tucked tightly into body, ears are slightly swivelled sideways, head is slightly lowered and tucked into body, pupils are dilated, mild tension shows in face.

2. Cats who are worried or anxious may hide.

An angry or very unhappy cat

These cats are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.

1. Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head, pupils are dilated, tail is held tightly into body, body is tense, limbs are held tight and close to body.

2. Cat is lying down, body is flattened, ears are flattened to the head and drawn back, body is slightly rolled over to one side, pupils are dilated, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing.

3. Cat is standing, back is arched, body is held sideways, hair is raised, posture is tense, front paw is slightly lifted off the ground (ready to swipe if needed), ears are lowered and pointing out to the side, mouth is open and tense, teeth are showing, tail is tense.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Effective date: 27/07/2018    Version: 001
## Appendix B: Foster Carer Observation Report for Cats - example only

### Animal Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheltermate ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Returned from foster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Foster Carer Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheltermate ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 1 - Health

Please note if you have observed any of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Contacted Shelter/Clinic Date &amp; Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Sneezing
- Discharge from nose or eyes
- Vomiting
- Not eating
- Lethargy
- Diarrhoea
- Skin irritation or rash
- Swellings beneath a suture line
- Scratching at ears or head shaking
- Fleas

Any other comments about health:

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

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### Section 2 - Behaviour

Has the cat displayed any of the following problem behaviours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furniture scratching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate scratching/biting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is the cat litter trained?  
Yes  
No  
Almost  
If no, what training has taken place and what progress has been made? Detail any concerns.

Does the cat show a preference for a certain food type?  
__________________________________________

Please indicate which of the following your cat has been exposed to and what their reaction was:

- **(C) Calm:** Not worried by the situation
- **(E) Excited:** Gets excited, may vocalise or attempt to chase  
- **(A) Anxious:** May be timid, may remove itself from situation  
- **(F) Fearful:** Shows real fear or aggression when placed in this situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposed</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children - babies/toddlers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children - primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud noises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small animals (specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry or birds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which characteristics apply to the cat?  
(You may tick several boxes)

- Enjoys being stroked
- Likes or tolerates being picked up
- Talkative
- Nervous
- Timid
- Often hides
Enjoys playing with toys
Seeks attention and interaction

Aggressive
Aloof

Any other comments about behaviour:
Appendix C: Foster Carer Observation Report for Kittens – example only

### Animal Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheltermate ID</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Returned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: if more than 4 kittens in the litter, please continue on another form

### Foster Carer Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheltermate ID</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 1 - Health

Please tick if you have observed any of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sneezing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge from nose/eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethargy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin irritation or rash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swellings beneath suture line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you contact the Shelter or Clinic? Did the issue resolve? Are there any current health issues? Please provide details below:

---

Effective date: 27/07/2018  Version: 001
### Behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
<th>Kitten # ..........</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Furniture scratching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate scratching/biting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are the kittens litter trained? Yes No Almost

If not, do you know which kitten/s are toileting in the wrong place? __________________________

What litter training has taken place and what progress has been made? Detail any concerns.

---

Indicate which of the following the kittens have been exposed to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults other than carer</th>
<th>Exposed</th>
<th>Dogs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children - babies/toddlers</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>Small animals (specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children - primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Poultry or birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud noises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you use any of the following terms to describe the individual kittens:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
<th>Kitten # ......</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly rough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frightened by noises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calmer than the others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularly friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any other comments about behaviour:

---
Appendix D: Hill’s Feeding Guide

When feeding Hills Science diet dry food, keep fresh water available at all times. Animals under 4 months are fed three times daily; all other animals are fed twice daily. Lactating animals should have food available at all times.

The recommended amounts to feed are a guide only. Adjust as necessary. Observe each animal’s feeding habit. If food is consistently left after a feed and the animal is not losing weight, then reduce its portion. If it is still hungry and/or loses any weight, then increase its portion. If weight loss or weight gain continues, seek veterinary advice and implement a feeding plan to help the animal achieve a healthy weight.

The amounts listed in the tables below refer to a Hills cup measure; fill food bowls with this amount or top up food remaining in the bowl to this amount. Discard left over food at the beginning of each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight of cat</th>
<th>Hills Kitten Healthy Development#</th>
<th>Hills Adult Optimal Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 4 months Feed 3 times daily</td>
<td>Adult cats aged 1 – 6 years Feed twice daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5 kg</td>
<td>1/8 cup</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 kg</td>
<td>1/8 cup</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 kg</td>
<td>1/4 cup</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 kg</td>
<td>1/4 cup</td>
<td>1/3 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 kg</td>
<td>1/3 cup</td>
<td>1/2 cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 kg</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1/2 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 kg</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2/3 cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 kg</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3/4 cups</td>
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# – food should be available ad lib for pregnant and nursing mothers and kittens
x - recommended amounts not provided as animals of this age or stage do not fall in this weight category

Appendix E: RSPCA Victoria Corporate Partners & Sponsors

RSPCA Victoria aims to build long term, mutually beneficial partnerships within the Victoria business community. Our partners share our values of accountability, professional integrity, openness and creativity and they help us achieve our vision in bold and creative ways.

For more information about our Corporate Partners & Sponsors, visit http://rspcavic.org/about-us/corporate-partners-and-sponsors

Document Specifications

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