# Dogs & Puppies 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 shelters 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 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 a shelter. 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 dogs and puppies. 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 dogs and puppies 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.
- Puppy proof your home to reduce potential safety hazards.
- Maintain a peaceful, loving environment for the foster animals and spend quality time socialising them (as outlined in the Foster Agreement Form).
- Maintain communication with the Foster Care Network Team.
- Commit to the nominated foster period required.

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.

1.1 Your Role as Foster Carer

As a foster carer, you will help offer RSPCA Victoria dogs and puppies 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 dogs and puppies 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 foster process. Where possible, we’ll keep you informed of your animals’ progress once it has been returned to our care. Please rest assured every decision we make regarding your foster animals always keeps their welfare the priority. Foster care can be emotional, and as a Volunteer with RSPCA Victoria, foster carers can seek free assistance from Converge International’s employee assistance program on 1300 687 327 or via www.convergeinternational.com.au.
We understand that sometimes, while you are providing lots of love, attention and care to your foster animals, friends or family can fall in love with them. We certainly welcome your friends and family to express their interest in adopting your foster animal once they are 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 who will consult with the RSPCA Victoria Veterinary team.

2. Preparing for your Dog or Puppies

2.1 Equipment List

You will be supplied with all of the equipment and products needed to care for your foster animals, including:

- Dry and canned food
- Bedding (towels/blankets)
- Standard plastic carry cage and/or crate
- Food and water bowls
- Toys (eg. Kong)

2.2 Preparing a Safe Environment

The safe room

It’s important that foster animals have a place in which they are safe and feel secure. Choose one room in your house to be the ‘safe room’ where your dog or puppies will primarily be housed. This room will need to be dog and puppy proofed and the animal/s will spend their first few days in here. Later, they 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 accidents and any other mess the dog or puppies 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 the bed to prevent puppies from 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 animals. It is best to remove breakable items from the safe room, so dogs and puppies don’t damage them.

**Puppy-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 puppy may get tangled in and tie up the cords from blinds.
- Block any holes or gaps that a puppy 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**

- Create distinct zones for sleeping, eating, toileting and playing. Put puppy pads 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 puppies, make sure you put down enough bowls, so they don’t have to fight and compete for food. We recommend one bowl for each puppy.
- Set up a play area with a variety of fun toys.
- Establish the sleeping area. You will need to make sure the carrier cage (with door removed or wedged open) or crate is available as a bed for them, but they will need other sleeping places close by. If the dog or puppies are in a bathroom, it 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 it be. It may need time to adjust to their new 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, you should apply to foster the animal/s online. We will then contact you to discuss your selection/s and arrange for you to come to the shelter 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 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 dog or puppies:

- 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. carrier).

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

4. Caring for Your Dog and Puppies

4.1 Introducing the foster animal/s to your home

Moving from the RSPCA Victoria animal care centre to a new home represents a complete upheaval of an animal’s world, especially for puppies.

Dogs or puppies who have trouble adjusting to their new home may engage in house-soiling, vocal behaviour, destructiveness or self-mutilation activities like tail biting. Other symptoms of anxiety may include depression, loss of appetite, hiding or aggression.

Some simple planning will help prevent an animal from becoming stressed by a complete change in their environment. Some tips to provide to new owners include:

- Always leave the carrier/crate open in the designated room, so that they can come in and out of their own accord.
- Give the dog/puppy some treats so they associate something positive with their unfamiliar environment. Reward behaviour that you want the dog to repeat.
• Make sure doors and windows are secure so the foster animal doesn't accidentally escape because they won't know where they are.
• Make sure you stick to the rules of where the dog is allowed in the house, as it is not fair on the dog to change the rules once it has settled in. Reward the dog when it abides by the rules, so it continues obeying them.

Note: baby gates and crates are a great way to help segregate the home to keep your foster animal out of unwanted areas.

4.2 Getting Acquainted

Let your foster animals get used to you slowly. If the animal is nervous, offer some tasty treats and let them come to you. Some dogs and puppies may need longer than others to become comfortable. This is normal.

4.3 Introducing Dogs to Each Other

Adding another dog (even only a foster dog that you’ll only have temporarily) into your household can bring you and your current dog more fun and companionship, however it may take time for the dogs to build a comfortable relationship. It is important to be patient and introduce the dogs slowly to maximise the potential for a great relationship.

Practice obedience

Use positive reinforcement training to teach your current dog basic exercises such as “sit”, “drop”, “down” and “come” as early as possible and reward good behaviour with a tasty treat. This will help you maintain control during introductions.

Initial Introduction

• When you pick up your new dog, it is best not to have your current dog with you to avoid potential trouble in the car on the way home.
• It’s best if the dogs meet for the first time on neutral territory, such as a nearby park.
• If possible, have someone there to help you so that each of you can have a dog on a lead.
• It is important to try to keep the leads loose during introductions, so dogs don’t react inappropriately.
• Do not force interaction between dogs. If they initially ignore each other, or if one dog seems reluctant to interact with the other, be patient and give both dogs time to greet each other at their own pace.

Brief Introduction

• Initially keep the greetings brief to keep the dogs calm.
• Only allow a few seconds of sniffing each other before calling each dog back and separating them.
• After a minute or so, lead the dogs back together and allow another several seconds of sniffing. Repeat this process a number of times and gradually increase the length of time they interact.
• Take the dogs for a short walk together to relax both dogs and assist with bonding. It will also reinforce that positive, fun things happen when they’re together.
Observe Body Language

- Relaxed body movements, open mouths and play bows (elbows on the ground and hind end in the air) are all good signs that the two dogs feel comfortable with each other.
- Stiff, slow body movements, tense mouths, teeth-baring, growls and prolonged staring are all signs that a dog is feeling threatened. If you see this type of behaviour, quickly separate the dogs and practice simple obedience with them individually using treats before trying again. Reinforce good behaviour with verbal praise (e.g. good boy).

First Few Weeks at Home

It is important to avoid squabbles during the early stages of your dog’s new relationship. It is therefore important to:

- Ensure that each dog has its own individual safe place where it can go to be alone (e.g. a crate or separate room), particularly if there’s a big age difference between the dogs, or if one is more energetic than the other.
- Pick up all toys, chews, food bowls and your current dog’s favourite items, as these may cause rivalry. These can be reintroduced later once the dogs have started to develop a good relationship.
- Each dog should have its own bed, water and food bowl.
- At meal times, feed both dogs at the same time but in separate areas and remove food bowls when they have finished eating.
- Confine the dogs in separate areas of your home, particularly when you’re away or unable to supervise their interactions. When the dogs are separated, a baby gate can be a good way for them to get to know each other. The new dog should be gated in the confinement area and your current dog should be free to move around and visit when it wants. Alternating the area that the dogs are separated in each day is a good way to prevent either one becoming protective of a particular space.
- In the first few weeks, only give chews or toys to the dogs when they are separated.
- Keep playtime and interactions brief to avoid overstimulation and over arousal.
- Be sure to praise each dog when it is interacting nicely.
- Let your existing dog know that it is still important to avoid jealousy or anxiety. Ensure you give it the same amount of attention that it received prior to the new dog arriving.
- Spend time individually with each dog. One on one time is very important and can be as simple as a brief training session or a quick walk.
- During this period of adjustment, it is important that both dogs understand that good things happen when they are together and getting along, and that when they are alone or not getting along nicely, the good things go away.
- When the dogs are together and interacting appropriately, give them lots of attention, treats and praise. When they are calmly lying on the floor, randomly give them a treat or attention, just for being good dogs.

4.4 Introducing Your Dog to a Cat

Introducing a new pet into the household takes patience. Some pets are social, and others are not. Cats are territorial and need to be introduced to other animals very slowly, and dogs usually want to chase and play with cats, which can in turn, cause fearful or aggressive behaviour. Slow introductions are key to ensuring you and your animals live together happily.
Practice Obedience

Use positive reinforcement training to teach your dog basic exercises such as “sit”, “drop/down” and “come” as early as possible. These exercises will help to maintain control during introductions. If your dog already knows these exercises, reinforce them by heavily rewarding compliance with a tasty food treat.

Setting up your home

It is important to disrupt your cat’s ‘normal’ routine as little as possible. If your cat usually has access to outside, or has areas she is used to being in, try to block off these areas for when your foster dog arrives. Ensure your cat still has access to everything she needs (eg. litter tray, food, water, bed etc) - this may mean putting food up high rather than on the floor.

You will need to keep both animals separate initially. The easiest way to do this may be using baby gates (if the dog is not likely to jump over) or simply by closing doors. Switch sleeping blankets or beds between your resident pet and your foster animal so they can familiarise with each other’s scent. You could also rub a towel on one pet and put it underneath the food dish of the other animal. This is called ‘scent-swapping’ and is a way of introducing two animals without them actually meeting.

Controlled Meeting

Once both animals are comfortable with the above processes, you can then attempt a face to face introduction. If you have baby gates set up, the two pets should be able to see one another and you will have an idea of how each one may react. We strongly advise that this is an intermediary step before attempting face-to-face introductions.

Ensure that you have lots of treats ready and that the dog is on a lead. Your cat should have the option to move up high where she feels more secure. Open the baby gate or bring the dog into the room. If the dog looks at the cat or expresses interest, get his attention and reward him with a treat – you want to teach the dog to focus on you rather than the cat. Keep these sessions short – perhaps 2-3 minutes. Allow your resident pet to walk away earlier if it wants to. Repeat this several times until both animals are tolerating each other’s presence without fear, aggression or undesirable behaviours. This could take some weeks or months, depending on the animals. Always make sure the introduction ends on a positive note and never leave them alone together at this stage. Do not force introductions.

Directly Supervise All Interactions Between Animals

It’s best to keep your dog on a leash and with you whenever your cat is free in the house during the introduction process. Ensure the cat has an escape route and keep your dog and cat separated when you’re not home until you’re certain your pet will be safe. If there’s ever a setback, go back a step in training and reintroduce the animals again.

When to Get Help

If the introduction process goes badly, seek professional help immediately. Animals can be severely injured in fights and the longer the problem continues, the harder it can be to resolve. It is also important to not punish the animals, as this will not help.
4.5 Managing a Multi Dog Household

- Don’t worry about which dog is the ‘dominant’ dog.
- Try to feed and pet your dogs in a random order to minimise tension.
- Teach all of your dogs to be polite and patient in order to get what they want.
- It’s important to teach your dogs what’s acceptable and what’s not acceptable.
- Sit down with your family and decide on the house rules for the dogs. Also determine where the dogs are allowed to roam and reinforce this consistently.
- Keep play sessions constructive – you may need to step in if play becomes too rough or spills into bullying.
- Reward any calm and respectful behaviour directed towards you or the other dogs.
- Teach your dogs that you control their resources and that by cooperating with you, good things happen.
- Spend one on one time with each dog to strengthen the bond.
- Teach your dogs that it’s ok to spend time alone.
- Ensure that each dog receives basic training and is competent in basic skills such as “sit”, “stay”, “wait” and “come”. They must know their names and be able to settle on a mat or other defined place.
- Walk away and do not interact with any of your dogs if one shows any signs of pushy behaviour.
- If dogs start to argue over toys, remove them.

4.6 Feeding & Nutrition

The type and amount of food you should give, and how often you should feed is 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 dogs and puppies. Puppies 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 dogs and puppies return to the shelter 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, which may cause them to be more susceptible to stress and disease. If a dog or puppy 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 foster animals (especially puppies), eating at least once a day to determine whether all puppies are eating, or whether some are being bullied away from the food, or are not eating due to illness. We recommend you weigh your puppies if safe to see any increase or decrease in weight gain.

If you think you will run out of food, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator.

4.7 Daily Cleaning

Food and water bowls 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 discourages eating. Hot, soapy water will be sufficient for daily cleans. Cleaning should include:

- Clean canned food bowls and water bowls daily and throwing out uneaten canned food.
- Remove faeces from the toileting area and soiled puppy pads at least twice daily.
• Clean up any toileting accidents as soon as they are observed.
• Check 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 dog or puppy has had diarrhoea and has very dirty hind legs, there should be no need for it to be bathed.

If a bath is required, use a specially formulated pet shampoo. **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 puppy and securely hold the puppy in one hand the whole time.

Towel dry the animal (especially a puppy) afterwards as thoroughly as possible. Keep the puppy in a warm environment until completely dry. Do not wash a puppy 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.

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

**Summary: Recommended Daily Routine for Puppy Care**

When caring for puppies, 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**

• Remove all faeces and 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 puppy is eating.
• Top up water bowls.
• Pick up each puppy individually and check its health whilst weighing the puppy to measure weight increase or decrease.
• Spend a further 15 minutes playing with and socialising puppies in the safe room.
• As the puppies 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)

• Check each puppy’s health (as per Health Checks outlined below).
• Remove all faeces and 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 puppy is eating.
• Spend a further 20-30 minutes socialising, handling and interacting with the puppies.
• The puppies may spend time in other parts of the house while you are at home.
Late evening (before you go to bed)

- Remove all faeces and 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 puppy is eating.
- Top up water bowls.
- Pick up each puppy individually and check its health (as per Health Checks outlined below).
- Spend a further 15 minutes playing with and socialising the puppy in the safe room.
- Ensure the puppies are confined in the safe room overnight.

Health Checks

When you check your puppy’s 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?
- Is there any hair loss, lesions or scaly skin?
- Are all the puppies eating well?
- Are their collars still loose or are they getting tight?

4.9 Worming, Flea Treatments and Vaccinations

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

Worms

On admission to RSPCA Victoria, all dogs and puppies are treated with Bayer spot. You may see dead worms in their stools for the next day or so, but this is normal. The following are signs that a puppy 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 RSPCA Victoria, all dogs and puppies 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, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator.

Vaccinations
Our dogs and puppies are vaccinated upon arrival and at additional times as they grow (outlined on the Foster Agreement Form). Vaccinations do not guarantee that dogs and puppies will not get sick, but they reduce the chances of them becoming ill and the disease may be less severe if it is contracted.

**Progress Checks**
Puppies receive regular vaccinations every 2 weeks until 16 week of age, then annual booster vaccinations are required every 1-3 years (depending on the vaccination required).

### 4.10 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
- Persistently thin condition
- Inappetence (not eating or poor appetite)
- Excessive and persistent weakness or sleepiness (a low energy, listless puppy)
- Excessive thirst
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Runny, watery nose or eyes
- Repeated sneezing
- Bloating of the belly and/or abdominal pain

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

### 4.11 When to Seek Help

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Foster Care Network Co-ordinator to arrange veterinary visit in next 12 to 24 hours</th>
<th>Contact Foster Care Network Coordinator to arrange veterinary visit immediately</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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 greater than 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>
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<tr>
<td>Sneezing or coughing</td>
<td>Persistent frequent diarrhoea or diarrhoea containing blood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear/yellow/green discharge from eyes or nose</td>
<td>Bitten by snake/spider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persistent scratching. Skin or ear irritation</td>
<td>Hit by car</td>
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<tr>
<td>Straining to defecate (poo). If unable to urinate see next column</td>
<td>Unconscious or unresponsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black tarry faeces</td>
<td>Eaten a toxin or noxious substance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vomiting occasionally</td>
<td>Difficulty breathing/laboured breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea greater than 24 hours duration</td>
<td>Haemorrhage/white gum colour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Possible seizure</td>
<td>Open wound/suspected fracture</td>
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Frequent urination or cleaning of bottom & Puppy/kitten/rabbit/guinea pig not eating
Redness, irritation, swelling or discharge from stitches/suture line & Sudden swelling of body part

See Emergencies for more information.

5. Socialisation

Socialisation is the process of teaching a dog or puppy how to appropriately respond and interact with the things it will be exposed to throughout its life. Dogs have a critical socialisation period between the ages of 7 and 12 weeks of age. Experiences or lack of experiences your puppy has during this time can influence its ability to cope with situations for the rest of its life and may also increase the chances of behavioural problems occurring in the future.

5.1 How should I socialise my foster dog/puppy?

Your dog or puppy should experience exposure to various things and should be encouraged to investigate and explore a range of environments. If a puppy is not yet fully vaccinated, socialisation should occur in an environment where the risk of illness is minimal (no dog parks or off leash areas). The following tips may assist you in socialising your dog or puppy:

- Give your dog or puppy lots of food treats near various things to help it associate the experience with something positive, which will in turn make it look forward to the experience again.
- If your dog or puppy is shy or fearful, it is important to never force it into a situation, but instead, expose it to things gradually.
- Puppy socialisation classes are a fantastic way to socialise your puppy in a safe environment.
- Socialisation should not end at puppy hood – it should continue for the rest of the dog’s life.

5.2 What should I expose my foster dog or puppy to?

Puppies and dogs should be exposed to a wide range of experiences (if safe to do so) including:

- Lots of friendly people of all ages, genders and races
- Different surfaces (eg. shiny floors, carpet, wooden floors, dirt etc)
- Traffic noise (cars, motorbikes, trams, trains etc)
- Car rides
- Vacuum cleaners and noisy household appliances
- Other dogs and animals
- Bicycles, wheelchairs and prams
- Shopping centres
- Lawnmowers
- Postmen
- Large crowds
- Loud speakers
- Walking after dark
- Bad weather (wind, rain, thunder)
• Balconies and stairs
• Fireworks
• Vet clinics

Socialisation is not just important for puppies. Once your foster dog has had a few days to settle into life with you, take it out and about to interact with its surroundings.

• Expose the dog to as many things as you can and try to keep the interaction as positive and enjoyable as possible.
• Take some treats with you and reward the dog for behaving appropriately in any situation. This will help to develop a confident, well-adjusted dog.
• Remember to do this all at your dog’s pace. The key to socialisation is that the dog is comfortable and taking it all in its stride.
• Never assume the dog has any pre-taught behaviours. Make sure you train the behaviours you want the dog to exhibit and don’t allow it to carry out any unacceptable behaviours.
• **Ensure your foster dog is kept on a leash always (no off lead activity).**

6. Enrichment

Dogs that are not provided with adequate mental and physical stimulation are more likely to display behavioural problems. By providing an enriching environment, you can help reduce and prevent behavioural problems from developing in the future.

Even if you have a large yard, few dogs will occupy their day with constructive activities when they are left alone. Most will rest and sleep the day away, waiting for you to return. Others may become bored and start digging, chewing, barking or engaging in other destructive behaviours. The following tips may help:

• Offer your foster dog a range of toys to play with and rotate them regularly so the dog doesn’t get bored.
• Save old cereal boxes, egg cartons and toilet rolls, as these can be great fun for the dog to demolish, rather than your furniture! Put some food or a bone inside and watch the dog try its hardest to get the tasty treat out! If the dog starts eating the toy, remove it immediately.
• Clamshell paddling pools are great to use as a digging pit. Half fill it with sand and bury a bone, toy or treats inside to encourage the dog to dig in the pit and not the garden.
• If the dog likes water, fill the other half of the clamshell with water in the summer for the dog to paddle in. Place a toy, bone or apple in the water for the dog to play with.

Use mealtimes to entertain your dog so for dogs that are left alone for periods during the day, it can be beneficial to give them their food in a variety of ways, such as:

• Over summer, make ice-blocks using a small container (eg. an empty margarine container) with some chicken or beef stock and treats in. It is important that you remove the ice block form your selected container.
• Use an interactive toy (such as a Kong, Bustercube, Treatballs and Aussie Dog products) to prolong mealtimes and provide entertainment for your dog when you are not home.
• Substitute mealtime with a treasure hunt! Offer half of your dog’s meal in a variety of toys and hide these in various places around the backyard to keep your dog busy when you leave.
When you’re home, engage your dog in the following activities to help it to cope better when you leave:

- Provide your dog with regular aerobic exercise. This is beneficial as it releases serotonin (a feel good hormone). Offer your dog a range of different activities each day to help break up the monotony (e.g. frisbee, swimming, walking, obedience club etc).
- Actively train your dog using positive-based training methods and start using it in your daily interactions. You could teach it to fetch the newspaper, clean up its toys or find the remote!!
- Spend quality time with your dog as often as possible. Dogs are social animals and are often easier to manage if they receive adequate social interaction with their family members, so take any opportunity to include your dog in daily activities, such as picking up the kids from school.

7. Dog Illnesses and Zoonotic Diseases

The following diseases are commonly found in dogs and can also be contagious to other animals:

- Parvovirus
- Kennel Cough
- Giardia
- Hepatitis
- Ringworm
- Fleas and lice
- Gastrointestinal disease/ gastric torsion (bloat)
- Heartworm disease
- Poisoning from chocolate, grapes, onions etc

7.1 Kennel Cough

Kennel Cough is commonly caused by a virus called Para influenza or bacteria called Bordatella. Symptoms include a harsh, hacking cough with gagging or sometimes vomiting mucus. The coughing may become worse with exercise and there may also be coloured discharge from the nose. Despite the frustrating cough, the dog is usually still bright, alert and eating well. In cases that are more serious, the dog may become depressed, not eat or develop a fever or chest infection. Treatment may involve antibiotics and a cough suppressant to provide relief from persistent coughing.

Kennel Cough is commonly spread from dog to dog via secretions from the nose and mouth. Other important modes of disease transmission can come from contaminated bowls, cages, bedding etc. Some dogs carry the disease without showing signs but can infect other dogs. For these reasons, Kennel Cough commonly occurs in boarding kennels or in shelters where there is a risk of contact with an infected dog or contaminated objects. Dogs who have been vaccinated will have a decreased risk of exposure but are still susceptible to Kennel Cough regardless of whether or not they have been vaccinated. Vaccination against all the primary agents is possible, but immunity takes several days to develop.

7.2 Parvovirus

Parvovirus is an extremely dangerous viral disease in dogs and frequently results in death. Parvovirus typically results in severe vomiting and diarrhoea (which may contain blood). Affected dogs often exhibit a lack of appetite, depression and fever. It is important to note that many dogs may not show every clinical sign but vomiting and diarrhoea are the most common signs with vomiting usually beginning first.

Parvovirus may affect dogs of all ages but is most common in dogs less than one year of age. Young puppies less than five months of age are often the most severely affected and the most difficult to treat. Dogs that become infected with Parvovirus and show clinical signs will usually become ill within 7-10 days of initial infection.

The main source of virus transmission is in the faeces of infected dog’s.
Unlike most other viruses, Parvovirus is stable in the environment and is resistant to the effects of heat, detergents and alcohol. Due to its stability, the virus is easily transmitted by the hair or feet of infected dogs, contaminated shoes, clothes and other objects. Direct contact between dogs is not required to spread the virus.

Vaccination against all the primary agents is possible, but immunity takes several days to develop.

### 7.3 Infectious Diseases Affecting Animals and Humans – Zoonoses

The following diseases can affect both animals and humans:

- Ringworm
- Hydatid disease
- Leptospirosis
- Mange

### 7.4 Observation and Reporting

Symptoms of disease may develop very quickly in animals, and it is essential that each animal’s general appearance and behaviour are inspected daily. If the illness or injury is identified early, it’s more likely that treatment will be successful and lessens the chance of a major outbreak of an infectious disease.

Foster carers should note any of the following symptoms on their daily observation sheets and report these to the Foster Care Network Team, who depending on the type and severity of symptoms, may ask the foster carer to continue to observe the animal’s condition and behaviour or seek immediate veterinary attention for the animal:

- Runny nose
- Runny or inflamed eyes
- Repeated sneezing
- Ulcers on tongue, nose or eyes
- Apparent pain
- Coughing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Bloating of abdomen
- Lameness
- Difficulty or inability to defecate or urinate
- Inability to stand or walk
- Skin lesions or abscess
- Bleeding
- Swelling of body parts
- Weight loss
- Red or brown coloured urine
- Fits
- Loss of appetite
- Unusual behaviour

### 8. De-sexing and Returning Your Foster Animal

You will need to return your puppies for de-sexing on the date indicated in your Foster Agreement Form. Once de-sexed, the puppy will most likely cease placement in foster care and will be made available for adoption. If returning your foster puppy for de-sexing, please ensure that you return all animal supplies, the Foster
Agreement Form (and other foster specific paperwork) and all completed Observation Reports to the Foster Care Network Team.

8.1 Adoption Process

After your foster animals are returned, 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 adoptions 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 foster animal 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 animal to their new homes.

9. Your Health

There are several diseases that affect both animals and humans and can be transmitted by your foster animals to people. Examples of some of the more common zoonotic diseases include Toxoplasmosis, Ringworm, Hydatid disease and Mange. Before being placed in foster, all animals are carefully checked for any signs of these diseases, however it is possible for symptoms to develop after you take them home.

The following are simple measures you can take to help prevent from contracting these diseases:

- Use gloves when picking up faeces and urine.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling your foster animals and again before eating.
- Be careful not to touch your mouth or face while handling the foster puppies. **Do not kiss the puppies or let them contact your face.**
- If you are bitten, immediately wash the affected area with soap and water. **Please contact the Foster Care Network Team who will send you an Incident Report Form that must be completed and returned to record the incident with the foster animal.**
- Cover any wounds or broken skin on your hands with Band-Aids. Do not allow the puppies to lick broken skin.

**When to Seek Medical Attention**

Seek medical attention:

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 and contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator.

**10. Top Tips for Dog Care**

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

- **Provide dogs and puppies with adequate nutrition**
- **Provide socialisation, especially for puppies between 7-12 weeks of age**
- **Do your best to protect them from infectious disease**
- **Provide environmental enrichment, stimulation (both mental and physical) and lots of love**
- **Exercise your dog or puppy**
Additionally, the following foster carer tips may also assist you:

- Ensure your home is ready and has been dog or puppy proofed before bringing the foster animal home.
- Be patient and seek assistance from the Foster Care Network Team as needed. You’re not alone so don’t struggle or get stressed when help is only a phone call away.
- Monitor the dog or puppy’s collar as it grows and check it regularly to ensure it’s not too tight (you should be able to fit one finger between the collar and the neck).
- 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 animal’s health, behaviour and progress on the daily observation sheets provided to you when you collected your foster animal.
- Remember the benefits of having a foster animal and know that you’re making a difference to that animal.

11. Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Office number &amp; Mobile</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>9224 2222 Select option 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Shelter Supervisor</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>9224 2226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epping Animal Welfare Facility</td>
<td>Monday 11am-7pm Tuesday 7am-3pm Wednesday 11am-7pm Thursday 7am-3pm Friday 11am-7pm Saturday 9am-4pm Sunday 9am-4pm</td>
<td>03 8401 6600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epping Animal Welfare Facility Foster Care Coordinator</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>03 8401 6605 0447 935 347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>03 5978 6706 Select option 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Shelter Supervisor</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>03 5978 6706 Select option 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Reception</td>
<td>Seven days</td>
<td>03 5978 9000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Emergencies

13.1 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 foster animal/s. A list of several Animal Emergency Centres are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency vet</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal Accident &amp; Emergency</td>
<td>72 Hargrave Ave, Essendon Fields</td>
<td>9379 0700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Accident &amp; Emergency</td>
<td>6 Wallace Ave, Point Cook</td>
<td>8368 7400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>37 Blackburn Rd, Mount Waverley</td>
<td>9803 8122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>39 McMahons Rd, Frankston</td>
<td>9770 5555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>18 / 151-159 Princes Hwy, Hallam</td>
<td>8795 7020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.2 Action Required for an emergency/life-threatening situation with a foster animal

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>Contact Foster Care Network Co-ordinator to arrange veterinary visit in next 12 to 24 hours</td>
<td>Contact Foster Care Network Coordinator to arrange veterinary visit immediately</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>
</tbody>
</table>

Emergency - seek veterinary advice ASAP
Diarrhoea greater than 24 hours duration | Haemorrhage/white gum colour
--- | ---
Possible seizure | Open wound/suspected fracture
Frequent urination or cleaning of bottom | Puppy/kitten/rabbit/guinea pig not eating
Redness, irritation, swelling or discharge from suture line | Sudden swelling of body part

Contact List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RSPCA Burwood East</th>
<th>Epping Animal Welfare Facility</th>
<th>RSPCA Peninsula</th>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Veterinary Clinic</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Veterinary Clinic</strong></td>
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<td>Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>8am – 7:45pm</td>
<td>11am to 7pm</td>
<td>9am to 5pm</td>
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<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, the foster carer must:

- 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 animal/s 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 to 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.
13.3 What to do if a dog or puppy 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 dog or puppy very slowly and quietly if it is outside so you don’t frighten it, otherwise it might run away.

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. Try using food to lure the animal out from hiding.

If, after a thorough search, you cannot find your foster dog or puppy, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for further advice.

13.4 What to do if an animal passes away

Some foster animals (puppies especially) can be quite fragile creatures and even with all the care they receive in a foster home, sometimes unexpected things happen. If any of your foster animals pass away, please immediately call the Foster Care Network Coordinator for support and advice.

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

Appendix A: Giving Oral Medications to a Dog

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

Source: Washington State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
Appendix B: Do’s and Don’ts of Dog Training

The Do's and Don't's of Dog Training

**DO's**

- **DO** use rewards like treats to train your dog so your dog will enjoy training.
- **DO** use comfortable, dog friendly equipment so that your dog feel relaxed and happy.
- **DO** have your dog work for valued resources like meals, walks and toys so your dog looks to you for guidance.
- **DO** build a cooperative relationship based on mutual respect, communication and trust so both you and your dog enjoy being with one another.

**DON'T's**

- **DON'T** use force or punishment when working with your dog or your dog will not think training is fun and will be afraid of you.
- **DON'T** use aversive equipment like choke collars, prong collars or shock collars or training will be painful and scary for your dog.
- **DON'T** use confrontational methods that may frighten your dog or worse, cause your dog to react aggressively.
- **DON'T** use methods or equipment that are uncomfortable, painful, forceful, scary or intimidating to your dog. Positive reinforcement training is so much more fun for both the dog and owner.

**EAST BAY DOG TRAINERS**

www.eastbaydogtrainers.org

Illustrated by Lili Chin | doggeddrawings.net
Appendix C: How Not to Greet a Dog

**HOW NOT TO GREET A DOG**

Most people do this stuff and it stresses dogs out so they BITE!
I don’t care how cute you (or your kid) think Boogie is. Please show him some respect.

1. **DON'T** Lean over the dog & stick your hand in his face
2. **DON'T** Lean over the dog & stick your hand on top of his head
3. **DON'T** Grab or Hug him

4. **DON'T** Stare him in the eye (This is an adversarial gesture)
5. **DON'T** Squeal or shout in his face
6. **DON'T** Grab his head and kiss it (This is an invasion of space)

Doing this to a dog who doesn't know you is like a perfect stranger giving you a great big hug and kiss in an elevator. Wouldn’t that creep you out? And wouldn’t you have the right to defend yourself?

**THE CORRECT WAY:**

* No Eye contact
* Let the dog approach you in his own time
* Keep either your SIDE or BACK towards the dog (non-threatening posture)

* Pet or stroke him on the SIDE of his face or body. Or on his back.

Source: https://www.doggiedrawings.net/freeposters
Appendix D: RSPCA Victoria Corporate Partners & Sponsors

RSPCA Victoria aims to build long term, mutually beneficial partnerships within the Victorian 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 and Sponsors, visit http://rspcavic.org/about-us/corporate-partners-and-sponsors

Document Specifications

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