



***The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be WARM and have FULL BELLIES at all times! ***

Neonatal Foster Kitten Guide

Fostering truly saves lives! Thank you from the bottom of our heart for being a SAPA Foster hero, you are making a wonderful difference! **Fostering is a commitment.** Fostering kittens requires you to be set aside a few hours of your day, every day, to feed and care for kittens. Please read through this handout for important resources and information to help guide you through the foster process. We are always here for you if you have questions!

To get to know your foster(s), please take a moment to review their paperwork that was emailed to you. **It is vital that you keep all medical records saved in your email.** Their animal ID numbers are like the animal's birth certificate and you will need it when bringing your foster to any medical/vaccine appointments, events, and for adoption.

The #1 thing to remember when fostering kittens is: WEIGH, WEIGH, WEIGH!! The overwhelming majority of kittens who pass away in foster care do so because they were not weighed as frequently as they should have been!

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET YOUR KITTENS HOME:

- Get your kittens settled into their **habitat**. Make sure they have a **heat source!**
- Be sure to kitten-proof their area and watch out for any **common household hazards**.
- Feed and care** for your kittens as instructed, referring to the Feeding/Care Guide.
- Record** their weights and make notes about progress on the Daily Care Sheet.
- Spend time **playing** with your kittens and **socializing** them, if they're old enough!
- Give kittens plenty of time to **rest**. They will sleep much of the day—this is normal.

SPAY / NEUTER: Kittens cannot come in for their **spay/neuter surgery** until they weigh **2lbs (906g) and are at least 8 weeks old**. Kittens who have their mama *generally* reach 2 pounds around 8 weeks old, but, for orphans, it can be as late as 10-12 weeks! Kittens must be healthy (excluding ringworm) to come in for surgery!

- Email: Schedulemedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org and book appointment well in advance, especially during peak kitten season.
- If your kitten is sick or injured, please [check with the Marbach clinic](#) before making an appointment.



***The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be WARM and have FULL BELLIES at all times! ***

Important Contacts:

- General foster questions: foster@sanantoniopetsalive.org
- General Medical Questions- Fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org
- Clinic Appointments(Emergencies, exam needed by a veterinarian, Rabies vaccine needed, Heartworm injections)- appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org; For routine vaccinations, heartworm/flea/tick prevention, de-wormer, etc., please use this link: [Wait while](#)
- Spay/Neuter questions/appointments- schedulemedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org
- Foster Marketing Questions- Fostermarketing@sanantoniopetsalive.org Please make sure to submit photos and a bio of your foster kitten when they are almost ready for adoption (6-7 weeks old or almost 2 pounds)
- Adoption Questions- Adopt@sanantoniopetsalive.org
- For after hour medical emergencies, please call the emergency after hours phone line at (210) 338-8225.

For kittens, a medical emergency includes head slumped/ body limp/ unable to rouse: Please start the Fading Kitten Protocol immediately outlined in this packet.

If you observe diarrhea that is very liquidy, white, bloody, or black, any rapid weight loss, mouth breathing, heavy/labored breathing, red/brown urine, vomiting and diarrhea together or within a short timeframe, seizures- please contact: [**appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org**](mailto:appointment@sanantoniopetsalive.org)

Facebook Foster Forum:

If you are on Facebook, please ask to join our private Facebook page just for fosters: **“San Antonio Pets Alive Foster Forum”** This page is a great way to connect with fellow fosters and will provide you with additional support and resources!





***The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be WARM and have FULL BELLIES at all times! ***

Fading Kitten Syndrome: A Lifesaving Guide

You are **not** receiving this handout because Fading Kitten Syndrome is a common occurrence, but rather because if you ever encounter this condition, YOU will need to ACT IMMEDIATELY. The worst thing you can do for a fading kitten is to take him/her to your vet at the onset of symptoms – most kittens will not survive the car ride. YOU are this kitten's best chance at making it.

Fading Kitten Syndrome is a life-threatening emergency in which a kitten “crashes” and begins to fade away. Kittens under 3 weeks old and/or kittens who are, or were recently sick, are most susceptible to FKS. Oftentimes, it occurs in kittens who have been eating poorly, and losing, or, not gaining, weight. This is why it is **VITAL** that you weigh your kittens every time they're fed. *Although it is rare, FKS can also occur in healthy kittens at any age.*

Symptoms of FKS:

- Extreme lethargy — unable to stand or hold head up, not responding when touched
- Body feels cool to the touch (not just insides of ears – all over)
- Panting or gasping for breath
- Meowing/crying out in distress

If you see these symptoms, it is crucial that you take the following steps NOW:

Step 1: GET KITTEN WARM

Grab your heating pad and a towel. Place the towel over the heating pad, and place the kitten on top of the towel. Roll heating pad up to create a “kitten burrito” – like you're swaddling an infant. Leave the kitten's face exposed, and do not remove the kitten from the burrito even if he/she struggles and cries to get out! Make sure the heating pad is still on the **low** setting.

* If you don't have a heating pad, (fosters are now *required* to have a heating pad) you can either:

- a) Keep your dryer running full of towels. Grab a new hot one every 5 minutes and wrap it around the “burrito” towel. After 5 minutes, trade that towel out for a new hot one. Don't remove the “burrito” towel.
- b) Fill 2 socks full of rice, tie the ends so it doesn't spill out. Throw them in the microwave for 3 minutes. Keep them next to the kitten on the outside of the burrito towel. Every 30 minutes reheat one sock and leave the other next to the kitten so she doesn't cool off.

Step 2: GET KITTEN'S BLOOD SUGAR UP

Grab a small bowl and fill it with either corn syrup (Karo, etc), or sugar water. The more sugar content, the better. Make sure you have your syringe handy. Warm the contents up in the microwave for a few seconds until the liquid is a bit above room temperature. You will administer this sugar water (with the syringe) to the kitten while he/she is in the burrito.

Give the kitten about 1 drop every 3 minutes.

Step 3: Email Foster Medical and/or Call the emergency hotline at 210-338-8225:

Fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org to update us on the status, and we can assist with further guidance, we are here for you!

Prognosis

We generally have a high success rate with these kittens if you follow the above steps! The process can take hours, so be prepared to administer the steps outlined above for anywhere from one to three to even five hours.

We DO NOT recommend you rush your foster kitten to the vet for many reasons:

You have the motivation to sit right there with them and make them your top priority. A vet clinic has multiple patients who need help and won't be able to give your kitten the 100% undivided attention you can give them.

Your kitten will continue to be cold/hypoglycemic on the way to the vet, in the waiting room, and in the hospital while they try to determine what is wrong, etc. Most kittens won't last long enough for them to begin treatment. Most clinics would do the same thing – try to keep the kitten warm and get their blood sugar up. There isn't much else you can do.

Keep in mind that it can sometimes take hours for them to come out of this state and start acting normally again. Don't give up! Once they do come out of it, make sure you contact the med techs to discuss what could have possibly caused them to fade in the first place, and make sure we have the kitten on all the right medical treatments for any illnesses they have that may have caused it.

Unfortunately, even if you've employed all of the steps outlined above to a tee, some kittens just won't make it. Cats get pregnant very easily, and have A LOT of kittens, specifically because they are so fragile. If a kitten passes in your care, don't blame yourself – these kittens would have had about a 0% chance of surviving if it wasn't for you. Send us an email if your kitten has passed and focus on taking the best care of his/her littermates.

Thank you for everything you do, fosters!

Caring for your Foster Kittens

*****The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be *WARM* and have *FULL BELLIES* at all times! *****

The Basics

- Kittens must be kept in a safe and secure spot, and isolated from other pets (to prevent illness) for 7-10 days.
- Kittens must have access to a **heating pad (on low setting) at all times.**
- Do not give kittens baths unless absolutely necessary. If kittens get wet, they must be blow dried until they are completely dry. Young kittens can very easily become hypothermic. As an alternative, use a hypoallergenic baby wipe to clean dirty kittens.
- You are required to keep track of kittens' weights, bowel movements, medications, and other health issues on your Daily Care Sheets.

For any questions or concerns about your kittens' weights or general development, please contact: Foster@sanantoniopetsalive.org

Kitten Developmental Milestones

- Kittens typically weigh about 90-110 grams at birth; they should gain about 100g/week.
- Eyes open at 7-10 days (eyes will be blue until kittens are 6-7 weeks old).
- At about 2 weeks, they will start crawling around (can inch around as early as 4 days).
- At 3-4 weeks, they'll start to play with each other. The ears will start to stand up, and teeth will begin to come in.
- At 3-5 weeks, it's time to start the weaning process – kittens should be well on their way to eating independently and using the litter box.

- At 6 weeks they should get their first vaccinations from SAPA!, and go up on our website for pre-adoption.
- At 8-12 weeks, and/or whenever kittens have reached 2lbs (906g), they can be spayed or neutered, and go to their forever homes!

Setting up a Habitat

For Bottle Babies: Any medium sized bin, tub, crate, or carrier that measures around 20"x15"x15" (the size of a regular cat carrier) makes a great habitat for unweaned kittens. Something that's easy to clean is usually best (like a Rubbermaid storage bin). Place the heating pad (set on low) flat on one side of the containment area, and make sure that there is room for kittens to move off the heating pad if they get too warm. Cover the bottom of the containment area with a blanket or towel. Feel free to place stuffed toys and plenty of soft fleecy things in the habitat for the kittens to snuggle with.

For Syringe Gruel & Gruel Babies: Once kittens are able to crawl out of their bin or ready to use a litter box, you can move them to a bigger space. Bathtubs are often great for this stage. Keep the heating pad available at all times, but still make sure that the kittens can move off of it. Place a small bowl of kibble, a saucer of gruel, and a stable, flat-bottomed cup of water in an accessible spot, away from their bedding. Fill a very shallow litter box (a box top or baking tin is fine) with non-clumping litter, and place it in an accessible spot away from the food dishes. At this point, the kittens will also want to play with toys! Feel free to give them plenty of plush toys, bells, etc. Just make sure there's nothing they could accidentally swallow or get tangled up in!

For Kittens Age 6 weeks and Up: At this age, kittens will likely begin door-dashing and trying to escape whatever enclosure they're confined to. If you would like to give them a free run of your home, please do so with extreme caution. Kittens can and will get into everything. Never leave them unsupervised, particularly when there are other pets and/or roommates where you live! Also, remember that the more space they have, the less likely they are to find their litter box!

***The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be WARM and have FULL BELLIES at all times! ***

Most importantly, especially once they are over ~4 weeks old, make sure you socialize your kittens as often as possible! This is crucial to their development – they need to learn to love humans! Introduce them to friends, children, other cats, friendly dogs, etc., but **always** make sure they're in a controlled environment and are being closely supervised.

The most important thing to remember when caring for kittens is to WEIGH, WEIGH, WEIGH! The vast majority of kittens who pass away in foster care do so because they were not weighed as consistently as we require.

Making sure your kittens are getting enough to eat is your most important duty as a foster! So, below are in-depth instructions on how to feed kittens according to their age and size, as well as info on issues to look out for during each stage of your kittens' growth.



Bottle Babies

How to make formula:

Feed PetAg KMR® powdered formula from bottle and/or oral syringe. Mix 2 parts water to 1 part powdered formula (unless otherwise advised). Shake well to dissolve lumps! Store mixed formula in the fridge up to 48 hrs. Warm the formula: Place the bottle in a bowl of hot

water for a few minutes. Before feeding the kittens, always test the temperature of the formula by placing a few drops on your inner wrist to be sure it is not too hot. It should be slightly warmer than your body temperature.

All kittens must eat **5% of their body weight** at each feeding. All kittens

must be weighed before and after feeding!

*The digital food scales with the bowl, are sold at Walmart, Target, HEB, or Amazon are pretty inexpensive & will be your new best friend!



***The two most important rules of Kitten Club:**

Kittens must be **WARM** and have **FULL BELLIES** at all times! *

Bottle Baby Feeding instructions:

- Formula should be fed warm, preferably with kitten wrapped up in towel or blanket.
- Feed kitten upright or on belly in a **prone** position, **NOT** on his/her back like a human infant!
- Gather kittens' feeding charts and some warm towels.



- **Latching on.** It may take a couple tries for a kitten to latch on to the bottle nipple. Just be patient; sometimes kittens need some encouragement to eat. Make sure that the nipple you are using on the bottle has an adequate flow of milk. When the nipple tip is punctured with a sterile needle, formula should drip out (one drop at a time, not a stream) when the bottle is inverted 180 degrees. If kitten does not gain its 5% via the bottle, proceed w/ syringe feeding. **Only use 1mL syringe.** Do not hesitate to contact the foster department if you need any help or assistance with feeding your kittens.

- **Aspiration.** Watch for formula coming out of the kitten's nose or a rasping "wet" cough. This is called aspiration – it means the kitten has ingested formula into her lungs and is in danger of "drowning". If one of your kittens is aspirating, you need to do two things: Pat the kitten very gently on the back to elicit a cough or sneeze, or hold him in an inverted position, tail over head, for a moment to remove the formula from his lungs. Please notify: Fostermedical@sanantoniopetsalive.org if this happens so we can determine if antibiotics or a vet visit is needed.

- Thoroughly clean off any formula on kitten's fur and dry kitten off. (Formula will stick and is very hard to remove if it dries and is also painful for the kitten!)

- Weigh and record after-food weight!

- **Peeing and pooping.** Bottle-fed kittens need help with elimination, so you'll need to stimulate your kittens to pee and poop. After you feed them, wipe each kitten's back end with a baby wipe or warm wet cotton ball. Remember to do this every time you feed them. Document the color and consistency in your journal. Kittens should urinate after every meal and should poop at least once a day. The normal color of kitten poop is various shades of mustard and the consistency is similar as well. **When a kitten is first introduced to formula, it is normal for him or her not to poop for 48 hours. Failure to stimulate orphan kittens can lead to serious illness and/or death.**

***The two most important rules of Kitten Club:** Kittens must be **WARM** and always

have **FULL BELLIES** at all times! *



Syringe Gruelies

Bottle babies should be switched to syringe gruel when they reach 3.5-4 weeks old (when their canine teeth begin to grow in). Instead of KMR, kittens will now eat **premium** (only available at pet stores) canned kitten food mixed w/ water and blended to a smooth paste.

It is important to note that the syringe gruel phase is, essentially, nothing more than a layover between nursing (formula or mama's milk), and weaning (eating independently). So, at this stage, you should make sure your kittens always have access to kibble, gruel, (canned food w/ water), and a **bowl of water**, as eventually they will decide to go it on their own!

Until that magical day, though, you will need to step in! Remember that just because you see your kittens eating on their own, this does not mean that they're eating *enough* independently to maintain their health. Too often, fosters assume that because they've witnessed their kittens eating kibble or gruel from a bowl, those kittens don't need to be syringe fed anymore. ***This is not the case - and failure to follow the steps outlined above can lead to serious illness and/or death of kittens.***

How to make syringe gruel:

You will need a **blender**. Blend approximately one can of food with 1/3 to 1/2 can water (double, triple, etc as needed). Your syringe gruel should be about the consistency of a milkshake, and you should be able to easily draw it up into a syringe.

Again, kittens must eat **5% of their body weight** at each feeding. Kittens **must be weighed** before and after feeding.

Syringe Gruelies, Feeding instructions:

- First, give your kitten the opportunity to eat independently! Offer kitten

warmed up gruel and kibble in separate plates or shallow bowls. If kitten

shows no interest after a while, proceed with syringe feeding.

- With a syringe in your dominant hand, use your non-dominant index finger and thumb to grip the kitten's head at her temples. Tilt kitten's head back at about a 45-degree angle, using your palm to gently force kitten into a seated position. - Draw warmed syringe gruel (microwave to a bit above lukewarm temp - no more than 5-10 seconds) into a 10mL syringe.

- Insert syringe into **side** of kitten's mouth. *Do not put syringe directly in front of the kitten's mouth* (even if she tries to position herself this way!) as the kitten could very easily choke. - Slowly plunge syringe gruel into kitten's mouth, removing the syringe every few seconds to allow her to swallow.

- Weigh kitten periodically throughout the feeding process - the kitten is only done eating when he/she has gained 5%!

- Always thoroughly clean off any gruel on the kitten's fur. Dry kitten off well.



***The two most important rules of Kitten Club: Kittens must be WARM and have FULL BELLIES at all times! ***



Gruelies

This is the last stage of kitten rearing – rejoice! When your kittens begin eating enough gruel and kibble on their own to **gain weight consistently every day**, you’re well on your way to throwing those syringes out! Don’t get too excited yet, though – your kittens will still need to be syringe fed

if they’re not able to eat 5% of their body weight on their own. The switch from syringe gruel to gruel/kibble is not a magical “aha!” moment on your kitten’s part – it’s a process you’ll both need to work through very thoughtfully!

Once you see that your kittens are gaining around 5% of their body weight on a daily basis, for at least 5 days, you can begin to weigh them twice a day, instead of every time they eat.

NEVER go more than 24 hours without weighing your kittens – weight loss is the number one reason kittens pass away in foster care.

*****If you are not taking home a mama cat, please skip the following section.*****

MAMA CAT: Mom will stay in the Neonatal Program until she’s spayed. The sooner her kittens are no longer nursing, the sooner she can be spayed; **she must not be allowed to let her kittens nurse for 2 weeks before her spay.** Her milk must dry up before surgery because the mammary glands are located so close to the incision site. You have a couple of options for dealing with this:

- You can separate mama from her kittens when you see that the kittens are eating enough gruel/kibble to maintain (and gain!) their weights (generally around 7-8 weeks). This ensures that mama is able to come in for her spay appointment around the same time that her kittens are being spayed/neutered. If you are in a hurry to get mama into the adoption center so you can foster more kittens, this is the best choice.
- A lot of fosters find it very difficult/heartbreaking to separate mama from her kittens. If you’re one of these fosters, do not despair! Allowing mom to nurse her kittens well after they require it is not going to cause any harm. Just keep in mind that the longer you allow mama to nurse, the longer you’ll have to wait until she’s able to be spayed. If you’re in no rush to get rid of mama cat, this is the best option.

Caring for independent eaters

By six to seven weeks old, your kittens should be independent eaters. Dry food should be their primary source of food but offer wet food frequently as well to encourage eating and maximize growth. Replace the water in their water dish twice a day and wipe out the dish if needed.

During this stage, your daily responsibilities include socializing the kittens and exposing them to new situations and environments. It’s important to try and keep all experiences positive for the kittens, so give them lots of treats and toys as they learn about new sounds, smells, places and faces.

As always, watch the behavior of your kittens and monitor their health daily. Continue to keep a journal detailing each foster kitten’s weight, appetite, energy level and overall health. Weigh the kittens once a day, preferably around the same time, to minimize the variables when tracking the kittens’ growth. Look over each kitten every day for physical changes or potential medical problems.

Now that the kittens are using a litter box, be sure to scoop the box at least two times daily. Every other day, dump the litter, clean the box with a mild detergent (such as dishwashing liquid) and put in fresh litter. You’ll want to monitor the kittens for diarrhea and clean the litter box more frequently if diarrhea is apparent.

At this stage, play with the kittens several times a day with interactive toys. Play time provides stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy. Try a variety of toys (balls, squeaky toys, feather toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster kittens like. Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive. Cats often enjoy playing with something as simple as a paper bag (remove the handles for safety) or a box with holes cut in the sides.

Don't leave your foster kittens alone with any toys that could be easily ingested or cause harm to them. Examples are string toys, yarn and Da Bird (feathers dangling from a string and wand). Toys such as ping-pong balls and toilet paper tubes are safe. Also, it may seem cute, but discourage your foster kittens from play-biting your hands and feet. This is something that adopters may not find desirable.

Common Household Hazards for Kittens

Even the most experienced fosters sometimes overlook household hazards. The following is a list of things that we have seen cause injury to kittens.

- **Rocking chairs** - keep out of the kittens' area
- **Reclining chairs** - kittens can easily crawl inside
- **Toilets** - keep lids closed at all times
- **Bathtubs** - keep water drained at all times
- **Doors** - make sure that kittens are not behind doors that are being opened
- **Exits** - keep unscreened doors and windows closed at all times when not in use
- **Outdoors** - do NOT allow kittens to go outside, NO EXCEPTIONS!
- **Other cats** - can sometimes be asymptomatic carriers of viruses that are more harmful to kittens, or can be too aggressive with kittens
- **Dogs** - all dogs (but especially large dogs) can easily injure a kitten, often accidentally
- **Washers and dryers** - kittens can crawl inside of the machines unnoticed or get stuck behind them
- **Other appliances** - make sure that kittens cannot crawl behind or under refrigerators, ovens, etc.
- **Holes** - make sure any holes in drywall or cabinetry are plugged or blocked
- **Small objects** - rubber bands, strings, paperclips, and other small objects can be accidentally ingested
- **Chemicals** - make sure they are put away
- **House plants** - many are poisonous to cats, make sure they are out of reach
- **Electrical cords** - can be sprayed with bitter apple, covered with tape or "cord covers" to prevent chewing

Cleaning up between litters

Once your kittens have been adopted, you must sanitize your fostering room or area before you can take home a new batch of kittens. Remove anything the kittens touched and clean it with a weak bleach solution, consisting of one-part bleach to 32 parts cold water.

If you have items that can be washed in the dishwasher, please do so since the heat will disinfect those items. Plastic or metal items that need to be sterilized, such as litter boxes or plastic toys, should be soaked in the bleach solution for 10 minutes and then rinsed off. Wash all bedding with bleach and hot water and throw away any toys that cannot be sterilized. Being conscientious about sterilization will help ensure that your next foster group will not catch any illnesses from the previous group of kittens.