

CatzRus

Foster Care Rules and Procedures



REHOMING AND FOSTERING ORGANISATION

NPO 098-047

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Introduction

Thank you for your willingness to join our team of crazy cat ladies (and gents!).

As fun and rewarding as fostering is, it also involves a lot of hard work, and the potential for some serious heartache. Kittens, especially bottle babies (kittens under four weeks old), are very fragile and susceptible to disease. Mortality among litters of rescued foster kittens is shockingly high. Sometimes entire litters are wiped out within a matter of days, and statistics reveal that up to 30% of kittens die before the age of nine weeks. This is even more true for rescue kittens, a lot of whom come from feral and unvaccinated moms. For this reason it is very difficult to say goodbye to your foster babies, which you raised like your own children, once they are adopted.

Fostering is a risk and you need to be aware that we cannot anticipate that things may go wrong. This comes with the territory, and rescue work is tough. Most of the foster moms who have been doing this for a while realise that often you need to put your emotions aside for the sake of the kittens.

Luckily you will not go through this alone, we have a strong team of foster parents who chat and offer support on a daily basis. We have two WhatsApp groups to which you will be added once you become a foster parent. Through these platforms we assist each other in emergencies and networking, and just laugh and cry together.

If, for whatever reason, you cannot cope with fostering kittens any longer, please make arrangements with the Shelter Manager or Foster Co-ordinators, to ensure that these kittens are placed in someone else's care. Please understand that once you give kittens up, you will not get those kittens back when you feel ready again.

What is required from me in order to foster?

- A spare room or bathroom, preferably with a tiled floor. Kittens must be kept indoors and isolated from other pets.
- Your own transport, as you need to be able to bring your kittens to the shelter as needed.
- You need to be located in Pretoria and vicinity, or be willing to travel to our shelter and vet with your kittens
- You need experience with cats and kittens. You are quite literally taking these kittens' lives into your hands and need to treat them with the utmost love and care
- Be aware that kittens are kittens – not all of them love cuddling, they WILL play and climb furniture and curtains, they WILL make a mess.
- Be willing to supply food and litter to your kittens. The more our foster parents help us in this regard, the more funding can go towards rescuing other cats. We prefer feeding our kittens Royal Canin Mother and Baby Cat and kitten mousse, as this ensures the best possible nutrition for already compromised babies.

CatzRus foster care rules

1. All foster parents are responsible for kitten food, cat litter, litter trays, blankets and toys. CatzRus will help out if and when we can.
2. CatzRus reserves the right to confiscate kittens from your care if we think it necessary to do so.
3. All foster kittens remain primarily in the care of CatzRus, and thus we reserve the right to make decisions regarding any kittens in your care.
4. Under no circumstances will a foster parent be allowed to take in any kittens, either on their own or for another organisation, without the knowledge and permission of CatzRus Foster Co-ordinators and Shelter Manager.
5. Under no circumstances will any kittens be adopted out before 13 weeks of age and all vaccinations and sterilisation has been done.
6. All foster parents are responsible for getting kittens vaccinated on time when kittens are 8 and 12 weeks old. Failure to do so will result in confiscation of your foster kittens.
7. All foster parents are responsible for getting kittens sterilised at 13 weeks.
8. No vaccinations and sterilisations will be done without appointments.
9. If names and numbers of kittens do not match the system, CatzRus will not take responsibility for those kittens.
10. All foster parents must send pictures and updates on all foster kittens to the CatzRus Foster Co-ordinators on a weekly basis.
11. All paperwork and documentation should always be up to date and ready to present when asked.
12. Kittens should be kept separate from any household pets and children at all times. No foster kittens should ever be integrated with your own pets.
13. Under no circumstances will one litter of kittens be mixed with other litters.
14. Under no circumstances will a litter of kittens be split up.
15. Only one litter of kittens will be given to any foster parent at a time. One litter can consist of anywhere between 1 to 6 kittens.

CatzRus foster procedure

Intake of kittens

- When kittens are taken in by CatzRus, they will be registered in the system with identification numbers and descriptions. Background information will be logged and intake forms will be completed.
- All kittens that are taken in by CatzRus will stay at the shelter for at least a week for observation, if possible. CatzRus will never knowingly give sick kittens to a foster parent, unless the foster parent is knowledgeable, able and willing to care of sick kittens.
- When kittens are ready to go to their foster home, CatzRus will contact the approved foster parent to pick the kittens up from the shelter.
- Foster parents should please bring their own carriers to collect kittens.
- Foster parents will complete all necessary forms and will be registered as foster parents to that specific litter of kittens.
- The Shelter Manager or Foster Co-ordinator will hand kittens over to the foster parent once all paperwork and the registration proses have been completed.

Receiving your foster kittens

- Upon receiving your foster kittens, the Shelter Manager or Foster Co-ordinator will give you specific care instructions for your litter.
- Always ask for F10 hand gel and F10 spray. We need to ensure that no germs are transmitted to and from you foster kittens and to and from any household pets.

At home

- F10 procedure: Before and after handling your foster kittens, squirt F10 gel on your hands and rub into your hands and arms. Before and after handling your kittens, use the spray bottle to spray your clothing, shoes and bottoms of your shoes/feet. Also spray any item that you take into or remove from the room/area where the kittens stay.
- All foster kittens should be kept in a separate room for the duration of their foster care. Always make sure that the kittens cannot get out of the room that they are kept in and that your own pets cannot get in. Remember that kittens can jump very high and squeeze through small holes, so keep windows closed! It is very important to keep foster kittens and household pets apart as kittens are too young to test for serious contagious diseases, and you don't want to run the risk of infecting your own pets. Also, kittens have compromised immune systems and can quickly get infected with infections of which your cats can be a carrier (even if they are not showing symptoms!).

- Kittens are very fragile, so if you have young children it is best to keep them away from the kittens or have them visit the kittens under supervision only after they have followed the proper F10 procedure. When your children do visit the kittens, please do not allow them to pick the kittens up, rather show them how to pet and stroke the kittens softly.
- Spend as much time as possible with foster kittens to get them well socialised. This is particularly true for feral kittens, who need extra special care and attention to tame.
- Always make sure that your kittens have enough food and water and that their litter box is clean. Poop-scoop the litter box at least twice a day, and give fresh litter every second day.

Vaccinations and sterilisation

As per our rules, foster parents need to adhere to the vaccination and sterilisation schedule. If not, foster kittens will be removed from your care with immediate effect. Please make an appointment with the CatzRus vet in advance, and inform the Foster Co-ordinator of the date and time for our records. Also send proof of sterilisation and vaccination to the Foster Co-ordinator.

Please only use the CatzRus vet for your kittens, as we have special arrangements in place with them.

Vaccination and sterilisation schedule

Age	What to get done	
8 weeks	First vaccination	Feline Rhinotracheitis, Calici, Panleukopenia vaccine
12 weeks	Second vaccination	Feline Rhinotracheitis, Calici, Panleukopenia vaccine + Robisin for Rabies
13 weeks	Sterilisation	Spay(females) or neuter (males)

Networking your kittens

CatzRus is practically run by volunteers alone, and every year we take in hundreds of cats and kittens that need to be homed. For this reason, we rely heavily on our foster parents to help network our cats that are ready to be adopted.

The idea is that all foster kittens are adopted straight from the foster parent so that no kittens have to come in to the shelter after sterilisation. We are almost always full to capacity with adult cats and simply cannot accommodate teenage kittens that were not networked.

Please be pro-active and start networking your kittens early. Take as many pictures of your kittens as you can. We have a foster mommy who kindly makes us posters for our cats that are up for adoption, use these posters and get your babies out there! Some useful platforms are:

- Facebook
- Gumtree, OLX and Junkmail
- Your local vet.

The details of people interested in adopting kittens are also shared on the Foster Kitten Whatsapp groups, so keep an eye out for those messages and send your posters on. If someone contacts you for a kitten and your babies do not meet their requirements, share the details with the rest of the foster parents. We are all one team and need to work together to get our kittens out there and adopted.

Adoptions

The adoption process is handled by our foster parents. Prospective owners will contact you directly if they are interested in one (or more) of your kittens. It is your responsibility to screen people (you are welcome to contact the Foster Co-ordinators when in doubt). You are also welcome to do a home check if you feel the need or arrange a meet and greet, either at your home or at the shelter. Trust your gut feeling – if you feel uncomfortable with someone, rather turn them away. People are not doing us a favour by adopting one of our babies, we want to ensure that each cat goes to the best possible home.

All adoptions must take place at the shelter. Arrange a date and time for the handover and book a microchip for the same day with the Shelter Manager or Foster Co-ordinators. The full adoption fee must be paid on the day and the Adoption Contract must be completed.

My kitten is sick, what now?

As mentioned earlier, kittens are very susceptible to disease and can fade in a matter of hours. CatzRus will never knowingly give you sick kittens without prior arrangement, but this unfortunately does not rule out the risk of illness.

Please contact the Foster Co-ordinators as soon as you notice that a kitten is not well and immediately make a vet appointment. Sometimes even the smallest change in behaviour could be an early symptom, so rather be safe than sorry.

Some common feline ailments are discussed in the next chapter, please familiarise yourself with these so that you know what you are dealing with. You can also do your own research on your kittens symptoms, it is always better to be well-informed.

Since we do not have a huge fulltime staff compliment, we require our foster parents to treat all common, non-threatening ailments at home. The vet will prescribe medicine and treatment, please ensure that you medicate as prescribed. When you have sick kittens at home, your hygiene regimen is even more important. Remember that you always have the team of foster parents who can offer advice and support. We have many foster parents who have years of experience in raising kittens and dealing with illness.

Kittens that need to be hospitalised will be kept at the shelter where they can be treated by the vet until they are strong enough to go back to their foster homes.

If, for any reason, you cannot accommodate your sick kittens, please make arrangements with the Foster Co-ordinators to place them in a new foster home. Note that once you give up your kittens, they will not be returned to you.

Kittens – the basics

This section gives a brief overview of:

- Kitten development week by week
- Common feline ailments
- Bottle feeding.

Development stages

Kittens develop and grow fast in the first eight weeks and there are a number of key milestones that occur during this time. Kittens weigh about 90–100 g at birth and should gain about 7–10 grams per day in the first few weeks. The below table gives a short overview of what to expect.

Key milestones during the first eight weeks

Week 1	Kittens are born blind and deaf. Their eyes are closed and their ears folded down. During the first week, kittens basically sleep and eat. These babies cannot regulate their body temperature and it is important to keep them in a warm environment with a constant temperature. The umbilical cord remains attached for the first three days. These babies require their mom/foster mom to stimulate urination/bowl movement
Week 2	Eyes will start to open, but the kitten's vision will still be limited. Do not force they eyes open and keep an eye out for any signs of eye infection. All kittens have blue eyes at this stage. The kittens' sense of smell is beginning to develop. Bowl/urinary stimulation is still required
Week 3	The ears will now be erect and baby teeth begin to show. Kittens become more aware of their littermates and shakily begin to move around and explore. Bowl/urinary stimulation is still required
Week 4	Kittens are becoming more active and play with their littermates. The eyesight is improving and the sense of hearing is now well-developed. Kittens will start to use the litterbox and will slowly begin to eat (soft food) and drink by themselves
Week 5	The sight is now fully developed and the kittens become even more active. Now is the time to start feeding them a diet of solid food (kitten mousse and baby pellets). Kittens roam and play, and start to pounce on their littermates.
Week 6-8	Kittens are now very active and it is the role of the foster mommy to socialise them by introducing toys and familiarising them with being handled. This includes frequently touching the paws, ears, and mouth, which will make basic health inspections, medicating, and claw trimming easier, as the kitten is brought up to accept this. At this stage, kittens should be eating four, small meals a day and, by eight weeks, should be eating mostly solids. They should have almost all of their baby teeth by now.

Common feline ailments

Non-threatening ailments

Snuffles/upper respiratory infection

Description/symptoms	Sneezing, coughing, runny eyes, runny noses, drooling, lack of appetite and general lethargy, ulcers in and around the mouth, fever
Common causes	Very contagious virus that can easily spread from one kitten to the next
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zithromax is a milky liquid antibiotic that is given to kittens once a day for 5–7 days• Colloidal silver and Exocin eye drops are used to clean and treat runny, inflamed eyes• Lysine is mixed in with soft food and acts as a supplement to help combat the virus

Ringworm

Description/symptoms	This is not a worm at all, but a fungal infection of the skin, hair and nails. It presents as patchy areas of hair loss.
Common causes	HIGHLY contagious fungus that can spread to other animals and humans. Spores can remain in the environment for months and can spread on clothes, etc.
Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The vet will prescribe Microsydol, an anti-fungal tablet, for 40 days• A lime-sulphur dip is used every second day.• A very strict cleaning and disinfecting regime must be followed to avoid contamination

Ear mites

Description/symptoms	Brown/black discharge from the ears. Kittens might scratch ears excessively and pull ears flat against the head.
Common causes	Contagious parasites
Treatment	Epi-otic solution is prescribed and must be poured into the ears twice a day for two weeks. Gently massage the liquid into the ear canal.

Ticks and fleas

Description/symptoms	Ticks are visible on the body, fleas can be more difficult to spot, but symptoms include excessive scratching and black granules in the fur and on bedding
Treatment	Frontline spray or Karbadust are safe to use on young kittens, if unsure, ask your vet for advice. There are also a number of natural alternatives, such as an apple cider vinegar rinse, marigold spray, etc.

The lowdown on poo – diarrhoea/constipation

It is important to keep an eye on your kitten's poo. Their tummies are incredibly sensitive, so something as simple as a change in food can cause an upset. Other factors such as stress (e.g. a new home) can also impact on intestinal health. A common cause of an upset stomach (and even a bit of blood in the stool) is intestinal parasites (roundworm, hookworm, tapeworm, coccidian and Giardia), for this reason it is important to deworm your kittens (ask the vet for a dewormer if you suspect parasites and remember that the tummy will take a couple of days to settle).

Diomec is commonly used to treat diarrhoea – it is not only a probiotic, but also helps to bulk up the stool quite quickly. The vet might also prescribe an antibiotic if there is an infection. Laxapet can be used for constipation, but always consult the Foster Co-ordinator or vet before deciding to self-medicate.

Stool colour guide

White	Usually indicates severe bacterial imbalance and infection in the bowel. Kitten at risk of dying, needs immediate medical attention
Yellow/green	Almost always indicates bacterial imbalance in the bowel and is often associated with diarrhoea caused by Coccidia. Seek immediate medical attention
Orange	Usually indicates way too much bile in stool, can occur with reflux. Seek immediate medical attention
Brown	Normal colour. Be happy!
Black	Usually indicates bleeding high in the bowel. This is a severe sign which needs immediate medical attention
Bloody	Could indicate Panleukopenia, or could simply be intestinal parasites. Seek immediate medical care as Panleukopenia is highly contagious and deadly
Mucous (yellow/white/clear)	Indicates severe bowel irritation. Grossly abnormal and needs immediate medical care.

Stool consistency guide

Dry/hard	Abnormal, usually indicates dehydration. Seek immediate medical attention
Firm	Normal, be happy!
Formed but soft	Low range of 'normal'. If stools change from firm to soft you should seek medical advice.
Toothpaste (still keeps form, but falls apart once touched)	Abnormal, needs medication.
Cow poo (not formed, falls into a cow poo shape)	Abnormal, animal is at significant risk and needs immediate attention.
Liquid (thin, sometimes mucousy fluid)	Abnormal, animal is at severe risk and must be seen immediately.
Total loss of bowl control, watery fluid	Grossly abnormal, animal in danger of dying, must be seen immediately!

Serious diseases

Fading Kitten Syndrome (FK)

This is the commonly used name for kittens who just fade and die for no apparent medical reason. Sadly FK is very common, especially among very young kittens, despite their foster parent's best efforts. There are many factors that can lead to FK syndrome, some of which occur pre-birth. It is quite common that only one kitten in a litter will fade while the others thrive and become strong and healthy. In many cases the runt of the litter will be the one that fades but it has also happened that a whole litter fades and dies.

Feline AIDS (FIV) and Feline Leukaemia (FeLV)

Kittens can only be accurately tested for FIV and FeLV at six months. At a younger age, results can still be inaccurate – showing false positives or false negatives. Because of this, we will never know if a seriously ill kitten has either of these diseases. If kittens do get seriously sick, we can only speculate and make educated guesses as to whether your foster kittens have one of these diseases. If we suspect that your kitten(s) have either of these diseases, they will be put to sleep.

Panleukopenia

Testing for Panleukopenia (Pan) is a very lengthy and expensive process and there is no cure for this virus. In our experience kittens always die from this disease, so if we suspect that your foster kittens have Pan they will be put to sleep.

Feline Infectious Peritonitis

As with Pan, testing for Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) is just not worth it so if we suspect that your kittens have FIP, they will unfortunately be put to sleep.

Bottle feeding

Bottle babies are the most challenging of all, and definitely not for the faint hearted. They require 24/7 care and regular bottle feedings. Always use Kitten Milk Replacement, do not opt for home remedies found on the internet – you can kill your kittens. Also never mix the formula stronger than recommended by the manufacturer; this can lead to diarrhoea, which can be fatal in such young kittens.

Feeding chart

Age	Number of feeds a day	Intervals
0–2 weeks	10	2–2.5 hours
2–4 weeks		2.5–3.5 hours

** Consult your kitten milk tin for feeding quantities and formula-water ratios*

Kittens often struggle to latch onto their bottles, and feeding therefore require an experienced hand. It is critical that you stick with the feeding regime, as kittens can dehydrate and their blood sugar will fall, both of which can lead to serious damage or even death. Overfeeding is just as dangerous. As a rule of thumb, rather underfeed than overfeed and feed more often. Also never hold kittens on their backs while feeding. Kittens nurse naturally on their tummies. Always feed lukewarm milk and through away whatever is left. Do not reuse old formula. Like with human babies, bottles need to be properly sterilised after each feeding.

Do not continue to bottle feed kittens once they need to be weaned, as this can also lead to upset stomachs. When kittens are around 4–5 weeks they will begin to bite and chew on the feeding teats rather than suckle. When they start doing this it is time to start weaning them. Start by giving small amounts of lukewarm milk in a spoon. Dip your finger in the milk and press to kitten's mouth so they lick it off. Keep the spoon close so that they can make the connection between the spoon and the milk. Once they start lapping the milk up by themselves, you can give more milk in a small bowl or saucer.

At this stage you can also introduce water for kitten to drink when they are thirsty. Once your kittens can lap up the milk successfully, you can start giving them kitten mousse. Mix the mousse with some water so that they can lap it up rather than chew. Give them watered down mousse for a few days, everyday adding less and less water until they eat the mousse by themselves. Serve the mousse for about a week and the introduce kitten pellets. Kittens might struggle at first to eat the harder pellets, but they will learn quickly enough.

When weaning kittens from soft food to pellets it is very important that you don't 'feel sorry' for them and give too much mousse, this will only prolong the weaning process. When they are hungry

the will eat the pellets. Give kitten mousse as a treat once or twice a day and give the kitten pellets in a bowl for them to eat when they want.

Bottle babies need to be stimulated to urinate and defecate after every feeding. Note that they will not always do both. Wait 20–30 minutes once they are fed for the milk to digest, then use a small piece of gauze/cotton wool dampened with lukewarm water to wipe the genital area and tummy like a mommy cat would lick it. Light yellow, soft faeces and urine should come out – the colour is still normal for such young kittens. If kittens do not poop after five minutes of continual rubbing wait a few more minutes and try again. Once kittens have been pooped, dry their bums properly to ensure that they do not get cold and sick.

New born kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature, so it is important to keep them warm and keep the temperature constant. Hygiene is of utmost importance, provide clean blankets regularly.

Important contacts

Shelter Manager

Lisa du Plessis

082 441 1029

lisa@catzrusa.co.za

Foster Co-ordinators

Adel Pretorius

082 775 2636

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Irene van der Horst

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CatzRus vet

To be confirmed