

## WELCOME!

Welcome to the world of A-PAL Humane Society's *SAVE the KITTENS* program!

*SAVE THE KITTENS* is a life-saving program originated on June 14, 1999. Kittens from the shelter were spayed/neutered, given their first FVRCP vaccination, de-wormed, then placed for adoption. The program was an immediate success. Soon it was difficult to fill the demand for our kittens. Within a short period of time we expanded from one adoption condo to as many as fourteen. As of this date, 7490 kittens have been saved.

The need for kitten foster care became apparent almost immediately. Many kittens were simply too young, small, sick, or poorly socialized, to enter the program without some supportive intervention. So the "*SAVE the KITTENS*" foster parent program came to the rescue. The program has been an heartwarming success. We have discovered a way to save thousands of homeless kittens from certain death. However, the program is extremely labor intensive. So, we sincerely **thank you** for finding the time to help us help homeless kittens.

You will find the experience both challenging and rewarding. We've put together the enclosed information in the hope that it will aid you in caring for your kittens.

Please take the time to read through the pages carefully. They will answer many of your questions.

If you are fostering newborn kittens (under 3 weeks of age), please refer to the pages titled "**But they're so tiny....**".

If, after reading the enclosed material, you have any questions or feel your kittens are ill, contact A-PAL's kitten Foster Coordinator tor..

**Good luck and Thank you for Caring....**

Your kittens' Foster Coordinator is Judy Hobbs.

email: [judyhobbs@gmail.com](mailto:judyhobbs@gmail.com)

phone: 209-267-9050 (home) 916-956-0758 (cell)

note: please use all contacts for urgent messages

## **HOW THE KITTEN FOSTER PROGRAM WORKS....**

Once you have read this manual on fostering kittens and agree to comply with its instructions and requirements, your name and contact information will be placed on a list of available kitten foster parents at Amador County Animal Care and Control.

When a litter of homeless kittens arrives at the shelter, you will be contacted by a shelter staff member. You will need to bring your cat carrier to the shelter to receive your kittens.

We need you to weigh your kittens immediately. You can weigh them on a scale at the shelter before you leave. You can also weigh them on a scale on the front counter of the Feed Barn. However, since you should be weighing your kittens on a regular basis, we recommend that you pick up an inexpensive food scale that weighs up to 4 or 5 lbs. These are frequently available at WalMart or K-Mart.

Age appropriate food will be provided by A-PAL Humane Society and can be picked up at the Feed Barn.

Contact your Foster Coordinator within 3 days of receiving your kittens, so that she knows you are currently fostering a litter. Do not assume that shelter staff has made this contact. She will need to know the weights of your kittens, how many in the litter, and any other pertinent information you can give her.

\*\*\*Note: This is an important step. If you don't contact your Foster Coordinator, she WILL NOT know that you have kittens.

Your kittens may be de-wormed and given a nasal vaccine to protect them at the time you pick them up from the shelter. You will be given a schedule for follow-up vaccinations at the shelter. It is important that you keep track of this schedule and adhere to it.

Follow the directions and information in this manual to make sure your kittens grow and thrive.

A-PAL Humane Society will cover any medical expenses incurred while your kittens are in foster care. Your Foster Coordinator will make any necessary veterinary appointments for your kittens.

### **ENJOY!**

There are few things as adorable, appealing, and fun as kittens. It is so rewarding to see them grow in a loving environment. You will come to cherish them.

When it's time to give them up, it may help for you to report to the shelter immediately for a new litter to foster!

## THE BASICS—WHAT YOU NEED TO FOSTER KITTENS

### ENVIRONMENT

A SAFE, warm environment separate from your own pets is ideal for your foster kittens. When you first get your foster kittens they are usually stressed and need to be quiet. Additionally, we don't know what illnesses these kittens could have. Observe them for awhile!

- tiny kittens can do very well in a small cage (rabbit cages work fine, so do dog carriers)
- older kittens who are healthy and active need to exercise, so they require a larger area—a spare bathroom, laundry room, bedroom or a larger cat condo
- their bed should be soft and warm—ideally, in a place where the kittens can get away from any noise or confusion; a cardboard box with a piece of old blanket or towels works well
- keep your kittens separate from other family pets for 2 weeks to make sure they don't harbor any diseases the could be passed to your pet cats; additionally, make sure your pet cats are up-to-date on their vaccinations before fostering kittens

### ***IMPORTANT: DO NOT foster more than one litter at a time!!***

A healthy litter can quite easily become contaminated by an unhealthy one, and sometimes you won't know which is which until it is too late. We have had this happen. The results can be heartbreaking.

### WATER & FOOD

- **WATER** should be freshened on a regular basis. It's important to keep them well hydrated.

#### **-FOOD:**

--For the past 10 years of the kitten program, we have successfully used Iams kitten food for our weaned kittens.

--If you are fostering babies that need to be bottle-fed, please refer to the enclosed article, "But they're so tiny..." for instructions.

--It's important for kittens to get as much nourishment as possible to remain healthy. If your kittens are ready to be weaned and graduate to kibble, feed them approximately 1T of warm, softened kibble several times per day. Iams kitten kibble is the best food for avoiding diarrhea.

To soften kitten kibble, add hot tap water to it, then mash it with a fork. It should resemble mush . Provide about 1T mixture per kitten. In addition, always keep a bowl of dry kibble available for them to nibble on throughout the day.

***Kittens do not drink cow's milk! Although tempting, kitten treats and table scraps are not allowed! These are too rich for kittens' tender stomachs and can easily cause diarrhea.***

Remember, nothing is written in stone. Your kitten may have a voracious appetite or a very small one. When fed adequately your kitten's stomach will feel full, not tense or distended. A steady weight gain of 10 grams or 1/3 ounce per day and a normal stool are indications you are feeding them the correct amount. Overfeeding is indicated by a loose stool

### **LITTER BOX**

Even very small kittens will attempt to use a litter box. Be sure to clean the box frequently.

### **BATHING**

Don't be afraid to bathe your kittens if necessary. Having dirt, food, urine and fecal matter on their tender skin is far worse than bathing them. As long as your kittens are 2 weeks old you can use baby shampoo (avoiding their eyes). Prior to that, use an antibacterial soap.

Dry kittens well with a towel, followed by a hair dryer set on LOW. Keep them warm and don't let them get chilled. A heating pad (on LOW) covered with a towel or blanket or a heat lamp placed over their carrier work well. Also, provide a "cool spot" for them to crawl to if they get too warm.

If you notice blood in the water when you bathe them, don't be alarmed. It is probably just "flea dirt" from fleas on your kitten. Refer to the section labeled "Fleas".

Don't forget to clean your kittens' bottoms every time they have diarrhea.

### **LOVE THEM**

Give your kittens lots and lots of affection. Nothing can take the place of gentle handling and socialization for the health and well-being of your kittens. Gradually introduce them to your children and other pets. This will insure their eventual ease of adoption into their permanent homes.

## **KITTEN HEALTH CHECK LIST**

**(for use with each litter you foster)**

- Weights—weekly**
- Stools—especially notice ongoing diarrhea**
- Skin—**FLEAS**, sores, ringworm....**
- Eyes—runny, crusty....**
- Ears—should be pink and clean**
- Watch for and report:**
  - persistent sneezing**
  - persistent diarrhea**
  - persistent vomiting**
  - persistent loss of appetite**

**See next page for more information on these topics.**

## **KITTEN HEALTH CHECK LIST—DETAILS**

(note: check your kittens on a weekly basis for any of the following conditions)

☛ **WEIGHING** kittens on a regular basis (usually once a week) is an important part of determining how well they are doing. In addition, it is important information for your Foster Coordinator in establishing the right time for their spay/neuter surgery. Please contact her when your kittens weigh 1 ½ lbs. so that she can get them on the surgery schedule in a timely fashion. Also inform her of any failures to gain weight.

☛ **STOOLS** are normally solid. However, disruptions in routines, loss of their mother, new environments, etc., can all cause kittens to have diarrhea for a short time. Rinse their tender bottoms with warm soapy water and dry them after each bout of diarrhea. You can apply Desitin or Vaseline to supply a protective coat over their skin to prevent any fecal matter from burning them. If diarrhea persists, kittens can easily become dehydrated—a serious condition for them. Intestinal parasites are common in kittens and most are easily treated—the earlier the better! Contact your Foster Coordinator for advice and/or a possible vet appointment.

☛ **SKIN** should be clean and without sores.

--**FLEAS** can be a particular problem for small kittens. Fleas should be eradicated ASAP and with the appropriate products (for example, Advantage works very effectively to kill adult fleas within 24 hours and for up to one month in kittens over 4 weeks of age). Check for fleas by running your fingers backwards over their fur, especially on their rumps and tummies. The presence of actual adult fleas, or a “dirt-like” substance indicates a flea infestation. **DO NOT USE FLEA SHAMPOO or FLEA POWDERS!**

At the same time that you treat the kittens for fleas, their bedding must also be cleaned to prevent more flea eggs from hatching and continuing the cycle.

If your kittens are under 4 weeks of age (too young for Advantage), they must be flea-combed. If they have a heavy infestation (crawling with fleas), try submerging your kittens very gently up to their necks in warm body temperature water. Then, when the fleas try to crawl up their necks, pick them off with tweezers. Or, take a Q-tip dipped in liquid hand soap and lightly touch the flea. The soap seems to paralyze them momentarily so you can tweeze them off.

\*(For up-to-date information on the best flea treatment product for kittens under 4 weeks of age, contact your Foster Coordinator).

--Report any unexplained **SORES** to your Foster Coordinator. A vet may need to check for infection or the presence of ringworm (not an actual worm).

--**RINGWORM** is extremely contagious, so, if suspected (**dry patches on the skin or an area where the fur is not growing**), contact your Foster Coordinator immediately for testing. Wash your hands after handling the suspect kitten(s). If your kittens are diagnosed with ringworm, their environment must be kept very clean to prevent spread while they are undergoing treatment. Further information will be provided if your kittens test positive for ringworm.

☛ **EYES** should be clear and bright. If there is clear weeping, observe for a couple of days. The presence of runny, crusted eyes is common in kittens. Try gently cleansing their eyes with warm water on a wash cloth. If the problem persists, or the discharge turns green or yellowish, it can be treated with twice/day application of Terramycin eye ointment. Call your Foster Coordinator for approval to pick up Terramycin from the Feed Barn. Place a ribbon of the ointment in their eyes and massage it in. If the eyes do not improve within a couple of days, or, if accompanied by sneezing, loss of appetite, loss of interest in playing, etc., contact your Foster Coordinator.

☛ **EARS** should be pink and clean. If they are just dirty, a warm damp cotton swab can be used to clean them. The presence of a dark, dirty, wax-like substance indicates the presence of ear mites, a condition that is easily diagnosed and treated by a veterinarian. Contact your Foster Coordinator.

☛ **ALSO, WATCH FOR AND REPORT:**

1) Persistent sneezing and/or droplets coming out of their noses....

Many kittens sneeze once in awhile. Infrequent sneezing could just be a reaction if they had a nasal vaccine from the Shelter, or, from dust from their litter box.

If however, your kitten's sneezing becomes persistent (e.g. several times a day) or if they also have runny eyes, a crusty nose from discharge, or difficulty or labored breathing or wheezing, they very possibly may have a common kitten ailment known as, Upper Respiratory Infection (URI). If they do have URI, they will probably need a vet visit and some antibiotics.

Contact your foster coordinator ASAP to arrange this for you. Since most URI infections are similar to the common cold, the antibiotics are more for any secondary infection they may develop and help them get thru their URI without getting worse. Since these infections are so easily spread, the vet will give you enough antibiotics for all your kittens.

2) Persistent vomiting: a healthy kitten may throw up occasionally; but persistent vomiting (when a kitten can't keep anything down) is a cause for concern since dehydration can be lethal to kittens

3) Persistent loss of appetite in kittens indicates that something is wrong....

**CALL YOUR FOSTER COORDINATOR SO THAT SHE CAN ARRANGE  
VETERINARY CARE FOR YOUR KITTENS BEFORE THEIR CONDITIONS  
BECOME SERIOUS**

## **WHEN IT'S TIME FOR ADOPTION**

### **WHEN?**

When your kittens are healthy and about 2 pounds in weight, they must be spayed/neutered prior to their adoption. Try not to keep them too long after that time, as they are easier to place when they are younger. A food scale is very helpful in determining their weight. An inexpensive food scale can be found at K-Mart or Walmart. Or you can use the scale at the Feed Barn.

### **HOW & WHERE?**

Please contact your Foster Coordinator when your kittens weigh about 1½ pounds. If they are healthy and well socialized, she will make the appointment for their spay/neuter surgery.

You will be asked to bring your kittens to Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic around 8 a.m. on the day of their surgery. The clinic is located at 12340 Trade Center Drive.

Trade Center Drive is the street between McDonalds and Jeff Holman Auto Center, just off Hwy 49.

The veterinarians at Jackson Creek Veterinary Clinic are very experienced in the art of early-age spay/neuter surgery.

**DO NOT keep food and water from your kittens before their vet appointment.**

### **WHO ARE THEY?**

Families interested in adopting kittens want to know all they can about them and no one is in a better position to give this information than their foster family. People want to know if the kittens get along well with dogs, other cats, children (ages?), etc. They want to know about personalities, activity levels, anything you can tell them to help them make their decision as to which kitten to choose.

So, please write a short description of your kitten(s) including any names you have given them. Pictures are great. This information will be placed on the front of their adoption condo, and will aid in a successful adoption.

### **THEN WHAT?**

After your kittens are spayed/neutered, A-PAL volunteers will place them in condos at the Feed Barn. An exception may occur if our adoption condos are full. We may have to ask you to keep your kittens for awhile longer, until a condo becomes available. You will be notified when this occurs.



## **“BUT THEY'RE SO TINY”**

Just how do you raise a newborn? The most important thing to remember is: treat these babies just like they are newborn humans.

### **KEEP THEM CLEAN**

Clean, clean and clean some more. Wash your hands with antibacterial soap before and after handling the babies. Wash all bedding, blankets and towels daily using hot soapy bleach water. This will insure that you are not harboring or spreading any disease or bugs. Don't be afraid to bathe the kittens regularly. Having dirt, food, urine and fecal matter on their tender skin is far worse than bathing them. Use an antibacterial soap (avoiding their eyes) for the first couple of weeks. Then, graduate to baby shampoo. Dry them well, followed by a hair dryer set on low. ***Do not let them get chilled,***

### **KEEP THEM WARM**

The second most important thing to remember is that kittens need to be kept warm as well as hydrated and fed. There are several proven methods to keep kittens warm. First, make a nest for them using soft and warm blankets. Then, place a heat lamp over the carrier they are kept in. Another method is to use a heating pad, on LOW, covered by a towel and then a blanket. Be sure to provide a "cool" spot for them to crawl to if they get too warm.

### **LOVE AND AFFECTION**

If the kittens do not have their eyes open, they are young and they should be held a minimum of three (3) hours per day. Without this affection, young kittens can die. Hold them several hours per day and you should have success. When raising an "only" child, place a small stuffed toy in the nest with him. He will snuggle up to it. Another trick is to empty out the contents of a stuffed animal and place an alarm clock in it. Then, put the stuffing back in to muffle the sound.

### **FEEDING**

***Newborn kittens do not drink cow's milk.***

Use FOX VALLEY KITTEN FORMULA for tiny unweaned kittens (powdered formula). The formula is given at body temperature, never cold, through a nursing bottle. To place it in the kittens mouth, simply open their mouth and stick the bottle in. The kitten should naturally suckle. You may have to give the bottle a little squeeze to start the milk flowing. Do not hold the kitten as you would a newborn baby. Kittens should be placed feet down on your lap and fed in that position. Another position, which seems to work, is upright against your chest. One thing that is very easy to do, but you must avoid, is overfeeding. Overfeeding produces diarrhea. It is far better to err on the side of underfeeding, rather than overfeeding.

Follow the following chart and you should have no problems: (30 ml is equal to one ounce of formula).

- At age 1 week, weight should be approximately 4 ounces. Give 30 ml of milk replacement per day, spread out over 6 feedings.
- At age 2 weeks, weight should be approximately 7 ounces. Give 60 ml of milk replacement, spread out over 4 feedings.
- At age 3 weeks, weight should be approximately 10 ounces. Give 75 ml of milk replacement, spread out over 3 feedings.
- At age 4 weeks, weight should be approximately 13 ounces. Give 105 ml of milk replacement, spread out over 3 feedings.

Remember, nothing is written in stone. Your kitten may have a voracious appetite or a very small one. When fed adequately a kitten's stomach will feel full, not tense or distended. A steady weight gain of 10 grams or 1/3 ounce per day, and a normal stool, are indications that you are feeding the correct amount. Overfeeding is indicated by a loose stool. Reduce the strength of the formula by diluting it 1/3 with water. Unchecked overfeeding leads to a depletion of digestive enzymes. Eventually, when there is no digestion of the formula, you will see a stool which looks like curdled milk. At this point stop all formula and give only "pediolite" and water until the kitten has a normal stool. Pediolite is available at grocery stores.

If you have a kitten that is showing signs of distress and not eating, try putting a little dab of Karo syrup in their mouth. Sometimes this is all they need to give them the added energy boost to get them eating. Kittens that are taken from Mom at the age of 1 or 2 weeks may have trouble adjusting to the bottle. This is simply a matter of persistence on your part. You must keep offering the bottle and they will learn that this is where food comes from, not Mom. Hold them close, so they get warmth while nursing. Remember, you are their new Mom. Don't give up on them. Keep offering the bottle. They may go as much as 24 hours with very little nourishment. Place the nipple in their mouth and squeeze the bottle, letting a little formula seep into their mouth. Any baby that has not been eating for more than 12 hours is probably getting very low on blood sugar. Mix Karo syrup with warm water and give it to them. It's surprising how much this will help. Put a dish of water out for them beginning at about 2 weeks. They may play in it at first, but will soon learn to drink. It is very important to keep kittens well hydrated.

After bottle feeding a kitten, put it on your shoulder and gently pat to burp them, just like a human baby.

About those nipples - There are two methods for poking a hole in the end. Heat the end of an ice pick and poke a hole in the nipple with it. The hot end makes the hole more defined. Another method is to use a pair of scissors to cut a small slit diagonally (a small X) in the end of the nipple. You don't want the milk to run out - just make it easier for the baby to suck on. If the hole is too big, the formula may come out too fast and be aspirated into the kitten's lungs, which could possibly lead to the death of the kitten.

Many times the babies simply do not have all the nutrients needed to make them healthy. You can add a little Gerber's Baby Cereal to their formula. This tends to stay with them a little longer, especially at night. Besides the cereal, try adding baby strained chicken. This will add protein and weight to a struggling kitten. Please be sure the baby food does NOT contain Onion Powder. This can be very harmful to kittens.

### **WEANING**

Weaning should begin between 3 and 4 weeks of age. Often kittens aren't ready to give up the nipple and have to be coaxed into eating on their own. Start by putting their formula in a bowl mixed with just a little of either lams kitten dry food (softened with formula) or lams canned food mixed with formula. To soften the dry food, add a little boiling water and let it sit for about 20 minutes, then add the formula. You can also try putting a little on your finger and hold it to the kitten's mouth. Once they are eating from your finger, let them follow your finger back to the bowl. In the beginning, supplement with a bottle feeding to ensure they are getting enough nutrition. Remember, every time you introduce something new to eat, it will probably show in their bowels.

### **BATHROOM STIMULATION**

Until between 2 and 3 weeks of age, stimulation is required for the release of both stool and urine. Using a warm, wet wash cloth or paper towel, slowly massage the genitals until the kitten has peed and pooped. It often helps to hold their rear ends under warm running water as you stimulate. The stool should be soft but formed, not runny. If the stool is runny, it is likely you are overfeeding or that the kitten has a parasite. It is better to feed more often and give less food each time than to overfeed a kitten. Potty them before and after each feeding. Don't forget to burp each kitten after feeding. It is very important that a kitten urinates daily and has a bowel movement at least every other day. If your kitten is constipated, try putting a drop or two of mineral oil in their formula. Another method to treat constipation is to dilute their KMR formula with more water than is stipulated in the instructions on the can.

### **LITTER BOX TRAINING**

When the kitten is old enough to start moving around on their own, put them in a cardboard box with newspaper on the bottom. While you are feeding one, let the others play in the box. You will notice that they will start going on their own on the paper. When this happens, you can stop stimulating them. Now you can add a small container with cat litter. At first they will play in it. Then, they will start using it as a litter box. Do not use the clumping type of litter, as they have a tendency to eat it and it can prove harmful.

### **DIARRHEA**

More often than not the babies will get the runs. If they have diarrhea for several days, it may be caused by exposure to parasites. Contact your Foster Coordinator so the stool can be checked by a vet. They will usually give them antibiotics. When they have diarrhea, many times their little bottoms are red and raw. Desitin or Vaseline provides a protective coating on their skin and prevents any fecal matter from burning them. This will relieve the pain quite a bit and prevent further irritation.

## **FLEAS**

Do NOT USE FLEA SHAMPOO on These babies. Bathe them regularly and use a flea comb. Fleas can be deadly to a newborn, so be diligent. Flea combing and bathing with an antibacterial soap is very effective. Advantage Flea Treatment can be used on kittens starting at 4 weeks of age. For up-to-date information on flea prevention products for kittens under 4 weeks of age, contact your Foster Coordinator.

## **NURSING ON OTHER KITTENS**

When raising more than one baby, at about 2 to 3 weeks of age they may start looking in their nest for something to nurse on. Invariably, they find each other. Kittens can get sick from ingesting urine or can cause damage to other kitten's genitals. After cleaning them, spray their bottoms with Bitter Apple. This is a foul tasting but harmless spray, which can be purchased at the Feed Barn. If this doesn't stop the behavior, separate them. DO NOT allow them to nurse on each other.

## **DEHYDRATION**

When kittens stop nursing they dehydrate quickly, causing them to lose weight, become chilled or fail to survive. Look into their mouth for a lack of moisture, a very pale pink tongue or mucus membranes. Pick the kittens' skin up at the back of the neck. If it doesn't bounce back, this is a sign of dehydration. Watch the kitten's urine. If it is not clear, but a distinct yellow, this is also a sign of dehydration.

## **FADING KITTEN SYNDROME**

Some kittens die, and there is nothing we can do about it. Sometimes, this is referred to as "Fading Kitten Syndrome". It can be very common in young kittens. Sometimes, they are born with congenital defects, which means there isn't anything anyone can do for them. They may have become chilled or malnourished before being brought to the shelter. If this is the case, despite the very best treatment, there is still a fairly high mortality rate. This is one reason to watch them carefully. Once they start to fade they can go very quickly