



Mitchell County Animal Rescue Dog Foster Care Manual

MCAR Dog Foster Care Manual has information on preparing for, bringing home and caring for a foster dog to prepare him or her for a “Furever” home.

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Section 1: Introduction

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering dogs for Mitchell County Animal Rescue. By opening up your home to foster pets, you're not only helping to save lives, you're providing the individual attention and love these dogs desperately need.

Once you have completed your foster application, our foster coordinator will get in touch with you to sign you up for one of our scheduled orientation. In the session, we'll go over this manual and answer any questions you have about the program.

Our dog foster program is designed to help dogs from MCAR get a second chance at finding a home-a chance they may not have while living at the shelter. Many dogs who need foster care require extra care and attention, which shelters often don't have the staff and resources to provide. But in a loving foster home, every dog can get the individual attention he/she needs to find a forever home.

Foster homes are asked to provide care for the dogs, as well as transportation to and from shelter for veterinary appointments as needed. Care for fosters include feeding according to size and needs, exercise according to energy levels, and lots of play time and socialization.

Although fostering is a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience. By participating in this program, you are saving lives and helping many different types of dogs find the families they've been longing for.

Frequently asked questions

Where do the foster dogs come from?

The dogs who are in need of foster come to us from two different situations:

- Stray dog that has been brought in found running loose in Mitchell County, that no one has reclaimed.
- Owner surrenders, when owners either no longer can take care of their pet or the pet is no longer wanted.

What do foster families need to provide?

Foster families need to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment for their foster dogs
- Transportation to and from the shelter for vet appointments as needed
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach dogs positive family and pet relationships
- Lots of exercise and positive stimulation to help them develop into great dogs

How much time do I need to spend with a foster dog?

As much time as you can. With that said, the amount of time will vary depending on the energy level and needs of the dog you are fostering. It is ideal to spend around two hours a day exercising and playing with your foster dog to ensure that he/she receives adequate socialization and stimulation

Can I foster even if I have a full-time job?

Yes. The foster application is designed as a survey to help the foster coordinator match you with the best animal for your needs and your current schedule. If you have a full-time job, the foster coordinator will match you with a dog who may be OK alone during the workday. You would then need to provide ample exercise before and after you go to work.

Can I foster a dog if I don't have a fenced yard?

Yes. Even if you do have a fenced yard, we request that you supervise all outdoor activities with the foster dog. And we ask that you always keep him/her on a leash when you're on walks.

How long will the dog need to be in foster care?

Ideally, foster dogs stay in their assigned foster homes until they get adopted. We may not always have space to bring the fosters back without notice.

Will I need to give medicine to my foster dog?

Almost all the dogs that we have in our foster program are strays brought in or owner surrenders that have been exposed to shelter illnesses. While we do our best to ensure that we are aware of all the conditions that a foster dog

may have prior to going home, many illnesses have incubation periods, meaning symptoms can arise after you take the dog home. So while some dogs do not require any medicine, others may. If your foster dog needs medications, we can show you how to administer them before you take the dog home.

Can I let my foster dog play with my personal pets?

There are a few guidelines that we ask foster families to adhere to regarding their personal pets. Your personal pets will need to be up-to-date on vaccines and spayed/neutered before you can foster. You will need to show proof if you get interviewed. While foster dogs playing with other pets is often fine, we advise that you consult with your veterinarian before fostering to ensure your personal pets are healthy. Dogs in shelters are very susceptible to illness and can carry or catch different diseases. If, for any reason, your personal pet becomes ill while you are fostering a MCAR pet, we cannot provide medical care for your personal pet.

What if I want to adopt my foster dog?

If you want to adopt a foster dog, you will need to complete an adoption application and follow the full adoption process. If you do decide to adopt your foster dog, please contact your foster coordinator right away because once the dog is up for adoption, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, including the foster parent.

Who will take care of my foster dog if I need to go out of town?

If you have travel plans while you are fostering a dog for MCAR you will need to contact the foster coordinator to make arrangements, please provide a week notice if at all possible. If your trip is over a holiday, please provide a minimum of two weeks' notice. If adequate notice is not given, we may not have space to bring back and you would need to provide payment for boarding.

You cannot leave your foster dog with an unauthorized person or pet sitter. Any unauthorized people have not signed the release waivers for the foster program.

What if my foster dog bites me?

If any of your foster pets bite you and break the skin, causing you to bleed, you need to report the bite to the foster coordinator within 24 hours of when the bite occurred. The law requires that we report all bites. The teeth of the animal, not the nails, must have broken the skin. If you are unsure, then please report the bite anyway.

What if my foster dog is not working out?

You are not required to continue to foster a dog if you feel it's not working out. However, we may not have immediate space for the dog but we will work hard on moving your foster dog out as soon as possible. We just ask for your understanding and patience in case of taking time. Please call the foster coordinator during business hours if this situation arises.

Can I foster a dog to fulfill a community service obligation?

Unfortunately, Mitchell County Animal Rescue cannot sign off on court-ordered community service hours for fostering. Community service is supposed to be supervised work, and fostering is unsupervised, since it takes place at home. If you need community service hours, on-site volunteering is an option.

Section 2: Preparing for your foster dog

When you take your foster dog home, he /she may be frightened or unsure about what's happening, so it's important not to overwhelm him. Prepare a special area for your foster dog to help ease his/her adjustment into the new home environment. Sometimes it's better to confine your foster dog to a small room or area at first, to let him/her adjust before giving him/her free reign in your home. This area should be large enough for an appropriately sized crate for the dog and should allow the dog access to his food and water dishes and toys.

During the first few days minimize the people and pet introductions to your foster dog, so that he/she is only meeting immediate family and your personal pets. If you have other pets at home, it is especially important to give your foster dog a space of his/her own where he/she can stay while getting used to all the new sounds and smells. Do not leave your foster dog unattended in

your home with your personal pets until you are comfortable that all of the animals can interact safely.

Supplies you'll need

Mitchell County Animal Rescue will supply you with any supplies that we may have. However, we greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for your foster dog. Here is what you'll need to help your foster dog make a smooth transition to living in your home:

- At least one bowl for dry food and one for water. Stainless steel or ceramic work best.
- A supply of dry dog food: All dogs are fed dry food unless a special diet is needed. We use Hills Science Diet and ask that foster dogs be fed this food.
- A collar with an ID tag and a leash; Even though foster dogs are microchipped, they still need an ID tag.
- A soft place to sleep. Old towels or blankets work well.
- A baby gate: This comes in handy to keep certain areas of your home off-limits.
- A crate: The crate should be large enough for the dog to stand up and turn around in, but not much bigger than that.
- Dog treats: Giving treats is a good way to help train and build a positive relationship with your foster dog.
- Dog Toys: Make sure the toys are durable and appropriate for the size of your foster dog.
- Grooming supplies: A well-groomed dog has a better chance of getting adopted.

Dog-proofing your home

Foster dogs come from a shelter environment, and even if they have previously lived in a home, we don't always know how they will react in a new home. So, before bringing home a new foster dog, you'll want to survey the area where you are going to keep your foster dog. Remove anything that would be unsafe or undesirable for the dog to chew on, and latch securely any cupboards and doors that the foster dog could get into. People food and

chemicals can be very harmful if consumed by dogs, so please store them in a place that the foster dog cannot access.

Never underestimate your foster dog's abilities. Here are some additional tips for dog-proofing your home:

- Make sure that all trash cans are covered or latched and keep them inside a closet. (Don't forget the bathroom trash bins.)
- Keep toilet lids closed.
- Keep both people and pet food out of reach and off all counter tops.
- Move house plants or secure them. Some dogs like to play with them and may knock them over.
- Make sure aquariums or cages that house small animals, like hamsters or fish, are securely out of reach of your foster dog.
- **Remove medications, lotions, or cosmetics from any accessible surfaces.**
- Move and secure all electrical and phone wires out of reach. Dogs may chew on or get tangled in them.
- Pick up any clothing items that have buttons or strings, which can be harmful to your foster dog if consumed.
- Relocate knickknacks or valuables that your foster dog could knock down.

Section 3: Bringing home your foster dog

Taking care of your foster dog requires a commitment from you to make sure the dog is happy and healthy. Thank you so much for opening your heart and home to these dogs who desperately need your help. Without you, we could not save as many as we do.

Choosing a foster dog

The foster coordinator will work with you to select a foster dog that fits into your household. We will always do our best to match you with a dog who fits with your lifestyle and schedule.

When you and the foster coordinator have decided on a foster dog, an appointment will be scheduled so you can pick up the dog and any supplies that you will need. The appointment will be at the shelter.

The foster coordinator will meet you and together, you will decide if the dog is a right fit for you. Be honest: If you aren't comfortable with anything about the animal you may be fostering, please tell the foster coordinator before you take the animal home.

Dog introductions

If you have personal pets who are dogs, you'll want to introduce them to your foster dog one at a time and supervise their interactions at first. It's a good idea to introduce them outside in a large yard or on a walk, keeping all the dogs on leash and allowing them enough space to get adjusted to one another. If you can, it works best to schedule a time for your personal dogs to meet the foster dog before you take your foster home.

In addition, make sure that high-value items (food, chew toys, plush toys, Kongs, rawhides or anything else that your dog holds in high regard) are put away whenever the dogs are interacting. You don't want to allow the possibility of a fight. Those high-value items are best placed in the dogs' personal areas. Finally, never feed your dogs in the same room as the foster dog; always separate them at feeding time.

Cat introductions

We try to ensure that a foster dog has been "cat-tested," so if you have personal pets who are cats, you'll need to make the introduction to the foster dog carefully and safely. Start by keeping them separated at first. You can either keep your cats in a separate room (equipped with food, water, litter boxes and beds) or confine your foster dog to a room. Over the next few days, let the dog and cats smell each other try not to let them have contact with one another. Exchanging blankets or towels between the dog's area and the cat's area will help them get used to how each other smells.

After a few days try a face-to-face introduction. Keeping your foster dog on leash, allow your cat out into the same area. (If you have more than one cat, introduce one cat at a time.) Do not allow the foster dog to charge or run directly up to the cat. Try to distract the dog as best you can so that the cat has the chance to approach without fear. Watch the body language of each

animal closely and don't continue the interaction if either pet becomes over-stimulated or aggressive. The idea is to keep the interactions positive, safe, and controlled.

Finally, never leave your foster dog unsupervised with any cats in your home.

Children and dogs

Since we don't always know a foster dog's history or tolerance level for different types of people and activities, please teach your children how to act responsibly and respectfully around your foster dog. We will do our best to place you with an appropriate animal for your home situation, but you should still supervise all interactions between children and your foster dog. Key things to remind your children:

- Always leave the foster dog alone when he/she is eating, chewing, or sleeping. Some dogs may nip or bite if bothered while eating or startled while sleeping.
- Do not take away a toy or prized possession from the foster dog.
- Do not tease the foster dog.
- Don't chase the foster dog around the house or run quickly around the foster dog; it may scare him/her.
- Pick up all your toys. Some dogs may not be able to tell the difference between what is theirs and what belongs to the kids.

Do not allow young children to walk the foster dog because they may not be strong enough or experienced enough to handle encounters with other dogs and cats who cross their path.

Section 4: Daily care

Feeding

All foster dogs should be fed a diet of dry dog food, unless otherwise specified by the foster coordinator. We use Hills Science Diet dog food and ask that you keep them on the same. We will provide the food for as long as you are fostering. Feed your foster once or twice daily; the amount will be based on

the age and weight of your foster dog. Make sure your dog has access to fresh, clean water.

You can give your foster dog treats of any kind (unless he/she has known allergies, of course); giving treats helps you and your foster to bond with each other. Most dogs like to chew on things, so try rawhide chews, Greenies, antlers, Nylabones or Dentabones. Keep in mind, though, that not all dogs like to share, so only give these treats when your foster dog is confined to his/her own area.

Daily Routine

When you first take your foster dog home, take care not to overwhelm her with too many new experiences all at once. Sometimes, too much stimulation can cause a dog to behave unexpectedly toward a person or animal, which is why it's a good idea to keep introductions to a minimum during the first couple of days after bringing your foster dog home. It's also important to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings, potty breaks, and walk times. Dogs take comfort in having a routine to count on.

Also, on a daily basis, be aware of your foster dog's appetite and energy level. If he/she is not eating well or seems listless, something may be wrong medically. You might want to record your observations to make it easier to notice health issues.

House-Training

It's unlikely that your foster dog will be perfectly house-trained when you take him or her home. Please, help your foster dog to perfect the skill. Take your foster dog outside to go potty multiple times per day (3-6 times daily, depending on age). Initially, you may need to take him or her out more frequently to remind where the door is to go outside and to reassure that you will take them out for potty breaks. Most dogs will give cues- such as standing near the door or sniffing the ground and walking in small circles- to indicate that they need to go out. Keep the dog in a crate when you are not available to supervise her indoors.

If your foster dog has an accident inside the house, do not discipline or punish them. It will only teach them to fear and mistrust you. Clean up all accidents with an enzymatic cleaner. Nature's Miracle and Simple Solution are two

products containing natural enzymes that tackle tough stains and odors and remove them permanently.

Crate Training

Crate training, done in a positive way, can be effective component of house-training. A crate can be a safe place for your foster to have “down time” and can also limit his access to the entire house until he/she knows the rules. A crate should never be used as a form of punishment and a dog should never be left in a crate for an extended period of time.

You can prevent problems with crate training by setting your foster up for success. He/she should only associate good things with the crate, so start by putting treats and/or toys in the crate and encouraging them to go in. Some dogs warm up to the crate slowly. If he/she is afraid to go in, place a treat in the crate as far as he/she is willing to go. After they take the treat, place another further back in the crate. Keep going until he/she is eating treats at the very back, then feed him his next meal in the crate with the door open, so that he can walk in and out at will.

Crate training a fearful dog can take days, so be patient and encouraging. If a crate is properly introduced and used, your foster dog will happily enter and settle down.

Grooming

A clean and well-groomed dog has a better chance of getting adopted, so bathe your foster dog as needed and brush him/her regularly if he has longer hair or requires more frequent grooming. Contact the foster coordinator if you feel that your foster dog should see a professional groomer.

Mental Stimulation and Exercise

Depending on your foster dog’s age and energy level, he/she should get at least 2, 30 minute play sessions or walks with you per day. Try a variety of toys(balls, squeaky toys, rope toys, etc.) to see which ones your foster prefers. Try to remember to discourage the foster from playing with your hands, since mouthing is not always a desirable behavior to adopters.

You can also offer your foster a food-dispensing toy for mental stimulation. You hide treats in the toy and the dog has to figure out how to get them out.

Safety Requirements

Foster dogs must live indoors, not outside. Please do not leave your foster dog outside unsupervised, even if you have a fenced in yard. We ask that you supervise your foster while outside to ensure that he/she does not escape or have any negative interaction with other people or animals. Your foster is only allowed off leash in an enclosed backyard that is completely fenced in.

When walking or hiking, please keep him/her on leash at all times. This also applies to dog parks and other off leash dog areas. We do not know how your foster will behave in these situations, or how other dogs will react, and we want to ensure that all the animals are safe at all times. It is also unknown if other dogs are vaccinated or possibly carry any diseases. So it is best if your foster does not meet any unknown dogs. Having recently come from a shelter setting, fosters can be vulnerable health-wise.

Also your foster can not ride in the bed of an open pickup truck. When transporting your foster, please keep them inside the vehicle.

Section 5: Helping your foster get adopted

Frequently asked questions

When is my foster ready to go?

All animals are up for adoption after a 72 hr quarantine hold. They are spayed/neutered deemed healthy enough to go to a home. When you pick up your foster from the shelter, the foster coordinator will go over the medical records and discuss that in case of an emergency what you will need to do.

Will I need to take my foster to adoption events?

We request that you try to attend our adoption events with your foster. These events are a great way to find these pets homes. This is why we ask our fosters to attend-so they have a good chance of finding a home. You may attend the ones you are available for.

How may I help my foster find a great home?

As you get to know your foster better, we ask that you stay in contact with the coordinator so that he/she can update the foster animal's biography on

Petfinder and Facebook to reflect accurate information about the dogs preferences and quirks. Some people write their own for their foster, we encourage this, though they may be edited. We also welcome any quality photos that you may take of your foster in your home; we can use the photos to create a kennel card and accompany their biography, with your permission. Please keep in mind that anyone who shows interest in adopting your foster will need to go through the adoption process screening and speak to a staff member before taking home.

Will if I know someone who's interested in adopting my foster?

If someone you know is interested in adopting your foster, please contact the coordinator and give him/her the details. Also, tell the possible adopter to start the process by filling out an application as soon as possible. Once the dog is up for adoption, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, but we do want to accommodate referrals from foster parents if we can.

Will it be hard to say goodbye to my foster?

Say goodbye can be the most difficult part of fostering, but keep in my mind that many more dogs are in need of wonderful foster homes like yours. Remember, you are playing a crucial role in helping save these dogs.

Section 6: Medical and Emergency Protocols

When you pick up your foster, you will receive a paper that specifies the dates that vaccines are due and any known medical conditions to treat. You are responsible for your foster's vaccines on or around the due dates indicated on the paper.

If you are fostering a dog who is on medications, please make sure that he/she gets all prescribed doses. Do not end medication for any reason unless directed to by staff or vet. If your foster has not responded to medication after 5 days, please contact the coordinator.

Veterinary care

MCAR provides all medical care for your foster. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster's well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for your foster at our approved veterinary partners.

If your foster needs to go to the vet, please notify the coordinator by email or phone. The coordinator will schedule your appointment.

For non-emergency situations, please understand that our veterinary partners book quickly and may not be available for same-day appointments. We ask that you schedule basic non-emergency appointments at least 24 hrs in advance.

Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster to a veterinarian without authorization from the foster coordinator or adoptions manager.

Signs of illness and what to do next

Dogs generally do a good job masking when they don't feel well, so determining if your foster is under the weather will require diligent observation of the dogs daily activity and appetite levels. It's a good idea to keep track of these levels in a journal. You will also want to record any of the following symptoms:

Eye discharge. It is normal for dogs to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if your foster has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his/her eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, you will need to contact the coordinator and schedule a vet appointment.

Coughing and nasal discharge. Coughing can be common if your foster is pulling on the leash. If the coughing becomes more frequent, however, watch for discharge coming from the nose. If the discharge is clear, the infection is probably viral and medication may not be needed, but check with the coordinator to find out if a vet appointment is necessary.

If the discharge becomes colored, contact the coordinator to make a vet appointment because your foster may have a bacterial infection. Be sure to monitor the dog's breathing. If the dog seems to struggle to breathe or starts wheezing, call the coordinator immediately. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the dog's eating habits more closely to ensure he/she is still eating.

Loss of appetite. Your foster may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. But if the dog hasn't eaten after 24 hrs, please notify the foster coordinator. Also, if the dog has been eating well, but stops eating for 12-24 hours, call the coordinator and set up a vet appointment. Please do not change the dog's diet without contacting the coordinator. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

Lethargy. The activity level of your foster will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log and journal will help you notice whether your foster is less active than he/she normally is. If the dog cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it's an emergency, so please contact the coordinator immediately.

Dehydration. This is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test dehydration, gently pinch the dog's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taunt, the dog is dehydrated. Please call the coordinator to schedule a vet appointment.

Vomiting. Sometimes dogs eat too quickly and will immediately throw up their food. Occasional vomiting isn't cause for alarm, but if your foster has thrown up two or more times in one day, please notify the coordinator. It could be an infection.

Pain or strain while urinating. When a dog first goes into foster, he/she may not urinate due to stress. If the dog hasn't urinated in more than 24 hrs, however, please contact the coordinator. Also, if you notice the dog straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact the foster coordinator immediately because it may be indicative of an infection or an obstruction.

Diarrhea. It is important to monitor your foster dogs pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking a dog home, most likely caused by stress and change in food. If your foster dog has liquid stool, however, please contact the foster coordinator so that an appointment can be scheduled to ensure that the dog doesn't need medications. Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the dog, so be proactive about contacting the foster coordinator.

Frequent ear scratching. Your foster dog may have a bacterial or yeast infection (or in rare cases ear mites) if she/he scratches their ears often and/or shakes head frequently. These conditions can be treated by a veterinarian, so please call the foster coordinator to schedule an appointment.

Swollen, irritated ears. If your foster dog has irritated, swollen or red/pink ears that smell like yeast, she/he may have an ear infection called otitis. This type of infection is more common in dogs who have very floppy ears, like Basset hounds or Labradors. These dogs may need to have their ears cleaned more often to ensure that the infection does not re-occur.

Hair loss. Please contact the foster coordinator if you notice any hair loss on your foster dog. It is normal for dogs to have thin fur around the lips, eyelids, and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair can indicate ringworm, dermatitis or the early stages of mange. It is important to check your foster dogs coat frequently.

Criteria for emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a dog? A good rule of thumb is any situation in which you call 911 for a person. Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of parvovirus: bloody diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, high fever (above 103.5 degrees).
- Signs of extreme dehydration: dry mucous membranes, weakness, vomiting, tenting of the skin (when the skin is pulled up, it stays in place).
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- Any trauma: hit by a car, dropped, stepped on
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 24 hours

If your foster dog displays any of these symptoms, please call the emergency phone number. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to get help.

Section 7: Behavior support

One of your goals as a foster parent is to help prepare your foster dog for living successfully in a home. So, we ask that you help your foster dog to develop good habits and skills through the use of positive reinforcement training, which builds a bond of trust between you and your foster pet. The basic idea is to reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.

You must not punish a dog for a behavior that you find undesirable because punishment is ineffective at eliminating the behavior. If the dog is doing something undesirable, distract him/her before the behavior occurs. It is also important that for every human in the foster home to stick to the rules established for your foster dogs, which will help them to learn faster.

When interacting with your foster dog, refrain from wrestling or engaging in play that encourages the dog to be mouthy and “play bite” on your body. Also, try to refrain from inviting dogs up on the couch or bed. Not all adopters find this habit acceptable.

Some foster dogs will have behavioral issues, which we are aware of at the time of their rescue. Some of the behavior challenges are separation anxiety, Destruction of property, fear issues or aggression towards other animals. We will only place dogs with behavioral issues with a person who feels comfortable working with the dog on his/her particular issue. We will provide that person with all the necessary information so that proper care can be given to the foster dog.

If you feel unable to manage any behavior that your foster dog is exhibiting, please contact the foster coordinator during business hours to discuss the issue. We will guide you and help in every way that we can. If the behavior is extreme, we will personally work with the dog.

Thank you so much for opening up your heart and your home to foster pets. Together, we can Save Them All.