



Becoming a Foster Parent: Are You Ready?

Fostering a dog in need of shelter, love, and guidance is a time-consuming effort, but it's also one of the most rewarding ways to help homeless pets. Providing a "stepping stone" for animals in search of permanent homes saves lives, helps set the stage for successful adoptions, and teaches you the skills that will enable you to help other animals in need.

If you're considering taking a foster pet into your home, ask yourself these important questions.

What If It Doesn't Work Out?

If you have decided that fostering is right for you and feel prepared for the experience, you may still encounter obstacles to a positive outcome for your foster pet. These may include unknown behavior problems that are difficult to modify; illness; injury or unexpected death; the foster pet's non-acceptance of pets already in the household (even after a reasonable acclimation period); or existing pets' non-acceptance of the foster pet.

Because dogs passed from home to home or repeatedly returned tend to suffer from bonding and behavioral problems, you must be willing to allow a significant amount of time and training in areas of housetraining, crate training, leash training, and basic obedience.

If your foster pet has been given ample time to adjust to your home (usually two to six weeks) and still seems anxious, becomes aggressive, or suffers from any significant behavior or health issues, notify ADR immediately. ***Never be embarrassed to ask for help.*** WE want to know EVERYTHING!

Does fostering fit your household and your life?

The health and welfare of all individuals in your home—human and animal—must be considered before bringing another creature into the mix. Fostering a homeless pet should never be considered unless your home environment is happy, safe, healthy, and spacious enough to nurture the foster pet adequately and retain sanity among the existing members of your home. If any of your family members are contending with allergies, excessive stress, other physical or mental health issues, career instability, financial difficulties, or housing or space restrictions, fostering is not a good option for you at this time.

But if you believe you have the ability to foster, and the entire household agrees that fostering would be a positive experience, your next question should be **"Do I have the time?"**

Fostering a pet is a 24/7 job. Although you may not be physically interacting with the animal every second of the day, you will be responsible round the clock for the pet's safety, comfort, and general well-being, and this responsibility alone can be exhausting.

If your work or family schedule is already so hectic that adding another time-consuming responsibility will only create more stress, do not consider fostering at this time. If that new foster dog will spend long periods of time in his crate—periods that frequently approach or exceed the eight-hour threshold—or if you've killed your umpteenth houseplant because you just haven't had time to water it, you'll want to put those foster dreams on hold for now.

The amount of personal attention needed will vary greatly from animal to animal, but you can expect to spend anywhere from three to seven hours a day interacting with a foster pet, and even more if you're planning to foster puppies. Teaching dogs the lessons they will need to become happy, thriving, lifelong members of another family is the essence of fostering, and this takes time and patience.

If you and your family feel you have the time and ability to provide a dog with the socialization, exercise, positive stimulation, and training she needs to become a happy, healthy addition to someone's home, you next need to ask

yourself, **“Who do I want to foster and why?”**

Any animal considered for fostering should be healthy, fully vaccinated, behaviorally sound, and disease-free (unless you are specifically fostering heartworm-positive dogs, or other “special needs” animals). But those are not the only considerations.

The Skinny on Behavior Assessments

ADR performs a simple, humane behavior assessment. Every dog who comes through the organization’s doors is evaluated for temperament and aggression.

While in foster care dogs and puppies should be observed and evaluated for dominance, aggression, resource guarding, and obedience. Any questionable or seemingly abnormal behavior should be reported to the rescue *immediately*. Conversely, don’t hesitate to also report positive behavior. As a foster guardian, you have the added benefit of learning more about the animal’s behavior than possibly anyone else, and therefore, you are also the pet’s best advocate in helping him find the perfect home.