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# FOSTER CARE MANUAL

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Lifeline of Galveston County



## Table of Contents

<b>About Lifeline of Galveston County</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About This Manual</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Manual Notices and Disclaimers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>General Information</b>	<b>1</b>
Routine care of foster animals	1
Housing and outdoor access	1
Resident pets and other animals	2
Lost foster animal	2
Adopting a foster animal	2
Help, I need to return the foster animal!	2
Finding adopters and finalizing adoptions	2
<b>Bites and Injuries to People</b>	<b>3</b>
Bite procedure:	3
Quarantine periods:	3
<b>Medical Care</b>	<b>3</b>
Medications	3
Common conditions	4
What constitutes a medical emergency in an animal?	5
<b>Behavioral Care</b>	<b>6</b>
Common conditions	6
Emergency conditions	8

## About Lifeline of Galveston County

Lifeline of Galveston County is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to assist every municipal animal shelter in Galveston County with reaching and sustaining no-kill status, which means at least 90% of pets entering the shelter are leaving alive. We are NOT a county shelter, but rather a partner organization created to fill in the lifesaving gaps.

## About This Manual

This manual outlines key policies, procedures and requirements for Lifeline of Galveston County's foster program. Lifeline of Galveston County has additional specialty manuals available with species-specific information and tips as well as other documents to help you be the best foster caregiver you can be. Other foster manuals include:

- [Cat Foster Care Essential Manual](#)

- [Dog Foster Care Essential Manual](#)
- [Kitten Foster Care Essential Manual](#)

All foster manuals are available for download on our foster program resource board that can be found by visiting [www.lifelinetx.org/resources](http://www.lifelinetx.org/resources).

## Manual Notices and Disclaimers

Lifeline of Galveston County may modify, delete, or add to the provisions of this manual at any time, with or without notice. When changes are made, the revised manual will be made available to foster caregivers.

If at any time you are unable to abide by the requirements of the Lifeline of Galveston County foster program, including those described in this manual, you agree that you will inform Lifeline of Galveston County that you are no longer able to foster.

Nothing in this manual creates a contractual relationship or employee relationship between you (the foster caregiver) and Lifeline of Galveston County.

**Any Lifeline of Galveston County foster animal in your care is owned by Lifeline of Galveston County.**

## General Information

### Routine care of foster animals

As a foster caregiver, you'll provide everything the foster animal needs to have a healthy and happy life. In addition to lots of love, foster caregivers provide routine care, including:

- A loving home environment
- Socialization, exercise, and fun times
- Proper food, water, treats and toys, as approved by or recommended by Lifeline of Galveston County
- Health care, including transportation or coordination of transportation for veterinary care

Although the care of the foster animal is your responsibility, you can enlist others — such as family members, pet sitters, relatives, and friends — to support you. **The only thing you can't do is give away the foster animal to another person, which would mean giving up the responsibilities you agreed to when you signed up to be a foster caregiver.**

### Housing and outdoor access

**Foster cats and kittens should be kept indoors for safety.** In some situations, particularly for unsocialized community cats in working cat programs, they may be kept in outdoor enclosures that have shelter from the elements. However, this arrangement needs to be discussed with Lifeline of Galveston County to ensure that the housing meets the needs of the foster animal.

**Adult foster dogs and puppies should be kept indoors with outdoor access either with leashed walks or in a secure fenced-in area (such as a fenced-in yard).** Dogs love the outdoors but please don't leave dogs unattended outside for extended periods of time without access to indoor space. Crates are recommended for most dogs and additional containment, such as a closed room or an

exercise pen, is recommended for puppies to keep them out of trouble. A dog door that leads to a securely fenced yard is an excellent option for house-trained dogs. However, some foster dogs will not understand how to use one, and some dogs may attempt to escape from a fenced yard if unattended.

If you have questions about what is most appropriate for the foster animal you'll be caring for, please discuss your housing situation and options with a Lifeline of Galveston County team member before bringing the foster animal home.

## **Resident pets and other animals**

Lifeline of Galveston County strongly recommends that resident pets be kept separate from foster animals for the health and safety of both animals. Keep in mind that if your pet becomes ill or is injured, Lifeline of Galveston County will not provide medical care for your pet. **If you do decide to introduce your pets, please follow our quarantine agreement that you agreed to in your foster application: pets should be quarantined (kept separate) from your owned pets for the following length of time: Dogs- 7 Day Quarantine, Cats- 10 Day Quarantine.** The majority of the pets we pull into our program are from the shelter, and although our municipal shelter partners do their best to minimize the risk of disease transmission, it can still happen. Generally a pet will "break" with an illness within the time-frame listed above. We don't want to put your pets at risk. Please follow the quarantine guidelines!

Additionally, to further minimize risk, we require that you do not foster any other animals (either for Lifeline of Galveston County or for other rescue groups or shelters) while caring for the foster animal unless you've received approval from Lifeline of Galveston County and the other organization.

## **Lost foster animal**

If the foster animal becomes lost, contact Lifeline of Galveston County immediately using the contact information provided to you. Then begin your search. With guidance from Lifeline of Galveston County, actively search for the animal and post missing-pet signs.

## **Adopting a foster animal**

We get it: Sometimes foster relationships lead to love. If you would like to adopt the foster animal, contact Lifeline of Galveston County and let us know you'd like to convert from foster caregiver to adopter. **Please keep in mind that you will still be required to pay the adoption fee. We fully vet all of our foster animals, and the adoption fee helps us cover those costs. Without adoption fees we can't save pets. Thanks for understanding!**

## **Help, I need to return the foster animal!**

We understand that foster relationships sometimes don't work out like we had hoped, and sometimes life throws us a curve ball. If you are unable to continue fostering or need to take a temporary break from fostering, contact Lifeline of Galveston County using the contact information provided to you. **We ask that you give at least 72 hours' notice to allow us to make arrangements for the animal, which may include finding another foster home.** However, we recognize that emergency situations do occur.

## **Finding adopters and finalizing adoptions**

One of the most gratifying experiences of fostering is finding an adoptive family who can continue the loving home experience you've provided to an animal. In some cases, foster animals may board a

transport to another city, and in other cases you may fall in love and adopt the animal yourself, but in most cases, you will play an important part in promoting the animal for adoption and finding the pet's next home.

Unless you've been specifically instructed that an animal cannot be promoted for adoption, all foster animals are available to be promoted for adoption, even if they are not yet ready to be adopted because of age or another reason. How can you promote the animal for adoption? Here are some ideas:

- If appropriate, introduce this great animal to your neighbors, friends, and acquaintances. Talk about the pet's endearing qualities and show off those positive attributes. If the pet is a dog, throw on a bandana that says "Adopt me" when you go on walks.
- You've probably already thought of this but do share lots of photos and stories about the animal on social media.
- Tell your coworkers, hang a flyer in the break room, post information about the animal on your company's intranet or internal social network where appropriate.

Lifeline of Galveston County will also be promoting the foster animal for adoption and since you are the person who knows the most about the animal's behavior in a home environment, you'll play an important part in sharing information with potential adopters.

As soon as you identify a potential adopter (or if you decide you want to adopt the foster animal yourself), notify Lifeline of Galveston County using the information provided.

Our team will also reach out to you to complete our online adoption marketing forms! Please complete those forms as quickly as possible to ensure we are creating the best online adoption profiles we possibly can for your foster pet.

## Bites and Injuries to People

We take bites and injuries seriously. If a foster animal bites and breaks skin, causing bleeding, you need to report the bite to Lifeline of Galveston County immediately or within 24 hours of when the bite occurred. Lifeline of Galveston County policy and the laws in most states require that we record and report all bites. Bites are defined as incidents when the teeth of the animal, not the nails, have broken skin.

Please follow all the steps outlined below. If you have any questions, contact Lifeline of Galveston County immediately using the contact information provided to you.

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*If other parties are involved in a biting incident, be sure to collect everyone's contact information.*

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### Bite procedure:

- In the event of a bite, or personal injury to you or anyone else, notify Lifeline of Galveston County immediately by using the contact information provided to you.
- Lifeline of Galveston County will need the contact information for all injured parties and witnesses involved in the incident.
- For our **personal injury** report, Lifeline of Galveston County will ask questions of everyone who was involved in the incident. We will ask for your assistance if the injured party is someone you

know.

## Quarantine periods:

- When a bite breaks skin and draws blood, the foster animal may need to complete a mandatory bite quarantine, which, depending on the jurisdiction requirements, can often be completed in your home. Lifeline of Galveston County will work with you to make proper arrangements.

## Medical Care

### Medications

It is not uncommon for foster animals to require some type of medication during their stay in a foster home.

When fostering an animal on medications, please make sure:

- You give the medication as instructed.
- You give all the prescribed doses and do not end medication early unless directed by Lifeline of Galveston County or a Lifeline of Galveston County authorized veterinarian.

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*If the foster animal has not responded to prescribed medications after five days (or in the time instructed by a veterinarian), please contact Lifeline of Galveston County for guidance.*

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### Common conditions

Cats and dogs from unknown circumstances who have spent time in an animal shelter environment may suffer from common, non-life-threatening ailments. Common conditions include infections, parasites, and diarrhea. If a foster animal is displaying one or more of the symptoms listed below, please follow the instructions in the “When to contact Lifeline of Galveston County” column and contact Lifeline of Galveston County using the contact information provided to you. If the animal is displaying a concerning symptom not included here, contact Lifeline of Galveston County for guidance.

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*Reminder: If you seek alternative or emergency veterinary care for the foster animal without Lifeline of Galveston County authorization, you will be responsible for any costs incurred.*

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Symptom	Common causes	Actions to take at home	When to contact Lifeline of Galveston County
Appetite loss, not eating	Stress	Continue to offer the animal's regular food and do not change the animal's diet, which can cause diarrhea.	If the animal hasn't eaten in 24 hours.
		Allow the animal time to adjust to the new environment.	If the animal has been eating well but suddenly stops eating for 12–24 hours.

Dehydration	Diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite	To test for dehydration, gently pinch the animal's skin around the scruff over the shoulder blades. A dehydrated animal's skin will stay taut and raised when released. Properly hydrated skin will return to its regular state.	If, after testing, you believe the animal is dehydrated, especially in combination with other symptoms of concern.
Diarrhea	Stress, change in food, parasites, infection	Soft stool is not unusual for the first few days after arriving in a foster home.	If the animal has liquid stool.  <b>If the animal has bloody or mucoid stool, follow emergency contact protocols (below).</b>
Discharge, eyes, or nose	Upper respiratory infections	Place the animal in a bathroom with a hot shower running (do not place a cat in the shower).  Place the animal in a carrier, cover it with a towel and place a nebulizer or humidifier under the towel.  Monitor the animal's eating habits to ensure adequate food intake.	If the discharge becomes colored.  <b>If the animal starts to breathe with an open mouth or wheeze, follow emergency contact protocols (below).</b>
Ears, scratching, swelling or irritation	Ear mites, ear infection	Examine the animal's ears for dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds.	If you see dark discharge in the animal's ears, or the scratching or head shaking persists without signs of discharge.  If the animal has irritated, swollen or reddened ears.
Hair loss	Dermatitis, ringworm, mange	While it's normal for animals to have thin fur around their lips and eyelids and in front of the ears, examine the animal regularly for patchy hair loss or thinning hair on the body.	If you notice patches of hair loss or thinning hair, which may or may not include irritated skin.
Lethargy	Illness or injury	Activity levels will vary depending on personality and age. Keeping an activity log can help you notice whether the foster animal is less active than normal.	If lethargy is combined with other symptoms, such as loss of appetite or eye or nose discharge.  <b>If the foster animal cannot be roused, seems weak or is unable to stand, follow emergency contact protocols (below).</b>
Urination pain or strain	Stress, infection, obstruction	Animals may resist urinating in a new foster home because of stress. Keep the animal in a quiet room, with a clean litter box available for cats and additional leash walks for dogs.	If the animal hasn't urinated in more than 24 hours.  <b>If the animal is straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying when urinating, follow emergency contact protocols (below), as this can be a life -threatening condition.</b>
Vomiting	Hairballs (cats), upset stomach	Sometimes cats will vomit up a thick, tubular hairball with bile or other liquid, or have one or two vomiting episodes while otherwise acting normally. This is normal.  For dogs and cats, monitor to ensure that the animal is eating normally.	If the animal is vomiting in conjunction with other symptoms, including loss of appetite, diarrhea, or lethargy.

There is additional detailed medical information in the species-specific foster essentials' manuals available to. You can access those by visiting [www.lifelinetx.org/resrouces](http://www.lifelinetx.org/resrouces).

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*If the foster animal displays any of these symptoms, contact Lifeline of Galveston County using the information provided to you when you picked up the animal.*

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## What constitutes a medical emergency in an animal?

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

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Symptoms of parvovirus in dogs (typically experienced in puppies): bloody diarrhea, vomiting, weakness, high fever (above 103.5)
- Extreme dehydration: dry mucous membranes, weakness, vomiting, tenting of the skin (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy: weak, wobbly, or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Broken bones
- 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 or continual vomiting
- Inability to urinate

**If the foster animal displays any of these symptoms, contact Lifeline of Galveston County at 409-797-6248.** 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.

If you are having trouble getting through the phoneline while having an emergency and it is between 7 AM and 7 PM Wednesday through Sunday, you are welcome to drive up to the adoption center. If it is between 7 AM and 11 AM or 5 PM and 7 PM on a Monday or Tuesday, you are welcome to drive to the adoption center.

If it is after 7pm and you cannot reach LOGC and you think the foster animal may incur permanent damage or pass away if not seen by a veterinarian immediately, please proceed to the approved emergency clinic listed below and call Lifeline of Galveston County on the way (unless this is a kitten under 8 weeks, in which case follow the [fading kitten protocol](#)).

**If your foster pet is experiencing a medical emergency & you are unable to reach us after the hours of 8pm, please call Pearland 288 Animal Emergency Clinic of Silverlake at (713) 482-4592 unless this is a kitten under 8 weeks, in which case follow our [fading kitten protocol](#) (the emergency clinic will not be able to do anything else for the kitten!).**

## Behavioral Care

### Common conditions

Cats and dogs from unknown circumstances who have spent time in an animal shelter environment will have various behavioral traits that can be worked on or managed while in a foster home. If the



animal is displaying a concerning behavior not included here, contact Lifeline of Galveston County for guidance.

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*Reminder: If you seek alternative or emergency veterinary care for the foster animal without Lifeline of Galveston County authorization, you will be responsible for any costs incurred.*

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Behavior	Common explanations	Actions to take at home	When to contact Lifeline of Galveston County
Excessive vocalization	Stress, boredom, excess stimuli	<p>Increase the animal's mental and physical stimulation (food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks, etc.).</p> <p>Allow the foster animal time to decompress in the new environment.</p> <p>If the foster animal is reacting to passersby outside, try removing access and/or blocking the view.</p>	If additional guidance is needed.
High energy	Personality, age, boredom	<p>Increase the animal's mental and physical stimulation (food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks, etc.).</p> <p>Add more physical activities to the animal's routine to use up excess energy.</p>	<p>If you need more ideas for mental or physical stimulation.</p> <p>If it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental or physical stimulation.</p>
Overstimulation	Stress, excess energy or stimuli, adjustment to new environment	<p>Increase the animal's mental and physical stimulation (food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks, etc.).</p> <p>Allow the foster animal time to decompress in the new environment by setting the pet up in a small area (e.g., separate room, crate, bathroom). Remember, the animal is coming from a chaotic and loud environment and may need time to adjust.</p>	If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting, or when it starts to become unmanageable.
Potty issues	Stress, fear, adjustment to new environment, marking, not house-trained	<p>The foster animal will need time to adjust to your schedule and routine.</p> <p>Create good habits and ensure that the foster animal has plenty of opportunities to relieve herself. This means additional walks for dogs and clean litter boxes for cats.</p> <p>Use enzymatic cleaners when cleaning up an accident. It reduces the likelihood of the foster animal hitting that same</p>	<p>If there's a potential medical concern, such as incontinence or excessive urination for more than 24 hours.</p> <p>If additional guidance is needed.</p>

		spot.	
Resource guarding	Adjusting to living in a home, past experiences, need for space or safe boundaries.	Always feed the foster animal separately and on his own, especially if there are resident pets or children in the home. The goal is to create safe boundaries.	If the behavior is redirected toward you or someone else in your household, or without any cause.  If resource guarding is not manageable with separation.
Rough play and play biting	Excess energy, lack of in home manners	Redirect the animal's attention to a proper outlet, like a toy. If redirection does not work, stop engaging or giving the animal attention.  Reward the behaviors you want to see (positive reinforcement), such as when the animal is engaging in play politely.  Increase the animal's mental and physical stimulation (food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks, etc.).	If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting, or when it starts to become unmanageable.  If it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental or physical stimulation.  <b>If the bite breaks skin, contact Lifeline of Galveston County immediately.</b>
Separation anxiety, isolation distress	Stress, past experiences, decompression, fear	Allow the foster animal time to decompress in the new environment and build trust with you. The pet needs a space where he can feel safe and the time to acclimate to your routine.  Practice coming and going from your home and do not make a big production about it.  Work to build the animal's confidence by increasing mental and physical stimulation (food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks, etc.).	If the foster pet is self-harming.  If it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental or physical stimulation and/or supervision.
Shy or fearful	Stress, past experience, low confidence, lack of socialization, decompression	Allow the foster animal time to decompress in the new environment and build trust with you. The pet needs a space where he can feel safe and the time to acclimate to your routine.  Let the foster pet come to you on her terms, but in the meantime, let her know that you are there to provide encouragement and treats until she starts to trust you.	If additional guidance is needed.  If the behavior escalates to defensiveness or when it starts to become unmanageable.

If you encounter behavioral concerns with the foster animal, contact Lifeline of Galveston County using the contact information provided to you.

We ask that you work through these issues to the best of your ability with the assistance of Lifeline of Galveston County staff and consultants. If these concerns are beyond your ability to manage, you can notify Lifeline of Galveston County and return the foster animal.

## **Emergency conditions**

If the animal is exhibiting extreme behavioral concerns that put another animal or person at risk for or has resulted in bites or severe injury, contact Lifeline of Galveston County immediately using the emergency contact information provided to you when you picked up the animal. Some behavioral emergencies are:

- Biting, aggressive lunging, attempting to bite
- Fighting with or biting other animals
- Unexpected guarding behavior (as opposed to a known condition for which a behavioral modification plan has been provided) or guarding behavior under treatment that escalates
- rapidly