



Foster Home Responsibilities and Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in helping the abandoned, unwanted, and rescued animals in Kings County. Our foster homes experience great joy and deep satisfaction when they see that through their efforts a neglected animal gets a second chance at life and a new opportunity to share his or her unconditional love with people who care.

What is Foster Care: Being a foster home means sharing your home with a rescued animal: providing food, shelter, toys, walks, and lots of attention, until the animal is ready to go to his/her permanent home. We count on our foster homes to evaluate temperament and observe behaviors in a variety of situations, and we welcome those updates so we can assess the animal and enhance the description on the web site. Positive reinforcement training is encouraged. Most foster care situations require 2 weeks to a month of residential foster care, and in some cases where the animal is ill or due to age, several months. In rare cases, you must be able to cope with the possibility that The Kings SPCA Halfway Home and our doctors may find it necessary to put the animal to sleep—always for a reason we discuss at length (e.g., unwarranted aggression with other animals and people, unprovoked biting of people, and terminal illness)—but never because we couldn't place the animal. Still interested? Here are the details.

What You Need to Foster Rescued Dogs: The most important requirements are time and attention. You must be willing to include the animal in family activities, allow the dog to live as a house dog with much human companionship, and provide some daily one-on-one time with your rescue, including cuddles, play, and walks on leash (depending on age), with our secure collar and Kings SPCA Halfway Home tag on the dog.

Our animals must be kept indoors (with exception for exercise and elimination). A fenced yard must be of appropriate height (4-6', as some dogs are jumpers) and in secure condition. If it has a gate, the gate must be locked when the dog is in the yard to prevent someone from opening the gate and letting the dog loose. At no time are our dogs to be confined in the yard while caretakers are away.

Apartment homes can also be excellent foster homes, with proper attention to providing several leash-walks daily for the dog as well as adequate off-leash exercise in a safe area like a dog park. We have also found that most modern apartment complexes are now gated which protects our dogs as well as residents. The reason we do not allow the leash-walk approach to single-dwelling homes without fences is the danger of someone forgetting and letting the dog out or leaving a door open for the dog to escape through. These are rescued dogs who have sometimes been runners, and we do not want people to have to chase and capture our dog in what can be a dangerous situation for both dog and pursuers.

Crates are an invaluable piece of equipment for rescue people. A Vari-Kennel is a great aid in transporting and isolating dogs. It is also a cozy den and a place of refuge for most dogs. Whenever possible, we will loan foster homes a crate.

The Kings SPCA Halfway Home recommends that all resident dogs be inoculated for kennel cough along with their regular vaccinations, as many rescues coming in from shelters contract this disease and are being treated for it. We cannot stress this enough: the incidence of kennel cough in dogs coming from Shelters is increasing. However, we always recommend bordetella inoculation for kennel cough in all resident dogs because the disease now has some 600 strains: it can be picked up by your own dogs on a simple walk in the neighborhood. Though kennel cough is treatable with medication and rest, it has become so virulent that dogs can too easily go quickly into pneumonia. Please have your veterinarian include the bordetella as part of the regular vaccination regimen. Finally, the Kings SPCA Halfway Home requires that all resident dogs in the foster home are neutered or spayed, and sometimes when our dogs are very ill, we need to wait to spay/neuter them until they are well. But, also, spaying and neutering your dogs is better for them both medically and behaviorally. Talk this over with your own veterinarians, if you have any doubts.

What You Need to Foster Rescued Cats: Fostered cats/kittens must be kept indoors at all times, and must be kept separated from other animals in your home. Kittens can carry hidden viruses, which your cats (particularly those under 3 years of age) may contract from contact with them. Do not allow them to share litter boxes with your cats, and do not share a litter scoop.

Foster caretakers provide the necessary supplies for cats/kittens, including a litter box, litter, and a litter scoop; wet/dry cat food, a scratching post or other scratching item, and toys. It's amazing how much a kitten can gain from being in a home environment for 2 or more weeks until he/she weighs the required weight for surgery.

Kids and Dogs: If you have children, never introduce a new rescued dog to them without assistance. Never leave a rescued dog and a child unsupervised. Sometimes, even though we make every attempt to uncover all available history on each dog, we may not have the full truth about the dog, and he or she may be a fear biter or dislike kids because of prior abuse from children who had not been taught how to treat animals kindly. It is preferred that foster homes have experience with pet dogs, and that children in the foster family are over the age of 5 years, though we realize many children even younger have a special rapport with animals. We will work with the family and dog on a case-by-case decision.

How Expenses Are Handled: The foster home is responsible for food, toys, and in-home bathing and grooming; we are happy to provide tax receipts for expenses and will reimburse for professional grooming (with prior approval), any purchase of collars, leashes, etc; please keep your receipts for all expenses. The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff usually transport the dogs for veterinary care, though foster homes are encouraged to participate in those transports as well because the dog is more comfortable with the foster family. Finally, we will reimburse you for approved emergency veterinary care and medications (again, save all your receipts). If you cannot reach a Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff member in case of emergency, you should take the injured or ill dog to the nearest vet who can stabilize the animal until The Kings SPCA Halfway Home can authorize further treatment. At no time, however, do foster homes make final medical decisions for our program animals; you don't want that responsibility, and we have years of experience in making those decisions with the clinics.

Your Pets and Your Rescued Dog: The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff will discuss with you the best methods for introducing the new cat/dog into your household. Though many cats and dogs, especially those used to their owner's rescue work, welcome the rescued animal, keep in mind that there may be a period of adjustment for the first few days up to 2 – 3 weeks depending on the rescued animal's history and personality and the resident animal's willingness to accept foster animal. During this time, the rescued cat/dog may appear shy or submissive. Your foster may also have been hit, dragged by the collar, or kicked, which you'll know immediately from his behavior around you and your family. Take it slow and easy; let the animal learn to regain trust; give him hugs and kisses as he/she can tolerate them; he/she may be surprised at first, but will eventually relish the attention and return it. As he/she becomes more confident, he/she may change his behavior towards resident pets, beginning to play and explore the pecking order. As the resident animal accepts the foster, the bonding becomes beneficial for both. Unless the animals get along famously from the beginning, feed your pets and your rescued animal separately; consider feeding the rescued dog in a crate if you notice any food aggression between dogs. Be careful when dispensing treats or other high-value items like rawhides or favorite toys. Sometimes what is thought to be food aggression is actually just a territorial imperative that will take care of itself as the pecking order is established and the animals relax. Keeping this in mind, always supervise the interactions of your rescued animal with other pets.

Most Frequently Asked Questions

"Don't you get attached to the animal?"—Yes, usually, and that is what we want for both you and the cat/dog. It's fun to get to know new animals, and for your foster animal and resident animal(s) to make new friends, too. Often, your resident cat/dog will be revitalized in the presence of the rescued cat/dog, and you will witness amazing developments in both animals. It's educational to see how different dogs react to training, how they play with and teach one another. It's also educational to see when any territorial problems develop and learn to deal with those, usually allowing the dogs to work thing out within reason, calling for crate time when the problem needs to be dealt with. You will fall in love with your foster animal, which is necessary to his or her rehabilitation and also leads us to the next question.

“How can you give him/her up?” – This is probably the number one reason why a lot of caring people do not offer their homes for foster care; they are afraid giving the animal up will hurt too much. However, it’s a hard truth, but without enough foster homes, we cannot rescue and save these animals; they will die in the shelters if we don’t have space for them in our program. It helps to think of your foster animal as your neighbor’s cat/dog that you are keeping during a vacation. Sure, you like him and will take really good care of him, but when your neighbor gets home, you will give the dog back! Some of us think of ourselves as the rescued animal’s ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle’, a loving guardian for the cat/dog on his or her way to a permanent home. This is an animal who ultimately belongs to someone else, who is in our care for only a short time. When you give him or her up, it will be to a ‘forever home’ that this cat/dog has been waiting for—and you will be opening a space for the next rescue that needs you so desperately. There is ALWAYS another rescue animal. But, also, after many years of fostering, your fellow volunteers can assure you there is nothing quite as moving as seeing your beloved foster animal happy, healthy, loved, and cherished by the forever home that really wanted him or her and in some cases really needed your animal. It’s contagious, and we hope you will be hooked on fostering, too.

“What if I don’t think I have enough room for a foster dog?” – Our rescued dogs are all different sizes, can take up very little space, and won’t be with you very long as indicated earlier. You might be surprised by how quickly they work themselves into the family situation and your hearts: all they really need is a space to recuperate until they are ready for their forever homes, and they are touchingly grateful.

“What if I’m afraid my foster animal who is ill might die?” – We ease foster homes into the work very gradually. To be honest, though, we can tell you that if you foster long enough, you may very well eventually lose a foster even with all our efforts to save him or her. Tragically, most of us who have fostered for a long time have gone through the pain of loss because, after all, most rescues are in the program because they have been neglected, abandoned, and abused: and that includes previous owners not giving medical care. The illness is not the animal’s fault, and sometimes the weeks or months he or she is with us are the only medical care, peace, and love the rescued animal has ever known. We have held them in our arms when they crossed over and wept tears for them. It happens. But in every case, if we hadn’t intervened, the animals would have had a far worse experience, dying on a cold steel table at the end of a needle in an overworked shelter putting down dozens of animals every day, or alone, frightened, and sick on the streets. The animals we do lose in our program knew we loved them and did the best we could for them; and we are humbled by their sweetness and understanding even as they cross over. It is, in fact, a very humbling experience, and we’re never sorry we tried to help these animals. Most of your fosters are not only going to make it, but are going to thrive, become unbelievably gorgeous, go on to a wonderful new life, and make you very proud.

“What if I really like the dog and want to keep him?”—This does happen. Sometimes the “perfect pet” comes along, and everyone in the family just seems to agree that theirs is the “perfect home,” Fortunately, qualifying as a Foster Home usually qualifies you as an Adopter as well. The Kings SPCA Halfway Home is concerned to place our animals with their needs and preferences as important as the adopters’. Sometimes the animal tells us which home is right; and we respect that. Should this happen, and we all agree, then the foster home will pay the adoption fee, complete the Final Adoption Agreement, and assume ownership of the animal. Please think about this carefully, though, as often adoption means the family feels it no longer has foster space available, and we desperately need those homes.

Other Things You Need to Know

If you have a problem or a question, call The Kings SPCA Halfway Home! If the dog bites someone, you must call The Kings SPCA and report this immediately. Though some biting is fear biting and can be corrected, no dog will be allowed to remain in the program if he/she has become aggressive. If the dog escapes the fence, fights with other dogs, won’t leave your cat alone, or has other behavior problems, we need to know this. The same goes with a cat that won’t use it’s litter box, attack family members, or won’t get along with other cats. We may be able to help with management or training suggestions, and will take these facts into consideration when screening potential adoptive homes for the dog.

When your foster animal arrives, The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff will tell you everything they know about the animal and the animal’s history. The cat/dog will have a collar and a tag (with exception of kittens) with name, “Kings SPCA” with the program number, and the phone number on it, which shall

remain on the animal at all times (except during bathing). If the foster home picks up the cat/dog at the clinic or from a volunteer, be sure the collar with The Kings SPCA tag is on the dog; if not, put them on immediately. The cat/dog will be vaccinated and neutered; any health problems will be fully discussed. The Coordinators will keep in touch with the foster home through E-mail and by phone; we need occasional updates on the animal's progress, so the foster home would need to be available to exchange information with the Coordinators at least every couple of weeks. Foster homes need to administer prescription medications, follow all veterinarian directions, alert The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff of any medical emergencies or if the dog is being taken out of town or out of state for family visits or recreation. Foster homes also need to observe the animal's behavior and report any concerns, including if the dog seems to be a runner or actually escapes so we can assist in recovery. If the latter happens, the foster family must call us immediately as time is of the essence in capturing our dog.

The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff are the only persons who can approve a permanent home for your foster cat/dog. If you have a family member or friend interested in adoption, or you meet a potential adopter, by all means, encourage him or her to apply and provide him or her with the phone number and/or web site. Please contact The Kings SPCA and give us that person's phone number. You must not promise or place a cat/dog yourself. The Kings SPCA has the paperwork necessary to finalize all adoptions. Foster homes give our dogs the love and renewed trust they need to move on to their new homes with confidence. We appreciate the work our fosters do more than can ever be satisfactorily expressed. In return, we appreciate our foster homes trust in us as well: the coordinators are extremely careful in our adoption procedures, and though we welcome our foster homes love for and concerned interest in and suggestions about our animals, because we are a charitable organization overseen by the IRS and health organizations, the coordinators make the final decisions about the actual adoptions of our programs animals.

The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff are the only persons who can accept a dog into the program. If you learn of an animal in need of rescue, please notify us as soon as possible with the information, and we will take steps to work with you to bring the cat/dog into the program.

Because we are responsible to our donors, animals, and program welfare, The Kings SPCA Halfway Home staff are the only persons who make medical decisions for program dogs. In an emergency, foster homes take their dogs to a clinic, but must call or e-mail the coordinators right away so we can work with you and the clinic during the dog's distress.

We deeply appreciate your concern for animals and your willingness to become involved with foster care. If you think you would like to do this important work in helping us save and rehabilitate our precious animals, please complete the foster application. Thank You!!