

Oconee County Animal Services

Dog Foster Program Manual



Thank you so much for your interest in fostering dogs for the Oconee County Animal Shelter. By opening up your home to foster dogs, 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 home questionnaire, a dog foster coordinator will get in touch with you.

Choosing Your Foster Dog

A foster team member will work with you to select a dog that meets your specific requirements. We will always do our best to match you with an animal that fits with your lifestyle and schedule.

The foster team member will meet you at the shelter and introduce you to some dogs. Together, you and the foster team member will decide if the dog is the right fit for you. Be honest: If you aren't comfortable with anything about the dog you may be fostering, please tell the foster team member before you take the dog home.

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

Supplies You'll Need

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

- At least one bowl for food and one for water
- A supply of dry dog food
- A collar with an ID tag and a leash
- A dog bed or blanket
- A crate
- Treats
- Toys
- Grooming supplies

Preparing for Your Foster Dog

Dog proof your home just as you would baby proof your home! All cleaning supplies and medications should be kept out of reach of jumping and climbing dogs. Place all small chewable items out of reach. Put food away so your foster dog will not be tempted to ‘counter surf’.

When you take your foster dog home, he may be frightened or unsure about what’s happening, so it’s important not to overwhelm him. Prepare a special area for the foster dog to help ease his adjustment into a new home environment. Sometimes it is better to confine the foster dog to a small room or area at first, to let him adjust before giving him free reign in your home. We will also provide you with a crate. If your eyes are not on the foster dog, he should be safely in his crate.

During the first couple of weeks, minimize the people and pet introductions to your foster dog, so that 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 her own where she can stay while getting used to all the new sounds and smells. Sometimes, too much stimulation can cause a dog to behave unexpectedly toward a person or resident animal. It’s also important to establish a daily routine of regularly scheduled feedings, potty breaks and walk/play times. Animals take comfort in having a routine they can count on.

Resident Pets and Your Foster Dog

If you have companion animals, we will do our best to ensure that your foster dog is friendly with other dogs and cats. Depending upon the dog, we may also require a meet and greet at the shelter before you take your chosen foster dog home.

Introductions should always be done in a neutral environment. Do not allow dogs to immediately go nose-to-nose. Instead, take them on a long ‘get to know you’ walk. Watch for signs of stress or fear: panting, avoidance, tucked tail, yawning, freezing, drooling, trembling. Keep the initial interactions short and sweet and always keep the dogs on leash until you are comfortable.

If you have a fenced yard, take the foster dog to the backyard to sniff and eliminate first. Then put the foster dog inside and let the resident dogs into the yard to investigate the smells left by the new dog.

Above all, don’t leave your foster dog unattended in your home with your personal pets until you are comfortable that all the animals can interact safely.

Children and Your Foster Dog

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.
- Pick up all your toys. Some animals 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 or cats who cross their path.

Feeding Your Foster Dog

All foster dogs should be fed a diet of dry food, unless otherwise specified by the foster liaison. Feed your foster dog twice daily. The amount will be based on the age and weight of your foster dog. As a general rule, adult dogs get ½ cup per 20lbs. Make sure the dog always has access to fresh, clean water. Always feed your foster dog separately from your resident dogs. You may want to try feeding your foster dog in his crate. Try to feed the same food. If you must switch foods, make the transition slowly to avoid stomach upset.

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 dog to bond with each other. Keep in mind, though, that not all animals like to share, so only give these treats when your foster dog is confined to his/her own area.

Crate Training Your Foster Dog

Crates provide safe havens and dens for dogs. They calm them and can help prevent destructive chewing, barking and house training mistakes. The acceptable amount of time a puppy or dog can be in a crate depends upon many factors such as age and medical conditions.

Rigorous exercise should be given before and after any long periods in the crate and safe chew toys should be in the crate at all times. Kongs, antlers, horns, marrow bones, bully sticks and nylabones are generally safe options.

The crate should always be a safe and positive place! Never use the crate as a punishment and never force a dog into a crate. Use treats, toys and positive reinforcement to teach them that the crate is not a bad place. Ideally, foster dogs should sleep in their crates overnight. For the first few nights a new foster dog is in your home, they may find it comforting to sleep in their crate near you.

House Training Your Foster Dog

DO: Supervise your foster dog. Remember, if your foster dog potties in the house you gave him too much freedom too soon. Watch for ‘pre-potty’ signs (sniffing, circling, walking with stiff back legs). Heap on the praise (and treats) when your foster dog gets it right. Take your foster dog out frequently, especially after meals and indoor play sessions. Put your foster dog in his crate when your eyes aren’t on him.

DON’T: Yell at your foster dog if you find a mess. If you catch her in the act, it’s okay to startle her by clapping or making a noise in hopes of stopping the behavior long enough to get her outside. Never rub your foster dog’s face in the mess. In addition to this making your foster dog fear you, she’s incapable of making the connection that it’s the act of soiling INDOORS you object to. To her, you just really dislike pee and poo and she will simply start hiding it from you.

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 dog. The basic idea is to reward desirable behaviors and ignore unwanted behaviors.

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

Some foster dogs will have behavioral issues. Some of these behavior challenges are separation anxiety, destruction of property, fear issues or aggression toward other animals. We will only place animals with behavioral issues with a person who feels comfortable working with the animal on his/her particular issues. We will provide that person with all the necessary information so that proper care and training can be given to the foster animal.

If you feel unable to manage any behavior that your foster animal is exhibiting, please contact the foster coordinator to discuss the issue. We will guide you and help in every way that we can. If the behavior is extreme enough to warrant use of a trainer, we will provide one for you.

Safety Requirements for Foster Dogs

Foster dogs must live indoors, not outside. Please do not leave your foster dog outside unsupervised, even if you have a fenced yard. We ask that you supervise your foster dog when he is outside at all times to ensure that he doesn't escape or have any negative interactions with other people or animals. Your foster dog is only allowed to be off-leash in an enclosed backyard that is completely fenced in.

When walking or hiking with your foster dog, please keep her on leash at all times. This means that **your foster dog is not allowed to go to off-leash dog parks or other off-leash dog areas.** We do not know how your foster dog will act in these situations, or how other dogs will react, and we need to ensure that all animals are safe at all times. In addition, we don't know if the other dogs they encounter are vaccinated appropriately or carry diseases, so it is best if your foster dog does not meet any unknown dogs. Having recently come from a shelter setting, foster dogs can be vulnerable health-wise.

Promoting Your Foster Dog

Social Media: Promoting your foster dog is crucial to his eventual adoption. The more exposure he receives, the less time he will spend in foster care. An online presence is the most effective way to get dogs adopted in a timely manner. Post pictures, stories and videos to your personal social media. Friends of Oconee County Animal Shelter GA has a Facebook page and Instagram account, so be sure to tag and share all your posts using @friendsofocasga

On the Town: Take your foster to dog friendly places wearing their 'Adopt Me' vest. Remember, **off leash dog parks are not allowed**, so try walking downtown or through your neighborhood, going to dog friendly restaurants & cafes, parks, greenways or the UGA campus.

Promotional Flyers: Create a flyer with your foster dog's picture, name, breed, age, gender and personality info to post on bulletin boards and hand out to potential adopters that you meet.

Adoption Events and Your Foster Dog

We have multiple adoption events each month. As a foster you are committing to attend at least one event a month, but you are welcome to attend as many events as you like. Again, exposure is the key to getting your foster dog adopted. **You will receive an email update from the dog foster liaison advising you of the times and locations of the upcoming events.**

Event Rules & Guidelines: Bring the foster's 'Adopt Me' vest, leash and promotional flyers. Be cautious and aware of the event's environment and be mindful of how people (particularly children) approach your foster dog.

ALWAYS FOLLOW THE THREE FOOT RULE. Dogs cannot come within three feet of each other, go nose to nose or meet other dogs in any capacity during an event. This is for the safety of the animals, volunteers and the public. If a potential adopter wants a "meet and greet" with their personal pet, simply walk to a neutral location and take the dogs on a 'get to know you walk'. Watch closely for signs of stress or aggression.

Adoption Procedures

You will receive adoption applications when you pick up your foster dog. **If you find someone who wants to adopt, have them fill out the application and then notify the foster coordinator** and they will guide you through the rest of the process.

Veterinary Care

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

If your foster dog needs to go to the veterinarian, please notify the foster coordinator as soon as possible. Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster dog to a veterinarian without authorization from the foster coordinator or shelter manager.

Signs of Illness and What to do Next

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

- Eye discharge
- Coughing and nasal discharge
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Dehydration
- Vomiting
- Pain or strain while urinating

Diarrhea
Frequent ear scratching
Swollen, irritated ears
Hair loss

If your foster dog is displaying one or more of these signs, please contact the foster coordinator as soon as possible. These ailments can worsen if left untreated.

Criteria for Emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a dog? 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: 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 there)
- 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

Contact Information

Foster Coordinator- Saskia Thompson	706-340-5000
Foster Coordinator- Nina Wingrove	706-495-7096
Shelter Manager- Officer Crystal Berisko	706-818-9505
Oconee County Animal Shelter	706-769-3956
Hawthorne Animal Hospital	706-613-7877
Barber Creek Veterinary Hospital	706-549-7387
UGA Emergency Hospital	706-542-3221
ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center	888-426-4435