

# Fostering For Fearful Cats



## Tips & Tricks:

- Always let the cat touch you first!
- Use interactive toys like wand toys to engage with the cat first before trying to touch the cat with your hands.
- Don't use a closed crate for fearful cats! This removes any sense of control that they may feel, and prevents them from becoming comfortable in your home.
- Place food away from the litterbox to encourage your foster cat to move around the room and explore.
- Place toys around the room. Watch for signs that your foster cat is moving and playing without you at night

**\*Refer back to the "Fearful Cat Information" page in your foster manual for body language signs and more information about how to read your foster cat.**

Most cats coming into the shelter have unknown history, either coming in as strays or from our rescue partners in other states.

Often, we see cats that are experiencing stress and change in their lives and have a tendency to hide or show fearful behaviors. The time for socialization has passed, but these cats need to be allowed time and patience to show us their real selves. Foster care gives them the best place to settle and allows us to assess their socialization history, behavior and needs.

## Confined Space- What does this mean?:

Be sure to set up the cat in a small room- the smaller and quieter the better. Be sure to refer back to the "Are You Prepared" page in your foster manual for the best ways to set up the space. Provide a "small" hiding place for the foster cat- hiding is often a coping strategy for fearful fosters, and you want an easily assessible spot like a carrier, feral box, or box with a blanket draped over it, rather than under the bed or behind an appliance. Do not use a living room, or allow your fearful cat free run of the house.

## The First 48 Hours:

When first bringing a fearful foster cat home, enter the room, close the door, get the entire room set up with the litter box, food, and water. Make sure all windows and floor grates are closed. THEN open the cat carrier. Do not force the cat out of the carrier- let the foster pet come out on their terms. This can take several hours to a day or so. Do not try to pet or interact with the cat until they solicit attention from you.

## After 48 Hours:

Feed the cat on a schedule. Leave the food available for about 30 minutes and then remove it when you leave the room. This allows the cat to associate you (and therefore humans) with something positive like food! If the cat won't eat while your in the room, spend 10 minutes with the cat when you bring in the food, then leave the cat alone for 30 minutes. If the food is untouched, leave the food available overnight.

## What is Flooding? :

Flooding is prolonged exposure to a stimulus, regardless of the cat's response, until they stop reacting. Many think handling a frightened cat desensitizing them to touch. True desensitization is done when a cat is not fearful and can tolerate and even enjoy the interaction. Flooding causes learned helplessness and emotional damage, teaching fearful cats to tolerate touch and contact instead of seeking it. NEAS does not use forced handling and relies on positive reinforcement.

## Expectations:

Fearful cats don't respond to the same behavior modification as kittens. Fostering a fearful cat allows them to settle into a more comforting environment, and for us to understand them and what they're ideal adopted home. Remember that fearful cats can take several weeks or even a few months to fully acclimate and adjust. If you have any concerns, questions or need more guidance, reach out to your Foster Care Coordinator.



**\*As long as the foster cat is eating, drinking, using the litterbox and not showing signs of illness, it is generally safe to leave them in their hiding place. They will venture out when they are ready.**

## **If you don't see improvement after one week, try these next steps and reach out to your Foster Care Coordinator:**

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- Try offering more canned food- the stinkier, the better. If still not taking the food from you or eating, try warming the food up in the microwave- this will make it more enticing.
- Try meat-flavored baby foods like ham, turkey or chicken, and cat liquid treat supplements like Delectables Bisque and Friskies Gravy Sensations- these are higher value treats and can be invaluable as enticements.
- Try hand feeding. If they are still too nervous to approach or take treats from you use a long-handled spoon or a tongue depressor.
- Utilize Feliway pheromone sprays or plug-ins-Your Foster Care Coordinator can supply you with these per request.
- Provide a perch at least three feet off the ground- this can be a cat tower, a chair- anything the cat can climb on to. Cats are natural predators, and this will help them to feel more comfortable.
- Try introducing any resident cats slowly- refer back to the "Intro to Other Pets" page in your foster manual- to see if the foster cat will pick up on social cues from another confident, people-friendly cat.
- Refer back to the "Fearful Cat Information" and "Body Language" pages of the foster manual. Record any negative or positive changes you see in the cat's behavior. This will help Adoption Counselors explain your foster cat to it's new family, and Foster Care Coordinator and Behavior team to provide the best support. Behaviors to record are daily habits of your foster cat, any acts of aggressive behavior and what led up to it, and any progress made in terms of medical improvements and social interactions.

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