
FOSTER CARE ESSENTIALS FOR CATS

FIX WEST TEXAS

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Table of Contents

SECTION 1: PREPARING FOR A FOSTER CAT	1
Supplies you'll need	1
Cat-proofing your home	1
Resident pets	2
Cat-to-cat introductions	2
Before bringing the foster cat home:	2
After you bring the foster cat home:	2
Dog-to-cat introductions	2
Before bringing the foster cat home:	2
After bringing the foster cat home:	2
Children and cats	3
SECTION 2: DAY-TO-DAY CARE	3
Feeding	3
Litter box care	4
Grooming	4
Mental stimulation and exercise	4
Housing and outdoor access	4
Safety requirements	5
First 48 hours	5
SECTION 3: MEDICAL AND EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS	5
Medications	5
Signs of illness and what to do next	5
Appetite loss or not eating	6
Dehydration	6
Diarrhea	6
Discharge: eyes and nose	6
Ears: scratching, swelling or irritation	7
Hair loss	7
Lethargy	8
Potty issues: pain, strain or missing the litter box	8
Vomiting	9
Criteria for emergencies	9

Emergency response and foster caregiver’s next steps	9
SECTION 4: BEHAVIOR SUPPORT	10
Common behavioral concerns and what to do next	10
Excessive vocalization	10
High energy	10
Overstimulation	11
Litter box issues due to behavior	12
Resource guarding	13
Rough play and play biting	13
Separation anxiety and isolation distress	13
Shy or fearful cat	14
Cat body language	15
Emergency conditions	16
SECTION 5: THE FOSTER CAT’S ADOPTIVE HOME	16
Finding adopters and finalizing adoptions	16
Saying goodbye	16
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	17

SECTION 1: PREPARING FOR A FOSTER CAT

Taking home a new foster cat is incredibly exciting. Not only does it prevent cats from overstaying in a shelter environment, it adds value to foster cats' social, emotional and physical well-being, and provides valuable information to interested adopters looking for a new cat to add to their family.

Keep in mind, though, that humans can see the benefits of foster care immediately, but foster cats may initially be frightened or even unsure about what exactly is happening.

In this section, we help prepare you and your home for the foster cat so you are ready to go. Let's get started.

Supplies you'll need

We greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for fostering a cat.

Here's what you'll need to help the foster cat make a smooth transition to living in your home:

- **At least one bowl for dry food and one for water:** Stainless steel or ceramic tend to work best.
- **A supply of wet and dry cat food:** All cats are fed dry food unless a special diet is needed. It's also important to include wet food because it is higher in protein and hydrating.
- **A soft place to sleep:** You don't need to invest a lot of money in bedding. Cats generally get creative and find a comfy spot. Just put out blankets or towels in the areas where you prefer the cat to sleep.
- **Uncovered litter box:** Be mindful of the cat's size when selecting a litter box.
- **Litter:** Please use clumping litter, unless the cat requires an alternative type.
- **Scratching posts or trays:** Try different types (e.g., cardboard, carpet) to see the cat's preference. Providing places to scratch helps deter the cat from scratching on furniture.
- **Cat treats:** Giving treats is a good way to build a deeper bond with the foster cat.
- **Cat toys:** Cats can make playthings of everyday items, such as a cardboard box or a crumpled piece of paper. You can also purchase cat toys they may enjoy.

Cat-proofing your home

Before bringing the foster cat home, there are a couple things you can do to cat-proof your home to help keep the cat safe and prevent your valuables from being damaged. Here are some tips:

- Relocate any knickknacks or breakable items that a cat could knock down.
- Move houseplants out of the cat's reach. Many houseplants can be toxic to cats.
- Protect any aquariums or cages that house small animals. Keep in mind that cats are hunters by nature.
- Move electrical and phone wires out of reach. Cats may chew on or get tangled in them.
- Keep the toilet seat down and keep the lids on trash cans and food containers. Cats love to explore, so it's up to you to prevent the foster cat from getting into mischief.

Remember, never underestimate a cat's abilities.

Resident pets

Fix West Texas strongly recommends that you keep your own pets separate from foster animals for the health and safety of all the animals.

Please be aware that cats often come to Fix West Texas with unknown histories and if your cats are young or not fully vaccinated, they may be at risk of contracting disease. In these cases, we recommend that you wait 7-14 days before introducing the foster cat to your resident cats. If one of your pets becomes ill or injured, Fix West Texas will not provide medical care for your pet.

If you do decide to introduce your resident pet to the foster cat, we have some guidance (see below) on the best steps to take to keep everyone safe and promote positive interactions.

Cat-to-cat introductions

Even if both cats have been known to be social with other cats, you still want to introduce them properly to start their relationship off on a positive note.

Before bringing the foster cat home:

1. Create a separate “territory” for the foster cat to stay in initially. This area (e.g., a bathroom or a spare bedroom) should be equipped with everything the cat needs.
2. Give your personal cats their own area as well.
3. Put out blankets or towels for your cats to leave their scent on.

After you bring the foster cat home:

1. Keep the cats separated at first.
2. Over a one- to two-week period, let the cats smell each other through a closed door.
3. **Hissing is completely normal in these beginning stages.**
4. Exchange the blankets or towels between the areas to help the cats get used to each other’s smells.
5. Allow them to see each other through a baby gate or a door that is propped open two inches.
6. If the cats are interested in each other and seem comfortable, allow them to meet.
7. Open the door to the rooms between the cats and observe them closely.
8. If any cat shows signs of significant stress or aggression, separate them again and introduce them more slowly.

Dog-to-cat introductions

If your dog is social around cats and you choose to introduce your pup to the foster cat, you will want to do the introduction at a **slow and steady pace**.

Before bringing the foster cat home:

1. Create a separate “territory” for the foster cat to stay in initially. This area (e.g., a bathroom or a spare bedroom) should be equipped with everything the cat needs.
2. Put out blankets or towels for the foster cat and the dog to leave their scent on.

After bringing the foster cat home:

1. Keep the cat and the dog separated at first.

2. Over a one- to two-week period, let the dog and cat smell each other through a closed door. Exchanging blankets or towels between the dog's area and the cat's area will help them get used to each other's smells.
3. After a week or two, do the face-to-face introduction. Keeping your dog on a leash, allow the foster cat out in the same area. If you have more than one dog, introduce them one at a time.
4. Do not allow the dog to charge or run directly up to the cat.
5. Try to distract the dog as best you can so that the cat has the chance to approach.
6. Watch the body language of each animal closely and don't continue the interaction if either pet becomes over-stimulated or hostile.

We kindly ask that you avoid leaving foster cats and resident dogs unsupervised. Sometimes unexpected loud noises (e.g., fireworks) can startle fearful pets and cause them to redirect those fears. Supervision helps to ensure that all animals are as safe as possible.

The idea is to keep all animal-to-animal interactions positive, safe and controlled.

Children and cats

Cats in our care often come with an unknown history and most times, we will not know the full scope of their personalities. We recommend talking with your children about fostering and explaining what boundaries the foster cat may need.

Here are some key reminders for your children to make fostering an enriching experience for all:

1. Cats can startle easily when approached unexpectedly. Give the foster cat the space to sleep and eat without disruptions.
2. Show your children how to engage in safe and respectful play with the cat. For example, drag a wand toy around the room for the cat to chase.
3. Not all cats enjoy being held, but some do and sometimes it depends on the cat's mood. Adults should always be present when children are with the foster cat to ensure that the cat is being held safely and comfortably.
4. Double-check that doors leading to the outside are closed to prevent the foster cat from accidentally getting out.

SECTION 2: DAY-TO-DAY CARE

Having a routine for the foster cat's day-to-day care will help to ensure that the cat is happy, healthy and comfortable.

Feeding

Cats may have their preferences, but a balanced diet includes both wet and dry cat food, unless otherwise specified by Fix West Texas. Here's some guidance on feeding:

- Leave fresh water and dry food out at all times.
- Offer the cat one-quarter of a can of wet food two or three times a day (if wet food is included in the cat's diet).
- Giving treats is a sure way to win the foster cat's heart and encourage bonding with you.

Litter box care

Cats prefer to do their business in private in a clean litter box, so keep these things in mind:

- Place the litter box in a quiet, low-traffic spot with easy access.
- If you have other cats in your home, try to observe the "plus one" rule (two cats = three litter boxes).
- Covered litter boxes can be unpleasant for cats. We don't recommend using them because they can lead to the cat having litter box issues if they are not kept clean.

Cats are incredibly sensitive to the smell of urine and feces, as well as deodorizers, so be sure to clean their litter boxes on a regular basis.

Grooming

Cats are generally very low-maintenance pets in terms of grooming and they do not require bathing, as they typically clean themselves (plus, most cats do not enjoy baths). If you are comfortable with trimming a cat's nails, please keep up with the foster cat's nail trims.

Older cats may have a harder time maintaining their grooming routine, so we recommend brushing older foster cats more often. Contact Fix West Texas if you feel the foster cat needs to see a professional groomer.

Mental stimulation and exercise

Daily playtime provides the foster cat with stimulation, encourages socialization and releases excess energy. Here are a few ideas:

- Try a variety of toys (balls, feather on a string, fake mice, etc.) to see which ones the cat prefers.
- Cat toys don't have to be fancy or expensive. Cats enjoy the simple things in life, like empty boxes, paper bags and crumpled-up paper. Have fun with it.
- Teach good habits by not letting the cat "play bite" your hands. Redirect the cat's attention to toys.

Housing and outdoor access

Foster cats and kittens should be kept indoors for safety. In some situations, particularly regarding unsocialized community cats in working cat programs, they may be kept in outdoor enclosures that have shelter from the elements. However, this arrangement must be discussed with Fix West Texas to ensure that the housing meets the needs of the foster animal. 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 Fix West Texas before bringing the foster animal home.

Safety requirements

For their safety, we ask that foster cats remain indoors at all times. Contracting a feline disease, being attacked by a larger animal and being hit by a car are just some of the things that can happen to a cat in the outdoors. If the foster cat is comfortable on a cat harness and leash, however, you are welcome to take the cat outside to explore enclosed areas. And for safety, always use a carrier to transport the cat to and from appointments.

First 48 hours

You have the foster cat, so now what? Here are some pointers for the first 48 hours:

- Letting foster cats have the full run of your home in the beginning can be overwhelming for them. So, set up the cat in a small area (a bathroom or small bedroom) and gradually open up the rest of your home.
- Food is the way to a feline's heart. Make sure you have extra-delicious treats and wet food on hand.
- Be mindful of the cat's body language and allow the cat time to settle in and adjust to the new environment. How long that takes will vary, depending on the cat's confidence level, but it's important to be patient and let the cat set the pace.

SECTION 3: MEDICAL AND EMERGENCY PROTOCOLS

Medications

It is not uncommon for foster cats to require some type of medication during their stay in a foster home. When fostering a cat on medications, please make sure:

- You give the medication as instructed.
- You give all of the prescribed doses and do not end medication early unless directed by Fix West Texas or an authorized veterinarian.

If the foster animal has not responded to prescribed medications after five days (or in the time instructed by a veterinarian), please request guidance.

Signs of illness and what to do next

Cats 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 or diarrhea. If the cat is displaying one or more of the symptoms listed below, please follow the instructions given and contact Fix West Texas using the contact information provided to you. If the animal is displaying a concerning symptom not included here, contact Fix West Texas for guidance.

Reminder: If you seek alternative or emergency veterinary care for the foster animal without Fix West Texas' authorization, you will be responsible for any costs incurred.

Appetite loss or not eating

The foster cat may be stressed after arriving in your home, and stress can cause lack of appetite. Allow the cat time to adjust to the new environment. But if the cat hasn't eaten after 24 hours, please notify Fix West Texas. Also, if the cat has been eating well, but then stops eating for 12 to 24 hours, contact Fix West Texas to set up a vet appointment.

Please do not change the cat's diet without contacting Fix West Texas. An abrupt change in diet can cause diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the cat hasn't eaten in 24 hours. If the cat has been eating well but suddenly stops eating for 12-24 hours.
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Dehydration

Dehydration is usually associated with diarrhea, vomiting and/or loss of appetite. To test for dehydration, gently pinch the cat's skin around the scruff area. If the skin stays taut, the cat is dehydrated. Please contact Fix West Texas within 24 hours to schedule a vet appointment.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If after doing the above test, you believe the cat is dehydrated, especially in combination with other symptoms of concern.
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Diarrhea

It is important to monitor the cat's pooping habits daily. Soft stool is normal for the first two or three days after taking a cat home; soft stool is most likely caused by stress and a change in food.

If the cat has liquid stool, however, please contact Fix West Texas so that an appointment can be scheduled to determine whether the cat needs medication.

Keep in mind that diarrhea will dehydrate the cat. If the diarrhea is bloody or mucoid, please contact Fix West Texas through the emergency contact protocol.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the cat has liquid stool. If the cat has bloody or mucoid stool, follow emergency contact protocol.
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Discharge: eyes and nose

It is normal for cats to have some discharge from their eyes when they wake up and some may have more than others, depending on the breed. But if the foster cat has yellow or green discharge, or swelling around the eyes (making it hard for him to open his eyes), or the third eyelid is showing, contact Fix West Texas to schedule a vet appointment.

Sneezing can be common in a cat recovering from an upper respiratory infection. If the sneezing becomes more frequent, watch for discharge coming from the nose.

You can try nebulizing the cat to relieve her discomfort. Nebulizing can be done in two ways:

1. Place the cat in the bathroom with a hot shower running. (Do not place the cat in the shower, of course.) The steam can help clear out the discharge.
2. Put the cat in a carrier, cover it with a towel, and place a nebulizer or humidifier under the towel.

If the eye or nose discharge stays clear and the cat is acting normal, continue to monitor the cat. If the discharge becomes colored, however, contact Fix West Texas to schedule a vet appointment.

Be sure to monitor the cat's breathing. If the cat starts to wheeze or breathe with an open mouth, follow the emergency contact protocol. Also, once you notice nasal discharge, monitor the cat's eating habits more closely to ensure that he or she is still eating.

When to contact Fix West Texas	<p>If the discharge becomes colored. If there is eye or nose discharge combined with lethargy or decreased appetite.</p> <p>If the cat starts to wheeze or breathe with an open mouth, follow emergency contact protocol.</p>
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Ears: scratching, swelling or irritation

If the cat is scratching her ears frequently and/or shakes her head often, she may have ear mites. When you look in her ears, you may see a dark discharge that resembles coffee grounds. Ear mites are easily treatable, so contact Fix West Texas to set up a medical appointment.

If the cat has irritated, swollen, or red or pink ears that smell like yeast, she may have an ear infection called otitis. It's more common in dogs, but some cats do get it. If you see any of these signs, please follow the steps for setting up a medical appointment.

When to contact Fix West Texas	<p>If you see dark discharge in the cat's ears, or the scratching or headshaking persists even without signs of discharge.</p> <p>If the cat has irritated, swollen or reddened ears.</p>
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Hair loss

Please contact Fix West Texas if you notice any hair loss on the cat. It is normal for cats to have thin fur around the lips and eyelids and in front of the ears, but clumpy patches of hair loss or thinning hair is not normal. It is important to check the cat's coat every day.

Ringworm, a skin fungal infection that can cause hair loss, is common in cats in shelters. While it does not cause serious illness, ringworm is contagious to both other pets and people. So, if you see hair loss on the foster cat, we recommend keeping him separated from your own pets, and washing your hands after any handling until the foster cat has a medical evaluation.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If you notice patches of hair loss or thinning hair, with or without irritated skin.
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Lethargy

The activity level of the cat will vary depending on age and personality. Keeping an activity log will help you notice whether the cat is less active than usual.

If the cat cannot be roused or seems weak and unable to stand, it's an emergency, so start the emergency contact protocol.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If lethargy is combined with other symptoms such as loss of appetite or discharge from the eyes or nose. If the cat cannot be roused, seems weak or is unable to stand, follow the emergency contact protocol.
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Potty issues: pain, strain or missing the litter box

Upon arrival in a foster home, a cat may not urinate for a while because of stress. If the cat hasn't urinated in more than 24 hours, please contact Fix West Texas.

Additional indications that the cat may have a urinary issue include:

- Straining to eliminate
- Has blood or discoloration in urine or feces
- Has hard or soft stools
- Vocalizes while eliminating
- Makes frequent visits to the litter box
- Avoids the litter box

If you notice the cat — particularly a male cat — straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying out when urinating, please contact Fix West Texas via the emergency contact protocol because it may indicate an infection or a urethral obstruction, which can be life-threatening.

If a medical exam is normal yet the cat continues to have litter box issues, see the information pertaining to that topic in "Section 4: Behavior Support."

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the cat hasn't urinated in more than 24 hours. If the cat is straining to urinate with little or no results, or crying when urinating, follow the emergency contact protocol ASAP, as this can indicate a life-threatening condition (especially for male cats).
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Vomiting

Sometimes cats vomit up a thick tubular hairball along with bile or other liquids. This is normal, but please contact Fix West Texas if the cat has out-of-the-ordinary vomiting that does not occur in conjunction with throwing up a hairball. Don't worry about one or two vomiting episodes as long as the cat is acting normal otherwise (eating, active, no diarrhea).

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the cat is vomiting in conjunction with other symptoms, such as loss of appetite, diarrhea or lethargy.
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Criteria for emergencies

What constitutes a medical emergency in a cat? 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:

- Urinary blockage (which can be life-threatening for cats)
- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Extreme dehydration: dry gums, weakness, vomiting, not urinating, skin tenting (when the skin is pulled up, it stays there)
- Abnormal lethargy or inability to stand
- Unconsciousness or inability 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

If the cat displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency contact protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea but is still active, eating and drinking, continue to monitor the cat. If the vomiting or diarrhea continues for more than 48 hours, contact Fix West Texas.

If you think the cat may incur permanent damage or pass away if not seen by a veterinarian immediately, please proceed to the approved emergency clinic and start the emergency phone chain on the way.

Emergency response and foster caregiver's next steps

If an emergency response and/or disaster situation occurs in your area, Fix West Texas will provide as much support as we can to you and the foster pet. Depending on the circumstances, an extended stay in your home may be necessary for the foster pet, or the foster pet may need to go to a specific location provided by Fix West Texas.

Please know that we will work within safety guidelines and to the best of our abilities to assist you and the pet in a safe and efficient manner. If a disaster situation occurs, we will communicate next steps

directly to you. To ensure that we can communicate with you, please keep your contact information up to date with Fix West Texas. We truly appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

SECTION 4: BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

If you encounter behavioral concerns with the cat, contact Fix West Texas 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 Fix West Texas team members.

If you feel that the cat’s behavior is beyond your ability to manage, please notify Fix West Texas to discuss the best next steps.

Common behavioral concerns and what to do next

Excessive vocalization

Increases in vocalization are common when there are changes in a pet’s environment, such as a move to a new place or a change from being an outdoor to an indoor pet. In these cases, the increases in vocalization may be temporary. But if it continues, the most common cause of excessive vocalization is attention-seeking, a learned behavior.

The best strategy for remedying this behavior is to ignore it. Typically, cats will initially vocalize more and for longer periods of time before they finally give up. It’s important to ignore the behavior because if you give in, the cat will learn that louder and longer vocalization is the way to get your attention.

In addition, you should try increasing the cat’s mental and physical stimulation by increasing interactive play and using a food puzzle, especially during the night. Give the cat some company overnight by leaving a radio station on with soft music and voices.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If additional guidance is needed.
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High energy

Younger cats have boundless energy. We need to provide ways for them to discharge some of that energy safely through play in an environment that offers stimulation as well as places to relax. An increase in energy can also be a result of boredom, and the solution is the same — increase the cat’s mental and physical stimulation. Add more physical activities to the cat’s routine and switch toys out each week.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If you need more ideas for mental and physical stimulation. If it’s a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental and physical stimulation.
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Overstimulation

There are two kinds of overstimulation for cats: petting-induced and play-induced. Petting-induced overstimulation can occur in cats who didn't have enough socialization with other cats or humans when they were young. Kittens who did not grow up with littermates often become overstimulated when petted. And some cats simply have more sensitivity to being touched.

To respect a cat's boundaries, it is important to recognize the warning signs, which include a stop in purring, twitching skin along the back, changing position or stiffening, and a swishing or thumping tail. Try focusing on the less sensitive areas, such as the cat's head, face, chin and cheeks, and engage the cat in play with toys. Some cats simply don't enjoy being petted or cuddled for a long period of time. As long as you respect the cat's boundaries, the trust will continue to grow.

Regarding play-induced overstimulation, one of the most common signs is "ankle grabbing." (You're walking by your cat, and she grabs your ankle and scratches or bites you.) Play-induced overstimulation can also be directed at your hands, especially if you use them to play with cats. It's something that may be cute in kittens, but painful once a cat is an adult.

Play is vital to a cat's mental and physical health. Hunting and prey behavior starts as soon as kittens are old enough to stand. Kittens will "stalk" their littermates and pounce on them. To meet the foster cat's needs, you'll want to provide many different kinds of stimulation. Toys that stimulate the cat's natural hunting instinct (e.g., interactive wand toys) are the most effective for creating a fun play experience.

When playing with the foster cat, watch his body language for overstimulation clues. Normal play behavior can include the sideways pounce or hop, often with the back arched. The cat's ears and tail will be straight up in the air. There may be some hissing, but normal play is usually quiet.

If you notice the cat's ears turn toward the back of his head (aka "airplane ears") or you hear growling, the play has tipped over into overstimulation. Be sure to stop playing if the cat displays signs of overstimulation. Leave the room or direct your attention elsewhere. Be as consistent as possible with this and reward the cat's positive behaviors with treats.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting, or starts to be unmanageable.
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Litter box issues due to behavior

Litter box issues typically mean the cat is trying to communicate that something is out of sorts. If the foster cat continues to have urinary issues after a medical check with Fix West Texas shows everything is normal physically, then the problem may be something else. The chart below gives a general breakdown of common causes and actions that could remedy the situation.

Why?	Common causes	Actions to try at home
A problem with the litter box setup	Dirty or covered litter box, bad location, too small, old, not enough boxes for the number of cats in the house, litter type is new or undesirable, sides are too high, it's too close to food and water, it has litter box liners	Cats prefer a large, open litter box that is located in an open area of the home. They also prefer unscented, scoopable litter. Things that may need a fix include the location of boxes, number of boxes, type of litter and cleaning protocol.
Something causing stress	Outdoor cats, new sounds, new routines, new people or animals, new diet, new smells	If you can identify and eliminate the source of stress, that is the best first step. Make sure the cat has lots of interactive play and environmental enrichment, which will help reduce stress by allowing the cat to feel like a predator (rather than nervous prey). Provide the cat with safe hiding places, high resting options and a safe room.
Tensions with other cats	Cats are territorial animals. Problems arise if they feel in competition with each other for resources or space. Cats also have hierarchies, which can lead to bullying.	Provide more than enough resources for the cats so they don't feel they're competing with each other. Resources include litter boxes, scratching posts, high resting places, food and water bowls, toys, playtime and one-on-one time with you. Have lots of high resting places in your home to increase the amount of territory.

Regarding “accidents” that happen around litter box issues: We know how emotionally frustrating this can be, but it’s super important to be patient with the cat. Never discipline or punish a cat for a litter box accident because it can create mistrust between the cat and you.

We recommend using an enzymatic cleaner to clean up all such accidents. Nature’s Miracle and Simple Solution are two products containing natural enzymes that tackle tough stains and odors and remove them permanently.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If additional guidance and support are needed.
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Resource guarding

While it may not be as common in cats as it is in dogs, resource guarding can happen — especially in multiple-cat households. Resource guarding can be caused by a number of things, including adjustment to an in-home lifestyle, past experiences and the need for safe boundaries.

To help eliminate a cat’s resource guarding, the goal is to create safe boundaries around feeding time. Always feed the resource-guarding cat separately and away from other pets or children. Try to be patient and don’t ever punish the cat. Work toward creating that safe space to build trust.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the behavior is redirected toward you or anyone else in the household, or if the behavior doesn’t seem to have a cause. If resource guarding is not manageable with separation.
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Rough play and play biting

These behaviors are usually due to an animal having excess energy or simply a lack of manners. Engaging the cat and teaching her proper play skills will help provide appropriate outlets for her energy, which will prove beneficial when she goes to her adoptive home.

One general rule is to avoid using your hands to play with the cat. If you find the cat focusing on your hands as playthings, redirect her attention to a toy. If redirection does not work, stop engaging her in play or giving her attention. Another effective strategy is to increase the cat’s mental and physical stimulation by using food puzzles, interactive toy play, opportunities for self-play or even teaching her some tricks.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the behavior escalates to rough mouthing or play biting, or starts to be unmanageable. If it’s a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental and physical stimulation. If the bite breaks skin, contact Fix West Texas immediately.
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Separation anxiety and isolation distress

Despite the stereotype, cats are not actually solitary creatures. They often form close attachments with people and other animals, and they can become anxious when their favorites are not nearby. They

might respond to the absence with excessive meowing or grooming, or by urinating on things that are saturated with their human's scent, like pillows, laundry and bedding.

Remember, after you bring the foster cat home, she may need some time to get adjusted to the new environment and build trust in you. She'll need a space where she can feel safe and the time to acclimate to your routine.

You can help build her confidence by providing plenty of mental and physical stimulation (e.g., food puzzles, interactive toy play, teaching tricks). If the cat seems to be experiencing separation anxiety, don't make a big production of coming and going from your home.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If the cat is hurting herself. If it's a challenging lifestyle match and you are unable to provide additional mental or physical stimulation.
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Shy or fearful cat

Helping a shy cat build confidence around interacting with people can be one of the most rewarding aspects of being a foster caregiver. Keep in mind that socializing such a cat requires patience on your part, since shy or fearful cats do not understand that we are truly trying to help them.

To help a shy cat adjust to your home, follow these steps:

1. Before bringing the cat home, set up a special room for him, a space with few hiding places. Make it a comfortable, welcoming place by including a soft bed, food and water, a litter box and toys. Put him in the room when he arrives in your home.
2. Sit calmly in the room with him several times a day, allowing him to get used to your scent and presence. Let him come to you when he is ready.
3. Food is the best way to win a cat's heart, so offer him extra-delicious treats when you are spending time with him in the room. He'll start associating you with positive things.
4. To continue that positive association, engage the cat in play using interactive toys.

Remember to always be patient and calm around the cat. The reward of having him warm up to you will far outweigh all the hard work you put in, and you and the cat will have a very special bond.

When to contact Fix West Texas	If additional guidance is needed. If the behavior escalates or starts to be unmanageable.
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Cat body language

You can learn a lot about cats simply by observing their body language. The illustration below depicts what cats are trying to communicate to us. It is helpful to know what cat body language means in order to respect their boundaries.

CAT LANGUAGE



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1 SOURCE: LILI CHEN, CAT LANGUAGE, 2015, DOGGIEDRAWINGS.NET

Emergency conditions

If the foster cat is exhibiting extreme behavior that puts another animal or a person at risk for or has resulted in bites or severe injury, contact Fix West Texas immediately using the emergency contact provided to you when you picked up the cat.

Behavioral emergencies include:

- 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

SECTION 5: THE FOSTER CAT'S ADOPTIVE HOME

Finding adopters and finalizing adoptions

One of the most gratifying experiences of fostering a cat is finding an adoptive family who can continue the loving home experience you've provided. 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 a cat 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 foster cat for adoption? Here are some ideas:

- If appropriate, introduce this great cat to your neighbors, friends and acquaintances. Talk about the pet's endearing qualities and show off those positive attributes.
- You've probably already thought of this, but do share lots of photos and stories about the cat on social media.
- Tell your coworkers, hang a flyer in the break room, post information about the cat on your company's intranet or internal social network where appropriate.

Fix West Texas will also be promoting the foster cat 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 would like to adopt the foster animal, please notify Fix West Texas.

Saying goodbye

Saying goodbye can be hard, but if you've helped find a great home for the cat, you can pat yourself on the back knowing that you have brought joy and happiness to both the pet and the adopters. Saying goodbye is truly the best part of fostering because it means you've opened your home (and heart) to help save lives.

Make sure that the adopters have your contact information and let them know they can always update you on the cat's progress. Receiving updates can make fostering even more rewarding, as you can see the positive impact that you've had.

Thank you so much for fostering!

[ADDITIONAL RESOURCES](#)

For lots more information about cats and their care, please visit the websites below.

- bestfriends.org/resources/cats
- jacksongalaxy.com/blog
- fearfreehappyhomes.com