

## Show Some Love: Be A Foster Pet Parent

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Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

[Dr. Ruth MacPete](#) talks about the rewards of becoming a foster pet parent.

I recently added a new feline to the family. Starlite, a beautiful grey female mother cat named by my five-year old daughter, was one of many cats from the shelter that I work at in need of a home. Starlite was underweight, dehydrated and dirty when she was found on the streets. She came to the shelter with her five kittens and it was evident right away that she was very sweet and an amazingly dedicated mom. Unfortunately, after weeks of caring for her kittens till they were big enough to get adopted, Starlite got sick. She developed a severe upper respiratory infection or "cold" that caused her to sneeze, have ocular and nasal discharge and stop eating and drinking. Having seen her care so tenderly for her young kittens for weeks, I just felt some kindred mom spirit with her and so decided to bring her home to foster till she got better. Having two cats, a dog, a fish and two young children of my own, the plan was just to foster her and nurse her back to health. But a few days after her arrival my five-year old helper decided she loved her and wanted to keep her as her cat. "Mommy you already have Ling and Daddy has Elf. I want a cat for myself," she demanded. Starlite was incredibly gentle and sweet with both of my kids and she let my five-year-old daughter carry her awkwardly from room to room, never trying to get away or scratching to hold on. So again she appealed to my mommy instincts and I knew she was going to stay. So now we have three cats, a dog and a fish!

### What is a "foster" parent?

Having recently fostered an animal, I wanted to share my experiences about being a foster pet parent. Foster pet parents play an important role helping shelter animals, but unfortunately, many people know little about being a foster pet parent. Like their "human" counterparts, foster pet parents provide temporary care and housing for an animal. The animals they foster usually come from shelters or rescue groups and are

comprised of very young animals or injured and sick animals. Sadly, due to the large number of animals in a shelter, space and resources are limited, and shelters are often unable to care for young animals because they need frequent feedings, and injured and sick animals because they need extra care. Shelters and rescue groups rely on foster pet parents to care for these animals until they are old enough or healthy enough to adopt, providing a vital bridge to their adoptive families.

### How does being a foster parent help?

Being a foster pet parent helps animals in many ways besides giving needed care and shelter. For example, with kittens and puppies, the foster home environment is better suited for young animals with immature immune systems than the crowded and stressful setting of a shelter. In addition, being in a home environment and getting the love and attention of their foster families prepares them for their future homes and helps socialize them. The same is true for injured and ill animals. The extra love and care from their foster families helps promote a speedy recovery. As you can see, besides providing a needed lifeline for shelter animals, fostering prepares animals for their future families by exposing them to a loving setting.

### What are the benefits of fostering?

The benefits of fostering animals are reciprocal. Having fostered kittens, puppies, dogs, cats, and even ground squirrels, I have witnessed the positive impact of fostering on my family. My children have seen how our love and care helped these animals grow and get healthy for their adoptive families. Fostering has taught them to be gentle and to develop a respect for life. It has also showed them the importance of hard work and dedication. There is a great sense of gratification knowing that your efforts saved a life and helped a deserving animal find its family.

For people who are interested in becoming pet parents but who have never had a pet before, being a foster parent is a great way to try out being a pet parent. If you aren't sure if you are ready to take on a pet for life, fostering may be the answer. You can have a pet in your home for a few weeks to months and determine if you are ready to make a long-term commitment. It also allows you to determine if a particular pet is a good fit for you. After all, becoming a pet parent is a life-long

commitment and you want to be as sure as possible that you are making the right choice.

There is of course one other benefit of fostering shelter animals. As was the case with Starlite, opening your home and heart to a foster animal can sometimes lead to the addition of a new member to your family. It's an unintended consequence, but under the right circumstances, fostering the right animal at the right time will serendipitously lead to the realization that your foster animal is a perfect addition to your family.

Foster pet parents play a vital role helping shelter animals that need extra care and attention to become adoptable. Being a foster pet parent is great for the animal, you, and your family. If you are interested in becoming a foster pet parent, contact your local shelters and local animal rescue groups. They will tell you what you need to do to become a foster parent and help you get started.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*

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