



# Sammy's Forgotten Felines Rescue Society

## Foster Guide

Fostering saves lives! Opening your home to an animal in need is one of the most selfless things anyone can do! It is highly rewarding and fulfills your soul.

In this guide we hope to offer some insight into fostering feral, semi feral, traumatized, or under socialized cats and kittens. Sammy's Forgotten Felines specializes in feral rehabilitation. We do not put time limits on the cat's progress as many shelters or rescues do. The rule of thumb is three days for the cat to decompress, three weeks for the cat to learn your routine, and three months before the cat will feel at home. This is true for fostering or adopting a new cat or kitten into your home regardless of their level of socialization. Obviously, the social ones adjust much faster than a feral, but this is a good rule to live by.

### If Doesn't Happen Overnight

The 3/3/3/ rule is a general guideline for the adjustment period of a pet after adoption. Every pet is unique and will adjust differently. Please have patience and allow your new pet time to settle in.

		
<b>3 Days</b> <i>To Decompress</i>	<b>3 Weeks</b> <i>To Learn Your Routine</i>	<b>3 Months</b> <i>To Start to Feel at Home</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feeling overwhelmed</li><li>• May feel scared or unsure of what's going on</li><li>• Not yet comfortable to be "himself"</li><li>• May not want to eat or drink</li><li>• Shuts down and/or hides under furniture</li><li>• Tests the boundaries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starts settling in</li><li>• Feels more comfortable</li><li>• Realizes this could be his forever home</li><li>• Figures out his environment</li><li>• Gets into a routine</li><li>• Lets his guard down; beginning to show his true personality</li><li>• Behavior issues may appear</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finally feels completely comfortable in his home</li><li>• Begins to build trust and a true bond</li><li>• Gains a complete sense of security with his new family</li><li>• Sets into a routine</li></ul> <p><a href="http://CatBehaviorSolutions.org">CatBehaviorSolutions.org</a></p>

### Starting out with a feral or semi feral

First things first - the set up. With ferals or semi ferals, things are a little bit different than just bringing a foster cat to your house and keeping them in a spare room. If you let a feral or semi feral loose the result can be scary. They can 'popcorn' which is a term we use when they are so scared and threatened that the only thing they can do to get away is jump straight up. You would be surprised how far a cat can scale a wall and

attempt to run across the ceiling. This is obviously pretty traumatizing for all parties involved, so let's avoid that shall we?

A feral cat or kitten should be housed in a quiet spare room in a 'naughty kennel'. A 'naughty kennel' is a large wire dog cage that is big enough to house one cat with a litterbox, food/water, and a travel crate so the cat has a hidey hole. This also makes it much easier to work with the cat as it keeps both parties safe from injury.



We have two types of naughty kennels. The Ferret Nation Kennel offers different levels which is great to keep litter and food as far apart as possible. Cats don't generally like to eat where they poop so this is important. However, these kennels are quite expensive and not always available. The second naughty kennel is a large wire dog cage which gives the cat enough space to move around and keep litter and food as far apart as possible. It's basically a New York apartment for cats.

Keeping the travel crate inside the naughty kennel is key with ferals. This makes cleaning and transport to vet visits much easier for everyone. All you need to do is shut the door to the travel crate and kitty is safe and you can clean the naughty kennel without the cat getting loose or you getting a swat because you are so rudely invading the cat's space.

It is imperative the naughty kennel is used in the beginning as it will become a safe haven for your foster once they upgrade to 'loose in the room'. Every cat is different and some will take longer than others before they can be loose in the room. Be patient. For the first three days do not bother the cat other than feeding and litterbox duties only as necessary. Leave socializing to a bare minimum. The cat is confused and scared. Speak in a quiet, calm voice. Every time you do go into clean or feed, make sure to leave treats or a little wet food behind. We want the cat to associate your visit with something good. They learn very quickly that you are not someone to be afraid of because you bring the treats, food, toys, etc.

Once you feel the cat is starting to relax, you can now spend some time with them while the cat is still in the naughty kennel. These will still be fairly short visits and rather boring to start. Just sit near the kennel. Read a book, scroll Facebook or Instagram, watch videos or TV, but whatever you do, DO NOT make direct eye contact or stare at the cat.



From a cat's point of view, it is incredibly rude to stare or invade one's space without an invite, so please respect their personal bubble. By acting uninterested and ignoring the cat, you are actually sending a very clear message to the cat that you are not a threat and you are happy to be friends when they are ready. Please do not push the cat. In fact, the harder you try the more the cat will resist your attempts to be friends. This is easily the most frustrating time ever! You can do things like put on cat TV on YouTube and watch the riveting world of the bird feeder or read a book (out loud in a calm voice is great). Sound boring? It is, BUT your kitty may really enjoy it! Yes, loads of cats love to watch TV and the bonus here is some cats will watch the birds and squirrels which distracts them and they just might forget their fear for a moment.

### **Think of it this way**

If you're afraid of spiders, you don't see a spider and make a conscious decision to scream and run away or burn the house down - you simply react without thought. Your brain offers a response based on an emotional reaction and by the time you realize you might be overreacting, the fire department is already on the way.

Now, what if you were a cat that feels the same way about humans? Instead of a small little spider, your nightmare arachnid is 100 feet tall and wants to touch and pet you constantly! How would you react?

How do we break this fearful emotional state? By speaking cat. By being polite. By letting them learn that you are the good guy and not a two-legged monster.

### **The Slow Blink**

Another great way to communicate with your kitty is the slow blink. If you happen to catch yourself making eye to eye contact, simply close your eyes slowly and turn away. You may notice when you slow blink at your cat, they slow blink back. This is wonderful communication! Your cat is literally telling you that they don't want any trouble and they are being as polite as they know how. Also good for you - speaking cat so well! Bravo! Always think about what your foster might be feeling and try to minimize your scariness. Speak softly and be small (sitting on the floor next the naughty kennel is always best).

### **Treats and wet food**

Offer treats or wet food (small little dab) often. Several times a day if you can. It doesn't have to be a lot, but every interaction you have with kitty should result in some kind of reward for them. It may take some time to figure out which treats or wet food they really like, but once you have that figured out, you can begin training.

Yes, training. You read that right. Training them to speak human through play and trust exercises. Cats have a very complex social system and communicate mainly through body language and energy. If you are feeling anxious, frustrated, or not at ease, then perhaps you need a time out before you go talk to your foster cat. Cats are very sensitive to these things and they will pick up on it and throw it right back at you. Take a moment and calm yourself before you try to work with a cat that is already stressed. Some encounters will be frustrating or feel like you're not getting anywhere and it is easy to become discouraged. If you go into it stressed out, you'll find you're more often discouraged and frustrated. It happens to all of us.



### **The spanking stick**

The spanking stick is a tool we use for many things, none of which are EVER spanking. The spanking stick is actually a back scratcher. They come in all different shapes and sizes and are great for hand feeding ferals wet food without risking loss of your hands. Once the cat is comfortable with the spanking stick you can then try to offer some head scratches with it, focusing only on the cheeks and head areas. This mimics allogrooming and can produce happy cat pheromones. Plus, you are spreading the cat's scent on the stick and hopefully on you. This will help the cat to begin to trust you. You can also use the stick for extreme spicy fajitas to close their travel kennel door so you can contain them without loosing any blood. Most cats are not that aggressive and it's more of a respect my space thing.

### **Feliway**

Feliway is another tool we use to help keep kitty calm. It comes as a diffuser or spray. Long story short, it is happy cat pheromones and it doesn't hurt to have some on hand.

### **Catnip**

Catnip is a great tool for SOME cats. For other cats it can actually make them more aggressive. Use caution at first and offer a very small amount in a controlled area to see how kitty will react before you make it a more frequent thing.

### **Toys and playtime**

We can not express enough how important playtime is, especially for scaredy cats!

Once they do start to interact and play, that means they are feeling much more comfortable! The more they play, the more confident they get! Use a variety of toys. Once you are done the play session or kitty doesn't





## NOT SAFE!

If your cat doesn't prey play it could be he doesn't feel safe enough to focus on the game, you're not using the right technique or it's not a toy that interests him, or he's grown tired of.

 Cat Behavior Solutions

want to play anymore, reward them with a treat. Most play is prey play and if they were outside their reward would be a mouse or bird or some other juicy treat. If they do not get some kind of reward, they can become frustrated and this will make for a rather grumpy kitty. Avoid laser pointers for now. I know everyone thinks cats love them, but they don't really. People just love to watch cats go mental over something they can never catch or touch. If you do use a laser pointer make sure to offer a toy they can chew on and a treat reward after the laser pointer has been put away.

### How do you know it's working?

Some cats may take a few weeks before they will start to show noticeable signs that they are starting to trust you. Some of the very subtle signs to look for that you may miss are as follows:

- they hiss or growl less when you approach
- they start slow blinking more often
- they will accept treats in your presence
- they will eat wet food in your presence or come out to greet you when you bring wet food
- they may engage in some play
- they may respond to a little cat nip
- they start to spend more time outside of the travel kennel
- they may sniff your hand or fingers
- they aren't trashing their naughty kennel as much or not at all
- they may allow you to touch or pet them
- you may notice they are more relaxed and not so stiff and rigid

### Loose in the room

Once you have gone through the grueling settling in phase and are confident that the cat is no longer stressed out or going to attack you, you can upgrade to 'loose in the room' status. The only thing you need to do is open the naughty kennel door and leave it open. That's it. Let the cat make the decisions from there. They likely will not come out right away. If they do come flying out and are immediately looking for an escape route, then you have probably prematurely opened the door. The key here is to not panic and do not chase them around the room to get them back into the naughty kennel. Back off. Leave the room and let them find a place they feel safe. Hopefully, their safe place will be back in the naughty kennel. Once you are at the loose in the room stage this opens a lot of opportunity to get serious about play time and provide more enrichment. You can also allow the cat to watch you or use an iPad or tv to put on cat shows or just TV noise to get the cat used to household sounds. This will also fight boredom and give them new stimuli. When spending time with the cats loose in the room give them their space, but also try to engage them with play. Fishing pole toys are great for this. Before you know it, they will be running and paying with you frequently and they will look forward to the time you spend with them. The perfect foster cat room can be a spare bedroom (without a bed for them to hide under) or large bathroom or laundry room. If you can, provide some

cat furniture such as cat shelves or a large scratching post with places they can hide and 'go vertical'. Cats are multilevel dwellers. Some cats prefer to be low and hang out in hidey holes while others like to be up high and view their space from above. Enjoy your time with them, soon they will be ready for adoption. Likely before you are!

### **Fostering more than one cat**

Sometimes it is advantageous to foster more than one cat as a cat that is a bit more social may help the scaredy cat come out of their shell much faster. Let's face it, other cats speak cat better than we do. Cats learn from observation and when they see another cat enjoying pets and snuggles, they may want to also give it a try!

Mixing household cats with fosters is an absolute no no until the foster cat has been fully vetted. The household cat should be up-to-date on their vaccines, especially if you plan to introduce them in the future. The fact is that many colony cats or cats from hoarding situations are often unhealthy. It is imperative to make sure all veterinary care has been completed before mixing cats or introducing them.

You can foster more than one cat if it came from the same colony or house as they will have both been exposed to the same illnesses. However, with adult cats, there should be only one cat per naughty kennel. In some circumstances, two kittens may be housed in one naughty kennel or, of course, a momma cat would be housed in a kennel with her kittens.

### **Fostering for other rescues**

You may find that most rescues do not want you to foster cats from other rescues. The reason for this is cross contamination and liability. Cats can carry contagious diseases. If you bring in a cat from another rescue that has distemper, FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), or FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus) then not only are you putting the other fosters at risk, but also your own pets.

I suppose the moral of this story is please only foster for one rescue at a time.

### **Emergency**

If you find yourself with an emergency situation, you can call or text Jenn 778-921-1717, Julie 250-318-5044 or Jess 604-815-8586 anytime for any reason. If you can't get a hold of one of us and you have an animal medical emergency, please call a vet clinic right away! Inform the vet you are fostering for Sammy's Forgotten Felines and we will deal with the costs later. Veterinary care for non-emergencies or regular vet care should only be booked with consent from Jenn, Julie, or Jessica.

