



SPCA of Wake County

# QUICK GUIDE FOR SMALL CRITTERS FOSTER CARE

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## WELCOME

Thank you for fostering with the SPCA of Wake County! Pets are placed into foster care for many reasons. They may be too young, sick or injured, need socialization and training, or to help open up kennel space so more pets can be pulled from area shelters. Whatever the reason, we rely on you to provide the love and care needed to get these pets ready for adoption and their forever homes. This is a quick guide for all things rabbit, guinea pig, hamster and other small mammals to aid in your care.

## TO BE A FOSTER...

What we ask of you as the caretaker:

- Maintain a loving indoor environment, and spend quality time socializing your foster pets. Try to spend a minimum of three hours or more per day to socialize and monitor their health.
- Have a separate area for fosters that is rabbit-proof to reduce potential safety hazards. A room with minimal furniture, tile or hardwood floors blocked with a baby gate is a good example set-up. Any introductions to resident pets should be discussed with the Foster Coordinator first.
- Commit to the entire foster period whenever possible and have the pet remain in your care and home until they can be brought to the Adoption Center.
- Be able to set aside time to bring your foster in for any booster appointments, spay/neuter surgery and any other medical care needed.
- Maintain communication with the Foster Program Coordinator by using e-mail or the Foster Care phone line: **919-630-9680**. This phone line can receive calls, texts, pictures and videos!

## SUPPLIES

The SPCA of Wake County can provide most supplies needed for pets in your care, but you may need to purchase items like cleaning supplies on your own. Below are lists of things that we can provide to you. You are always welcome to purchase your own supplies to provide for your foster pet(s).

Most items are donated to the SPCA, so inventory and brands are dependent on what is available. When the pet has been brought back from foster, any returnable items should be brought back as well so they can be available for other fosters to use.

### Returnable supplies

- Cage / crate
- Carrier
- Bottles and bowls
- Bedding (towels, blankets, pet beds)
- Food containers
- Toys (plastic baby and cat toys)
- X-pen or baby gates
- Litter boxes and scoops

### Non - returnable supplies

- Bedding / Litter
- Timothy / Alfalfa hay
- Newspaper
- Cardboard and wooden toys
- Pellets

**While we would love to provide fresh veggies, this is something that we can't provide for fosters and will need to be provided by the foster parent.**

## FACEBOOK

The main way we reach out for foster needs is through the SPCA Wake Foster Care group. It allows us to reach and speak with multiple fosters about pets in need and get them quickly into homes. It also provides a great platform to share general SPCA news and for you to communicate with other foster parents.

When a foster pet is posted, we include all the information that we know as well as the earliest time and location that they can be picked up. Anyone who is available can comment below the post saying when they can arrive, ask any questions or request any supplies. We primarily operate on who comments first, but occasionally, if a pet has very specific needs we will go with the best match. All pets eligible for foster posts will be listed under Topics: Foster Needs, which can be found next to the Announcements section.

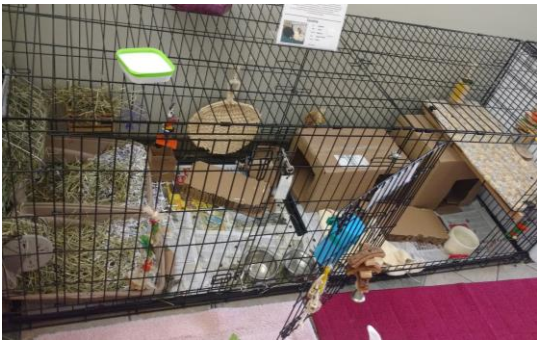
We ask that you refrain from posting about pets in other shelters, asking medical and adoption questions. The Group Page needs to be kept as free as possible for foster needs and these should be directed to the Foster Coordinator via phone or email instead. Of course we want to see all of your foster pet pictures and videos!



## HOUSING & DIET

### Housing

Housing must be inside the heated/cooled square footage of your home; ideally in a room with a closed door separate from any personal cats and dogs as they are seen as ‘predators’. Enclosures may be an x-pen, dog crate, or other approved, small critter habitat. It must be large enough for food and water bowls, a litter box, a hide box, and toys, with additional room to stretch out. They should have a solid bottom only. If using a wire bottom cage, please cover the wire with coroplast, cardboard or towels.



Rabbit housing should be at least 8 square feet for single rabbits, and 16 square feet for bonded pairs. Guinea pigs need an enclosure at least 18-20” wide, 25-30” long, and 14-16” high so they have plenty of room to explore. For guinea pigs, glass aquariums do not provide enough ventilation and air flow.

Aquariums can be appropriate for hamsters and mice as long as the top is wire. An enclosure for hamsters and mice should provide enough areas to tunnel and burrow

and will properly contain them. You will need to make sure they won’t get their feet or bodies stuck anywhere if there are wires.

Foster pets should have daily play/exercise time at least 30 minutes of exercise per day outside of their enclosure, unless the enclosure is 24 square feet or larger. The space must be rabbit-proof as small critters love to chew and this can cause digestive issues. Mice and hamsters can have exercise balls, while guinea pigs and rabbits can have x-pens.

### Diet

Diet is important for small pets as it helps regulate their digestion as well as provide necessary vitamins. Each species has their own nutritional requirements, but in general they need timothy hay, pellets, fruits and vegetables. In general, the smaller the pet, the smaller the amount of food needed. Young critters and pregnant mothers can have more than average because they are growing and nursing. On the following page is a guideline for you to provide a well-balanced diet for your foster pet. For a list about appropriate fruits and veggies for each species, feel free to request a chart from the Foster Coordinator!



FOOD	AMOUNT (SPECIES SPECIFIC)		
	Rabbits	Guinea Pigs	Hamsters
Timothy Hay	Unlimited	Unlimited	–
Alfalfa Hay ( <i>young &amp; pregnant animals only</i> )	Unlimited	Unlimited	–
Pellets	1/4 - 3/4 cup daily ( <i>weight dependent</i> )	1/4 cup daily ( <i>contains vitamin C</i> )	1 tablespoon – 1/8 cup daily ( <i>must contain seeds, grains &amp; dried veggies</i> )
Fresh Vegetables	2 - 4 cups daily	1 cup daily	1-2 pieces (every few days)
Fresh Fruits	Occasional treat	Occasional treat	1-2 pieces (every few days)
Additional Supplements	–	10 – 30mg Vitamin C daily	Place food away from their favorite sleeping spot to encourage foraging

## MEDICAL

### Things to Watch for...

Please understand that pets can break with illnesses **AFTER** they go home to foster! It is important to take time every day to keep an eye out for any symptoms of potential illness. As foster pets are under the legal ownership of the SPCA of Wake County, medical care is provided and doesn't need to be covered by the foster home. The location for the vet visit is determined by the availability of staff as well as the nature and severity of the problem. **When arriving for any appointments, all pets must be transported in a carrier and remain so while waiting in the lobby for their safety as there are often multiple pets and patrons from the public.**

*Report any of the below and other medical concerns to the Foster Coordinator at 919-630-9680.*

*Remember the Foster phone can receive texts, pictures and videos in addition to calls!*



**URI (Upper Respiratory Infection)** are fairly common and symptoms include sneezing, coughing (deep, dry and hacking, or moist and productive), excessive head shaking, clear or colored nasal discharge, ocular discharge, difficulty or labored breathing, lethargy, loss of appetite, weight loss, and exercise intolerance. It has about a two week incubation period, so URI is most likely going to be triggered after they are in a foster house. It is typically treated with antibiotics.

**Ear mites and fleas** look like small little black dots that move through their fur or in their ears are indicative of fleas or ear mites. Both are very common in pets that come from the shelter and it's important not to panic as it can be easily treated, both the pet and the home. In rare cases, maggots can be present and these are often with pets that have been strays for an extended period of time.

When any new rabbit comes into our adoption program, they are treated with Revolution which kills both parasites. If any are seen, we can provide a topical treatment for the pet and handouts as to how to best clean their environment so it doesn't spread.

**Dental Care:** Small pets have teeth that constantly grow so it's important to have many chew toys made of wood and cardboard in order to file their teeth. If they are not kept in check, their teeth can grow to the point where it becomes difficult to eat and cause issues with their jaw.



While toys are normally sufficient for most small critters to keep their teeth in check, occasionally it's not enough and they need to be filed down by a veterinarian. In extreme cases, the pet may very loudly grind their teeth; this is often accompanied by dull eyes and a tight and uncomfortable posture.



**Physical injuries** and **neurological issues** can be hard to identify. Notify the Foster Coordinator immediately of any of the following symptoms: not eating/drinking, extreme listlessness, excessive head shaking/scratching, urinary problems including straining or blood in the urine, loss of coordination, head tilt, seizures, suspected poisoning and the inability to move properly.

Typically we would need to have the animal assessed by a medical staff member to be able to identify what the issue is and treat accordingly.

**Environmental temperatures** are very important for rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters and other small mammals as they can easily get too cold or suffer from a heat stroke. When in doubt for rabbits, it's best to err on the side of cooler rooms as they like to stretch out on tile floors. Guinea pigs, hamsters and mice like to burrow, so indirect sunlight and warmer rooms are ideal.

## Spay & Neuter Surgery

All rabbits will be spayed or neutered prior to adoption. Since rabbits are considered an exotic pet, this will be completed with one of our partner veterinarians at an offsite location: **Avian and Exotic Animal Care in Raleigh** or **Animal Kingdom in Cary**.

The foster parent is responsible for dropping off and picking up the rabbit(s) for surgery unless arrangements with the SPCA have been made otherwise. Pick up and drop off times vary by location.

**Greens will need to be sent with the pet so they can eat after surgery. Do not remove food prior to being spayed and neutered.**

Recovery time is longer for rabbits, especially females, and they must be monitored closely; if your rabbit hasn't eaten within 12-24 hours after surgery, please call the foster care line right away so we the rabbit can get emergency care.

Guinea pigs, hamsters and gerbils are too small and therefore are not fixed prior to adoption, but they are kept separate from the opposite sex so as to not reproduce.

## MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

In the event of an emergency, we will send foster pets to one of our offsite, veterinary partners. We only have select vets for exotic foster pets as they are considered a specialty practice; they are listed below for your convenience. **If you are unsure if your foster is experiencing a medical emergency, call and we will make that decision. We will direct you to the best vet location for your foster as not all vets can perform all necessary procedures, i.e. like x-rays.** Call the Foster line at **919-630-9680** immediately so a staff member can coordinate with the vet about what is going on so you can focus on getting there safely.

### SPCA Partner Day-Time, Exotic Vet Locations

#### Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

**Address:** 8711 Fidelity Blvd., Raleigh, NC  
**Phone:** (919) 844-9166  
Day-time emergency & spay/neuter surgery

#### Animal Kingdom

**Address:** 336 East Durham Rd., Cary NC  
**Phone:** (919) 460-9111  
Day-time emergency & spay/neuter surgery

### SPCA Partner Urgent Care Vet Locations

#### Animal Emergency Hospital & Urgent Care

**Address:** 409 Vick Ave, Raleigh, NC 27612  
**Phone:** (919) 781-5145  
**Exotics Experience:** Yes

#### Wake Veterinary Hospital & Urgent Care

**Address:** 1007 Tandall Pl, Knightdale, NC 27545  
**Phone:** (919) 266-9852  
**Exotics Experience:** Veterinarian dependent



## WHERE DID THEY COME FROM & WHERE DO THEY GO?

### Admission Program

We are a managed-admission animal shelter, which means we accept incoming animals based on available shelter or foster care space. Once an animal comes into our care we will not euthanize that pet except in cases of untreatable illness or if the animal poses a safety risk to the community.

We focus our animal intake efforts on the animals most at-risk of euthanasia at surrounding area animal shelters. We don't usually take pets from the public, but are occasionally able to make exceptions for puppies and kittens, please contact the Admission Team at **919-772-3203** if you have any questions.

### Adoption Program

We operate on a first come, first serve basis to be fair for both humans and pets. This means your foster pet can have a pending adoption, without you knowing as people can go through the process for them based on a social media post, seeing them at the previous shelter, or even just because they saw the pet walk into the SPCA.

The process is a verbal discussion with an Adoption Specialist and typically takes thirty to forty-five minutes depending on the pet's history and how many questions you may have. We do try for same day adoptions, so be prepared to take home the same day. *The process and fees are the same for patrons, volunteers, fosters and staff.*

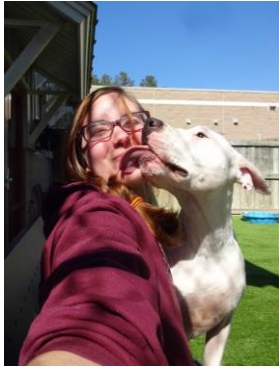
#### Adoption Fees:

- Dogs (7 month+): \$95
- Puppies (6 months & younger): \$250
- Cats (7 month+): \$45
- Kittens (6 months & younger): \$150
- Rabbits: \$35
- Guinea Pigs: \$15
- Hamsters & Mice: \$10



All available pets will be listed online. Fees for puppies and kittens are higher as they help offset the costs of care for adults who are not adopted as quickly. Bonded pairs that are required to go home together will have a notation in their profile and often a reduced fee to entice adopters. For more information, please check out our website at [spcawake.org/adopt](http://spcawake.org/adopt) or call the Adoption Team at **919-772-2326 ext. 2070**.

## MAIN CONTACT INFORMATION



### Foster Coordinator: Alyssa Broughton

I'm your main point of contact for all things foster related and am available to answer any questions both medically and behaviorally. Business hours are 9am-6pm, every day except Tuesday and Sunday. Emails are typically responded to within the same or following business day. If there is an emergency or an extremely time sensitive situation, call the Foster Care line any time.

**Foster Phone: 919-630-9680, Email: [abroughton@spcawake.org](mailto:abroughton@spcawake.org)**

### Small Critter, Volunteer Mentor: Astrid Verdegaal

Astrid is an experienced rabbit foster and owner; she has graciously offered to pass along her wisdom to new foster parents. Below is her best contact info for any questions that may come up while in foster care. Please be mindful of when you are calling as she is a volunteer and not paid staff. For any medical care, please call the Foster Line. **Phone: 919-567-2522, Email: [astrid@trianglerabbits.org](mailto:astrid@trianglerabbits.org)**

## SPCA Locations

We have two locations in our organization. Foster pick-ups and medical appointments can be at either building and we will give you instructions as to where to go. In general, small critters will have their appointments and pick-ups at the Adoption Center as this is where we have the supplies and spacing.



### Pet Adoption Center

**Address:** 200 Petfinder Ln Raleigh, NC 27603

**Phone:** (919) 772-2326

**Hours:** 11am - 6pm (Tues - Sat.)

1pm - 6pm (Sun.)

1pm - 8pm (Mon.)



### Admission Center

**Address:** 327 Hwy 70E Garner, NC 27529

**Phone:** (919) 772-3203

**Hours:** 9am - 6pm (M-F)