



Hospice Foster Guide

Thank you for joining us in saving lives! PAWS Hospice Program was created to provide a safety net for our terminally ill animals, giving them the comfort of a loving home for their final days instead of spending them in a shelter. This reference guide answers the most frequently asked questions to ensure your fostering experience goes as smoothly as possible.

Before you take home a hospice animal...

Communication is key! A hospice animal's health and behavior can change quickly, so it is key to relay any changes to the foster and medical team **immediately**. Please reply to our emails/calls in a timely manner.

You must have access to transportation. Hospice animals are very fragile, so foster parents must have a plan (a friend who drives, Lyft, Uber, etc.) in case the animal needs to be transported immediately to one of our clinics.

For details about PAWS full foster process, please read our [Cat Foster Guide](#) and [Dog Foster Guide](#).

Foster Resources: phillypaws.org/foster-resources - Bookmark this one-stop shop for all your foster needs!

Once approved, join our groups: Facebook (Philly PAWS Fosters); PAWS Hospice Google Group

Foster Email: foster@phillypaws.org (*Email is the best way to reach us during COVID!*)

Responsibilities, support, and saying goodbye...

Your responsibilities. Fostering a hospice animal is a wonderful and rewarding experience, but is also hard work, time-consuming, and emotional. Taking care of hospice foster animals requires a commitment from you to ensure the animal is comfortable and cared for. You will be responsible for providing your hospice animal with the basic necessities and when directed by our vet, medicating. You must be able to bring your foster animal to our clinic for any necessary medical attention including emergencies.

Support. You are not alone in this process. There is a whole team at PAWS who understand how hard it can be to care for a terminally ill animal. There's always someone for you to talk with about any part of hospice fostering. This can be an emotional journey and being honest with your team is the best way to feel supported.

When it's time to say goodbye. A common feeling is that you, as the foster parent, are determining when a life will end. PAWS has made sure to eliminate this burden because the decision is ultimately made by our trained medical team to make the best decision for the animal. Your input will certainly factor into their decision, but there may be a time when you aren't quite ready to say goodbye when the staff has deemed it best for the animal. We understand this is a lot to ask, but it is the central tenet of hospice fostering: being able to say goodbye to an animal we cared for when it is ready, even if we are not ready. We take euthanasia very seriously, and always put the compassion of easing suffering as our first priority.

You may be present during the time of euthanasia, if you choose. This is a very personal decision, and you will want to think about this ahead of time. While it is not a requirement, you are likely the person the animal feels the closest to, and it is always nice for the animal to be with familiar people during their final moments. If you choose not to attend, we will have staff members who know and love the animal present, so do not feel pressured if you are unable to be present.

We will cremate the ashes of any of our animals who pass. If you would like to purchase the ashes for yourself, please let the foster counselor know ahead of time so we can arrange for that.

Terminology...

Hospice animal: They have a condition or illness that will not improve with medication, procedures, or time.

Stable hospice: A condition or illness that will not improve with medication, procedures, or time. BUT they are stabilized with some palliative treatment.

Unstable hospice: They have a condition or illness that will not improve with medication, procedures, or time; with a steady decline that cannot be relieved with palliative, non-heroic care. Euthanasia will likely be recommended for animals in this category.

Palliative: Relieving pain without directly addressing the cause of the condition.

Quality of life (QOL): The standard of health, comfort, happiness, and ability to participate in or enjoy life events.

Daily care and monitoring...

Each animal will have specific needs, such as medications, special diets, or restrictions. Please follow the specific instructions given to you about your animal's needs. These things are in place for a reason and **MUST** be followed. If you are unable to do so, you will be asked to return your hospice animal to the shelter.

Monthly quality of life (QOL) assessments will need to be submitted to the foster team using [this form](#) which can also be found on the Foster Resource page. It is an important tool we use to gauge how your hospice foster is progressing. The first assessment should be completed within the first week you take a hospice animal home.

Monthly check-ins with the animal's primary veterinarian are required to monitor the animal's health. We never want animals to suffer, so hospice animals ideally meet with the same veterinarian each month to make sure they are not declining nor hiding any signs of pain or illness.

Your hospice animal is cleared for adoption!

If your hospice foster remains stable in your care and is cleared by our vet for adoption, you will be asked to start promoting the animal by submitting photos and a bio using [this form](#). We will need to include language that the animal is a part of our hospice program and set adopter's expectations while keeping the language positive!

Congratulations! Once you've found an adopter who is a good fit, ensure that they've had a conversation with our staff about the animal. Then the adoption can be finalized! See the [Cat](#) or [Dog](#) Foster Guides for more about the full adoption process. These can be found on the foster resource page. **Hospice adoption fees are waived.**

Important emergency info & urgent symptoms to look out for...

If an animal is showing any of these serious symptoms, it is considered an *emergency* and they may be in danger of dying. Please call our emergency phone numbers immediately, listed underneath the symptoms.

- Unable to lift up their head on their own and/or pale gums
- Struggling to breathe (open-mouth breathing for cats), highly increased breathing effort
- Lethargic (they are not moving at all even when you touch them)
- Feeling excessively cold to the touch with little movement
- Sudden lack of mobility in any limbs or inability to stand on their own
- Seizing
- Crying out in pain (either when being touched or not)
- *Please call us immediately if an animal has passed away in your care.*

ONLY emergencies listed above should call the emergency phone!

Emergency phone: 267-258-8510

Email with subject line "URGENT" for urgent medical issues that are not emergencies - foster@phillypaws.org