

Mom and Pups Foster Guide

Fostering a mom and her pups is an undertaking of love! The family gets to be raised in a home environment, which helps to reduce the stress on mom and her pups.

Mom should do a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to caring for the puppies when they're most vulnerable. She will keep her pups fed as well as clean them by stimulating them to go potty (and she will eat it-gross, we know, but it's part of the natural process!).

As her puppies get older, she will need longer breaks and will typically show signs of when she is "done" with her puppies and weaning in earnest should begin. After weaning, mom and pups separate.

Supply List

- Whelping box (or equivalent)
- Playpen or x-pen (for when pups start escaping the whelping box)
- Bedding, linens, towels
- Heating pad (adjustable preferred) or heating lamp
- Bowls, food, toys for mom
- Bowls, food, toys for puppies (if puppies are 3+ weeks old)
- Scale
- Thermometer and lubricant
- Grooming supplies/tools
- Bottle feeding supplies (in case of emergency)*
- Video camera (for remote viewing)*

* Optional but very helpful!

Week 1 and Week 2

Your goals are to care and check in on mom's health as well as to ensure puppies are gaining weight, are sleeping most of the time, and staying warm and clean.

Milestones

	1 WEEK OLD	2 WEEKS OLD
Health	96° to 98°F temp. ~10% weight gain/day	96° to 99°F temp. ~10% weight gain/day Eyes start to open
Activity Level	Low; mostly sleeping, otherwise eating	Low; mostly sleeping, otherwise eating
Movement	Crawling, snuggling with littermates	Attempts to use front legs, sleep twitches
Should not be	Crying frequently	Crying frequently

Puppies are most vulnerable during the Neonatal Stage, and when your mom is being a good mama, this is really her time to shine, and your focus should be on caring for mom. It is important to allow mom's behavior and tolerance of your presence with her and her pups to guide how much or little you interact with her.

If handling the puppies stresses mom out or causes signs of maternal aggression, your safety is more important! If you feel your safety is at risk, reach out to your foster coordinator.

In many cases, mom will become more tolerant of handling after the first week or two.

Week 1 and Week 2

Handling

- Weigh each puppy and record at the same time each day
- Gently hold puppy and make sure it is clean and in good health

Care

- Change out linens and bedding at least once daily
- Check heating pad temperature/timer every six hours
- Check the health of mom's teats every other day
- Check and top up mom's food and water three times daily
- Give mom at least a 30 minute break every few hours (if she wants one), give her love and attention if she allows
- Take mom out to go potty as needed

What to Watch For (Mom)

- Clogged milk ducts (mastitis)
- Ignoring puppies (not nursing, not cleaning, etc.)
- Lethargy
- Milk production
- Unusual vaginal discharge

What to Watch For (Puppies)

- Chilled
- Excessive crying
- Failure to gain weight or losing weight
- Lethargy

Week 3 to Week 4

The Transitional Stage occurs between 14 and 28 days of age. Around 21 days of age, puppies will start to regulate their own body temperature, which means that a source of heat may no longer be needed and can be removed.

They will continue to cry when a basic need is unmet, but they will be a little more active as they gain motor skills and will interact more with each other. Their eyes will open between 10-14 days and their hearing starts to come in between 17 and 21 days of age.

Mom may nurse less often as early as 3 weeks or may tolerate nursing for several weeks. Weaning should begin by 4 weeks of age and can be done gradually, depending on the pace mom sets.

	3 WEEKS OLD	4 WEEKS OLD
Health	100°F temp. ~5-10% weight gain/day Hearing improves Baby teeth emerge	100°F temp. ~5-10% weight gain/day Teeth continue to emerge
Activity Level	Starting to play and interact with littermates, still sleeping a lot	Moderate; increased interaction with littermates, socialization begins
Movement	Starts to stand and walk, can sit, potties on its own	Walks, stands, sits, potties on its own, may climb
Should not be	Crying frequently	Crying frequently

Week 3 to Week 4

Handling

- Weigh each puppy and record at approximately the same time each day until 21 days of age (then every 2 to 3 days)
- Gently hold puppy and make sure it is clean and in good health
- Begin puppy socialization program
- Check the health of mom's teats *every day*

Care

- Change out linens and bedding *every time* they are soiled
- Check and top up mom's food and water three times daily
- Give mom at least a 45 minute break every few hours, give her love and attention if she allows
- Take mom out to go potty as needed
- Feed puppies *one to three times* per day (once weaning begins)
- Provide fresh water to puppies (once food is introduced)

What to Watch For (Mom)

- Clogged milk ducts (mastitis)
- Ignoring puppies (not nursing, not cleaning, etc.)
- Lethargy
- Milk production
- Unusual vaginal discharge

What to Watch For (Puppies)

- Chilled
- Excessive crying
- Failure to gain weight or losing weight
- Lethargy
- Missing development milestones (vision, hearing, motor skills)



Week 5 to Week 12

Puppies should have started the weaning process, which is when they are introduced to wet food (or gruel). Mom often stop cleaning up after her pups as they eat more solid food, and she will need more breaks to prevent conflict between her and her pups.

You will need to proactively monitor mom's behavior with her pups to help determine when they will need to be separated. In larger breeds, this tends to be earlier (3 to 5 weeks) and in smaller breeds, it can be later (5 to 8 weeks).

Puppies will continue to go through their socialization program. Your job as a foster is to help your puppies understand what living life in a home is like, which includes familiarization and interaction with household noises, objects, and people.

	5-6 WEEKS OLD	7-8 WEEKS OLD	9-12 WEEKS OLD
Health	100 to 101°F temp. ~5-10% weight gain/day Most baby teeth in	100°F temp. ~5-10% weight gain/day	100 to 101°F temp. ~5-10% weight gain/day
Activity Level	Moderate, barking, playing, climbing, exploring	Moderate to high, playing longer, sleeping less	Moderate, barking, playing, climbing, exploring, trainable
Movement	Moves more confidently, mouthiness	Climbing, jumping, running	Climbing, jumping, running, rougher play

Week 5 to Week 12

Handling

- Weigh each puppy and record weekly
- Hold, handle, and pet puppies and increase duration and level of interaction each week following the socialization program
- Take outside (or to a “play space” if you have no outdoor space) beginning at four-weeks of age for 30-60 minutes daily; increase play breaks and duration as pups get older
- Check the health of mom’s teats every day

Care

- Change out linens and bedding every time they are soiled until four weeks of age; then two to three times daily (as needed)
- Replace used pee pads as needed
- Check and top up mom’s food and water three times daily (feed less as she cuts back on nursing)
- Allow mom to take breaks at her leisure
- Take mom out to go potty as needed
- Feed puppies three times a day and provide water to puppies

What to Watch For (Mom)

- Clogged milk ducts (mastitis)
- Correcting puppies
- Ignoring puppies (not nursing, not cleaning, etc.)
- Lethargy
- Unusual vaginal discharge

What to Watch For (Puppies)

- Failure to gain weight or losing weight
- Missing development milestones (vision, hearing, motor skills)



Supplemental Handouts

Please refer to the following supplemental handouts that complement our Mom and Pups foster guide:

- When to Wean
- Introducing Food and Water
- Introducing the Potty Area
- Introducing Grooming
- Separating Mom and Pups
- Setting Up Puppy Play Spaces

We recommend fosters follow the KinderPUP lesson plans to create well-socialized and forever home-ready puppies!

- Introduction to KinderPUP
- Socialization Stage Fundamentals
- Week 3 Lesson Plan
- Week 4 Lesson Plan
- Week 5 Lesson Plan
- Week 6-7 Lesson Plan
- Weeks 8-10 Lesson Plan
- Weeks 10-12 Lesson Plan

