Fostering Puppies

(Adapted from City of Seattle Animal Control)
MOM DOG WITH PUPPIES (PUPPIES 0–4 WEEKS)
A small, quiet, warm, easily cleaned room (laundry room, bathroom, family room, kitchen, or dry and warm basement or garage) is best for a mother and pups. Clean bedding should be provided, and food and water nearby. A child’s plastic baby pool, lined with a blanket makes a wonderful, safe den for mama and babies. The mother dog should be allowed outside on leash (or supervised in a fenced yard) at least twice daily to eliminate. The puppies should not go out at all. If the mother’s history is unknown, she will not be vaccinated at the shelter. Be aware of other dogs and other dogs’ feces when taking the mother out for a walk, since she may not be properly vaccinated. The mother will spend most of her time early on nursing, cleaning up, and caring for her pups. Later, as the pups become more mobile and less demanding on her, she may enjoy more time away from them and active play with people and chew toys. As pups become more mobile, check their living area for hazards.

Feeding
The mother dog requires extra nutrition for adequate milk production. Feed a premium diet three times a day. Be sure all the puppies are nursing and steadily gaining weight. Newborns depend entirely on mom’s milk, receiving valuable antibodies in the first milk (colostrum). When the puppies are three weeks old, begin offering a low bowl (a pie plate) of water-soaked kibble (puppy chow). Be sure to offer this at a time when the puppies are hungry, and, if necessary, separate the mom so she won’t eat it all up. By four weeks of age they should be eating some mushy meals. (See the next section on Weaning Orphan Puppies.) By six weeks of age puppies should no longer need mother’s milk and should be eating soaked kibble and starting on dry kibble.

Medical Care
Call your foster care coordinator if you see any signs of illness in mother or pups. If the mother dog goes off food or is stressed, milk production may drop sharply, and puppies may have to be raised as orphans. Check mother’s mammary glands daily. As long as pups all nurse and gain weight, production is probably adequate. If milk production or mother’s calcium reserves are inadequate, the mother may develop eclampsia, is an emergency situation of low blood calcium levels requiring immediate attention. Symptoms are muscle twitching, tremors, anxiousness, progressive to stiffening seizure-like tremors. A hard, red,
hot, or painful mammary gland may mean mastitis which should be checked by a veterinarian. Nursing mothers often “blow their coat” when nursing due to nutrition demands on their body; feeding premium diet in adequate amounts helps avoid this situation. Vitamin supplements can also help. The mother’s vaginal discharge (lochia) should taper from dark mucoid green to reddish brown in smaller amounts by three weeks postpartum. The mother should be vaccinated as soon as she is finished nursing. Check the pups’ umbilical cords daily until they dry and fall off. Eyes open at 7–10 days—watch for infections/crusting at the lids. If you see fleas, ask your vet for advice on treating the newborns.

The puppies should receive their first dose of deworming medicine at 2–3 weeks of age, followed by a second dose in 10 days. Dewormer will be provided for you. At 8 weeks of age the pups should receive their first set of shots.

Socializing
Be aware that mama dog may be protective of her pups, but most mother dogs will allow a calm, gentle approach by adults and picking up/handling of pups. Puppies need a lot of human contact. Handle them as much as you can.

**ORPHAN PUPPIES (0 – 3 WEEKS)**
What you will need:
- Box or Carrier
- Towels
- Wash cloths
- Esbilac or similar formula
- A/D or baby food
- Bottles & Nipples
- Small syringes
- Dishes with low sides (pie plates)
- Hot water bottle or Heating pad
- Timer/ticking clock
- Flea comb
- Baby Shampoo
- Kapectate
- Possibly a kitchen scale that weighs in 1 oz increments

Since the mother is not available, the foster parent must provide all of the mother’s functions: feeding, warmth, cleaning, and stimulation to urinate/defecate.

Safety/Confinement
These pups should be set up in small living quarters (crate or box with bedding) easily kept consistently warm—at about 80–90 degrees. They will pile on each other to keep warm, but a hot water bottle and warm bedding are needed. Heating pads can be dangerous. If used, they should be kept on low, with several layers of bedding between the pad and pups, and they should be monitored closely.

Feeding
Puppy milk replacer such as Vet-alac or Esbilac, should be mixed and fed according to the package directions. Generally, feeding every three hours is needed in the beginning. By three weeks of age, feeding every 4–5 hours with a night break of eight hours should work well. Milk replacer can be fed by dropper or syringe or bottle as pups accept it and need larger feedings. Some of the pups may be too weak to suck from the bottle and you will need to feed them with syringes. If you need to syringe feed the puppies, drip the formula slowly into the side of their mouths, and give them time to swallow. Going too fast can cause liquid to go into their lungs and cause pneumonia.
Do not hold pups on their backs either, or allow them to suck too fast (can lead to aspiration of formula into the lungs). The puppies should be tilted forward and slightly up, as if they were nursing on their mother. Never try to bottle feed an unconscious or semi-conscious puppy. Feed until the puppy’s tummy feels tight and full. Sick puppies will not eat eagerly, and you will have to feed them slowly and often to ensure that they are getting enough food.

After each feeding, you must stimulate bowel and bladder movement. Use a warm, damp cotton ball, or later a cloth as volume increases). Mineral oil on a Q-tip at the anus may stimulate defecation. DO NOT insert the Q-tip into the rectum! Gently massage their genital areas in a circular motion, and do not stop until they have finished eliminating. Note the color of the urine. If it is light yellow or straw colored, that is normal. If it is a bright canary yellow, the puppy is dehydrated and needs fluids immediately. Cottage cheesy stools or diarrhea are also an indication of illness. Call your foster care coordinator if you see these symptoms.

As your pups grow and become more mobile, weaning time approaches. Weaning can be started at three weeks by offering formula in a low dish or pie plate with or without canned food mixed in. Be sure to offer when puppies are hungry, so they will make their best effort to lap/flick/eat. Supplement with bottle feedings as needed until pups are lapping consistently from a dish. By 4–5 weeks no more bottle feedings should be needed. At four weeks, offer water soaked kibble with or without canned food mixed in or formula added. (Water penetrates kibble better; soaking in formula does not work as well). Begin offering dry food at five weeks when the puppies are hungry near meal time so they will start to try the dry food. Continue feeding soaked kibble until seven weeks or so. By eight weeks, the puppies should readily eat dry food only.

**Medical Care**

If signs of illness develop in the pups, notify your foster care coordinator. Lack of appetite and diarrhea are of special concern. Check umbilical cords daily until they dry and fall off. Eyes open at 7–10 days—watch for infections/ crustings at the lids. Newborns without a mom may also try to nurse on each other causing injury (genitalia are the common site for this false “nipple”). Pups may need to be separated if this occurs. Deworming should occur at 2–3 weeks of age which will be provided for you. A second dose should happen in 10 days. If fleas are found, call the shelter vet for advice in treating newborns. From birth on, puppies must be kept clean and flea free. Fleas can kill a puppy and cause anemia. Daily flea combing is usually enough, but you should be prepared to bathe them if necessary. At 8 weeks of age, the pups should get their first set of vaccinations.

**Cleaning**

Initially, newborn pups should be kept in a box or crate, and bedding should be changed as needed. The process of stimulating urination/defecation, then cleaning or soaking up urine/feces with cotton or cloth should keep puppies fairly clean. As pups become more mobile and learn to urinate/defecate on their own, a larger box or small, papered, gated area like a kitchen or bathroom may be used to confine them. Keep area free of feces/urine. The weaning process (low dish of mushy food) can make for messy feet and faces—wash with a warm wet cloth as needed. If you must bathe the puppies, make sure they are thoroughly dried after bathing, to avoid chilling, which can lead to illness.
Socializing
Handle newborn pups as much as possible to get them comfortable with humans.

Puppy Development
It is important to start handling and manipulating the puppies right from birth. Although their ears and eyes are still sealed, their sense of smell is already relatively well developed. The wild stress they may experience when being picked up accelerates body growth, reduces emotionality and possibly increases their resistance to certain diseases. Moreover, they become imprinted to human scent.

The growing puppies should be handled every day, and gentle grooming should be started at 4-5 weeks. As they become more aware of their environment, they should be exposed to as many stimuli as possible (vacuum cleaner, young children, men, women, other friendly animals, loud noises, etc.). However, you must pay attention that they do not become too stressed, over-stimulated, or tired. Short car trips will get puppies used to traveling. At first all puppies should experience things by themselves to learn to cope with life later on.

If the mother is not available, it is important that the puppies come in contact with an older, friendly dog from about 5 weeks of age on. They have to learn how to communicate like a dog and most importantly, how to submit. A puppy who has not learned submission from its mother or another adult dog will be more difficult to train later on. At this age, it is also very important that the puppy learn bite inhibition. He learns it best from his litter mates and from his mother or other adult dog.

From the age of 8 weeks on, the puppy is ready to learn “human” language and the rules of human society. Socialization with other dogs and humans has to be continued. With any introduction, be aware of the possibility of transmission of infectious disease—use good judgment.
Puppy Development

AGE
1–3 weeks

NEEDS
Warmth
Food
Sleep
Dependent on mother

MENTAL CAPABILITY
Reflex behavior
Needs stimulation to eliminate
Cannot regulate body temperature

NOTES
• Should be handled gently for brief periods of time
• Sense of smell is functioning
• Will imprint on humans
• Littermates important

4–7 weeks

Food
Sleep
Mother for discipline

Ears/eyes open
All senses functioning
Aware of environment
Responding to stimuli
Eliminate on their own
Temperature regulation has improved
Begin weaning

• Influence of littermates increases
• Interaction with mates necessary to learn bite inhibition
• Regular handling
• Exposure to people, animals, and noises
• Begin to form social attachments with other species
• Provide sensory rich environment

8–12 weeks

Continued socialization
Play
Food

Fully weaned
Mental capacity fully developed
Can learn basic commands

• Learns dog language from mates and adult dogs
• Learns submission from mother

**Most sensitive period in pup’s development: what it experiences now remains for life

HOW TO TAKE A PUPPY/DOG’S TEMPERATURE
You will need:
Rectal thermometer
Vaseline
Disinfectant (30:1 water & bleach solution)

A normal temperature for dogs and puppies is 100.5–102.5 degrees. Any temperature below 100 degrees or above 103 degrees is a problem. Call your foster care coordinator immediately.

If a puppy has a temperature below 100 degrees, get him onto a heating pad (turned to low and covered with a towel) immediately. If the temperature is 103 degrees or higher, and the puppy has been on a heating pad, remove him from the pad immediately.
To take the dog/puppy’s temperature:
• Sterilize the thermometer by dipping it into the disinfectant solution.
• Dry with a clean paper towel.
• Shake the thermometer down to under 80 degrees.
• Coat the tip of the thermometer with a small amount of Vaseline.
• Insert the tip of the thermometer 1/2 inch into the dog’s rectum and hold there for 1–2
  minutes. Be gentle, as the rectal tissues are fragile, and you don’t want to tear the tissue.
• You may need a second person to help hold the dog or puppy to prevent struggling. You
  should be speaking softly to the dog. If a second person is helping, sometimes it is helpful to
  stroke the dog around the head to distract him from what is going on in the other direction.
• Be sure to sterilize the thermometer again when finished.

NOTE: Using a digital thermometer can be much easier and faster! Follow the direction
included with the thermometer.

HOUSEHOLD ITEMS THAT ARE POISONOUS TO ANIMALS
Remove any rat or mouse poisonings and windshield wiper fluid from your house before
fostering!!!!!!!!!!!!
(Those printed in all caps can be fatal)
Alcohol
ALMONDS
Amaryllis bulb
Anthurium
APRICOT
ASPRIN
AUTUMN CROCUS
Avocado
Azalea
BEGONIA
Bird of paradise
Bittersweet
BLEEDING HEART
Boxwood
Bracken Fern
Buckeye
Buttercup
Caffeine
Caladium
CALLA LILLY
Castor bean
Cherry
CHINESE SACRED
OR HEAVENLY
BAMBOO
CHOCOLATE
CHOKE CHERRY
Chrysanthemum
Clematis
Crocus bulb
Croton
Daffodil
Delphinium, larkspur
Dumb cane
Elderberry
English Ivy
Fig
Four-o’clocks
FOXGLOVE
GARLIC
Hyacinth bulbs
HYDRANGEA
Holly berries
Iris corms
JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT
JIMSON WEED
Kalanchoe
LANTANA
Lilly
LILLY OF THE VALLEY
Lupine species
MARIJUANA OR HEMP
MILKWEED
MISTLETOE BERRIES
MORNING GLORY
Mountain laurel
Narcissus
OLEANDER
ONION
PEACH
PENCIL CACTUS
Phelodendron
Pointsetta
Potato
Rhododendron
Rhubarb leaves
Rosary Pea
Schefflera
Shamrock
Spurge
Tomatoes
YEW