

Policy Number:		Effective/ Revision Date:	4/27/2019 9/12/19
Policy Title:	Pet Safety Policy		
Policy:	It is the policy of Extraordinary Families to promote safety for all children and youth who are under the supervision of the agency in foster care. This includes an assessment of all animals in the resource home.		
Purpose:	<p>All animals present potential risks. The purpose of this policy is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectively assess what the risks are from a specific animal • Identify and verify the resource family's arrangements for the care of the animal and the extent to which they guard against potential risks and accidents; • Identify the resource family's intended action if problems around pets were to arise once a child is placed; and • Make it clear to resource families that the burden of evidence rests with them that the animal presents no serious risk. The owner may be asked to provide a statement from a qualified Veterinary or animal behaviorist concerning the safety of an animal. 		
Responsibilities:	Direct Service Staff and Supervisors, Director of Programs		
Reference/ Relevant Documents:	Reference:		

SUMMARY

The presence of animals in resource homes can be valuable and in certain cases have a positive and therapeutic effect on children. Pets can be a cornerstone of their emotional health, sharers of unconditional friendship, and a constant presence in a world that previously lacked stability. Some pets, however, can also pose a risk to children, especially pets who have not been socialized or who do not have experience with children. Pets can also become the object of a child's frustrations or suppressed anger. Knowing whether a pet, like a dog or cat, will be helpful or hurtful to a child depends on a thorough understanding of the history of both the child and pet concerned.

Extraordinary Families (EF), together with resource parents, needs to ensure that the child's welfare is protected at all times. Ownership of pets does not necessarily preclude anyone from becoming a resource parent. We recognize the benefits of having pets are vast. Our first and foremost consideration, however, is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and ensure their needs are prioritized. The potential implications presented by ownership of any type of pets will be assessed on their own merits. While initially assessed upfront, there is an ongoing duty for resource parents to ensure the child's safety and that their household (and other households they visit) remains safe. If an animal poses any risk, the resource family must have a strategy to either reduce or remove the risk.

Extraordinary Families will not tolerate any incidents of cruelty to animals and will not assess any potential applicants who have been convicted of cruelty to animals.

Assessment

Pets: During the home study process, whenever a new pet is introduced to a resource home, or whenever there are significant changes regarding the pets in a resource home, the resource family is responsible for notifying EF and providing details as to why their pet(s) have the appropriate temperament to join the family home. In addition to their own observations, EF may require supporting evidence regarding the pet's behavior and management. Consideration will be given to the impact of any changes in routine to the pet, issues of territory and protective factors in pets towards their owners, and the pet's prior experience with children. If there is any doubt about the suitability of an animal, expert opinion may be sought, such as from a veterinarian or animal behaviorist/trainer.

When deciding to introduce a new pet to an existing resource home, the resource family should:

- Carefully consider what type of pet would best fit the child's temperament, needs, etc. and the household dynamic;
- Seek expert advice on the care and attention the pet requires, and carefully consider whether the family has the resources to care for the pet without jeopardizing the care of the child or adversely impacting their responsibilities as resource parents;
- Seek background information on the pet, when possible (e.g. age, history with children, etc.); and
- Consult with EF once all information is known.

Any change in circumstances regarding pets should be included in the next Home Study Update. In general, no more than three pets may be cared for in the home while providing foster care. Exceptions may be made, and each case is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Children: Matching considerations before a child is placed with a resource family should include a risk assessment of, when possible, the child's attitude towards and experience with pets (e.g. is the child fearful of pets, have a history of mistreating animals, etc.), allergies, and any other risks that would impact the child's capacity to live in a household with pets.

Daycare, Respite, and Visiting Animals: This policy applies to visiting friends or relatives of the resource family or any other visitor who bring pets into the home, as well as to any daycare or respite provider. The introduction of pets to children should always be assessed for risk.

Health, Safety, and Hygiene

In all cases, pets are expected to be well cared for. Dogs and cats should be dewormed and treated for fleas regularly and as needed. Their food and water must be fresh (and may not contaminate human food or food preparation areas). All feces (inside and outside of the home), litter trays, fish tanks, and cages (for small animals, i.e. birds, hamsters, etc.) must be cleaned regularly and may not present any risk to humans. Any animal hair, feathers, etc. should be regularly cleaned, swept or vacuumed. Litter trays, cages, and fish/reptile tanks must be kept out of reach from crawling babies, toddlers, and young children.

It is important to be aware of the health risks that can be associated with pets and all vaccinations should be up to date. Some health risks include, but are not limited to:

- Toxoplasmosis from cat scratches, bites and litter trays;
- Toxocariasis or toxocara canis (aka dog roundworm)

- Campylobacter, a bacterial infection caused by bacteria commonly found in animal feces
- Psittacosis, sometimes called Parrot Fever, although relevant to other birds.

Suggested Pet Safety Rules for the Household (and to teach children as age appropriate)

- Never approach any animal, even your own, when the animal is eating, sleeping, chewing on a toy, or in its crate.
- Always pet an animal gently, with no pulling or tugging, and never from behind.
- Avoid making loud noises or sudden moves when approaching an animal.
- Always ask an adult before approaching an animal you don't know. If the adult says it is safe, reach out your hand with the palm facing up and slowly move it toward the pet's nose for sniffing. Do not touch the animal's eyes, ears, nose, mouth or genitals.
- Avoid contact with a dog or cat's waste, which can transfer disease. Young children are especially tempted to reach into the cat's litter box; (it looks like a mini-sandbox!)
- Don't let your child touch a dog or stand near a dog during times of heightened excitement—for example, while the dog is eating; when someone comes to the door; or when the dog is barking at a squirrel in the yard or at someone through the window.
- Never stick your hand into a fish tank. The water may contain salmonella or other harmful bacteria.
- Never tap on a pet's cage or stick your hands or objects in the cage.
- If a pet looks sick or is injured, stay away and tell an adult. An animal that normally loves to be touched and played with may get very upset and even bite when it is feeling ill or hurt.
- Pets are living creatures to be cared for and respected. Animals have needs and feelings, and they rely on us, their caretakers, for companionship and loving care.

No child in care should be left alone at any time with a pet. Accidents happen, even with the most trustworthy children and pets.

Actions in the Event of an Injury to a Child by a Pet

If a pet in the household bites, scratches or in any way injures a child, the resource family must take the following actions:

- Separate the pet from the child, pending further assessment;
- Give the child first aid and seek medical advice/attention as soon as possible, as needed;
- Notify EF immediately (following Special Incident Reporting procedures)

Actions in the Event of an Injury to a Pet by a Child

If a resource family finds or believes that their child in care is being cruel to the pet(s) in the household, they must immediately notify their EF social worker. Cruelty to animals is a childhood behavior that deserves attention from both parents and professionals involved in the care of the child. At times, children will innocently mistreat an animal (e.g. a young child may pull a cat's tail, but not understand that it is hurtful to the cat). In such cases, the child's behavior will usually be extinguished by the animal's response and reinforced by the parent's explanation. Unfortunately, if a child consistently hurts animals, seeks animals to hurt, and does not respond to parental interventions, there may be a problem that needs further assessment and intervention.

Pet Safety Plans and Alternative Care Plans

All families with pets in the home are required to develop a Pet Safety Plan for each pet in the home specifying who is responsible for the care of the animal (i.e. walking, feeding, cleaning, etc.), how the animal will be cared for (e.g. for a small rodent, kept in a clean cage inaccessible to the child), and actions to take to prevent injury to a child or pet (e.g. transitioning a dog or cat to be outdoors but with suitable shelter to protect from weather, access to food and water, etc.; or hiring a dog trainer to train the dog and seek expert recommendations regarding the safety plan; etc.).

In the event that a child is significantly injured by a pet, the pet presents behaviors that place the child at risk of injury, or the child has been found to be repeatedly cruel to a pet, the Pet Safety Plan must be revised as needed and approved by EF, which could include an Alternative Care Plan for the pet(s).

An Alternative Care Plan would be necessary in the event that a Pet Safety Plan alone would not protect the child or animal from harm. An Alternative Care Plan does not mean resource families must cease ownership of their pets. When possible, an Alternative Care Plan could mean a relative or friend agrees to care for the pet for the duration of time a resource family provides foster care services for a child.

Extraordinary Families understands the bond families share with their pets – they are members of the family – and EF will work with resource families to determine the best course of action to protect a child in placement while also honoring the families’ connection to their pets. The priority, however, must always be on the safety and wellbeing of the child.



Resource Family Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Check which applies to your home:

- There are currently **NO** pets in my home.
- There **ARE** currently pets in my home, and they are:

Type of Pet	Breed of Pet	Name of Pet	Date of Last Vaccination(s)	# of Years with Family	Temperament
<i>Example: Dog</i>	<i>Pug</i>	<i>Harriet</i>	<i>4/27/19</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Socialized, extensive experience with children, gentle</i>

Pet Safety Plan			
Person responsible for care (i.e. walking, feeding, cleaning, etc.)	Pet 1:	Pet 2:	Pet 3:
How the pet will be kept (e.g. indoors, outdoors, cage, combination of indoor/outdoor, kennel, dog run, etc.)	Pet 1:	Pet 2:	Pet 3:
Preventative Safety Actions (e.g. dog training, dog/pet daycare, ongoing supervision, etc.)	Pet 1:	Pet 2:	Pet 3:
Additional Comments (use back of page as necessary):			

In consideration of the safety of a child placed in our care, I/we acknowledge that I/we understand and agree to the conditions of the Pet Safety Policy and Plan outlined above. In particular, we agree to the following:

- Any pet, whether belonging to us or with whom a child in our care may come into contact, will be kept in a safe way;
- Children will be supervised at *all times* when in contact with pet(s), whether belonging to us or with whom a child in our care may come into contact;
- When considering obtaining a new pet when a child is already placed in our care, we will consult Extraordinary Families first;
- We will inform Extraordinary Families immediately if we obtain new pets, whether or not a child is placed in our care;
- We will ensure our pets are well cared for (receive routine vet care and vaccinations; have access to shelter, fresh water, and food daily; are dewormed as needed and treated for fleas; daily exercise needs are met; etc.);
- We will provide Extraordinary Families proof of pet vaccinations for dogs and cats and proof of license for dogs.
- Extraordinary Families staff must assess and meet all pets in the home.

By signing below, I/we acknowledge that I have read this document in its entirety, understand and agree to my responsibilities, and have received a copy of this Pet Policy and Contract.

Signature of Resource Parent 1

Printed Name

Date

Signature of Resource Parent 2

Printed Name

Date