



## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIND A STRAY ANIMAL (KITTEN LITTERS, CATS, DOGS)



If you've found a stray, do the obvious first – check for a tag. If there is a tag, and the owner's name is on it, call and arrange for a pickup, and know you have done your good deed for the day. If the tag gives the name of a veterinarian's clinic, call during business hours and get the name and phone number of the owner using the code number on the tag. Then follow up to return the dog or cat. If the animal has no tag, there may still be a way to identify the stray if he/she has been microchipped.

If you have some hesitation about trying to find the owner, keep in mind that just because an animal is injured, scared, or without identification does not mean that he has a "bad" home. Your stray might have lost his identification; he might have been lost for a long time; he may even be a rescued animal who was scared when he was adopted.

### ORPHANED KITTENS FOUND (OR MOM CAT FOUND WITHOUT KITTENS)

**The best place for kittens younger than eight weeks old is with their mother, whenever possible.**

If you see a litter of kittens that looks to be abandoned or orphaned, please refer to the following guide for what to do:

- If you find kittens who are alone, determine if the mother has abandoned them or if she is just off looking for food. The only way to find this out is to wait. Often times, she will return within a few hours. Observe from a distance or a hidden spot to be sure she is not returning before moving the kittens. Use common sense and be patient.
- If the mother cat doesn't come back after 8 hours, and you think she has abandoned the kittens or they are in danger, you can choose one of several options. Raise them yourself; bring them to Charleston Animal Society for fostering; foster them for Charleston Animal Society; or assist in trapping them so they can be vaccinated, spayed/neutered, and returned to their life outside. We can help you determine if the kittens require [neonatal kitten care](#) (one- to four-weeks-old), if the kittens are young enough to be socialized, fostered or adopted (six- to 16-weeks-old), or if they are at the age to be trapped, neutered, and returned (four months or older).
- If the mother cat does return for her kittens, you have multiple options to consider:
  - If the mother is feral and the kittens are too young to be separated from her, the best thing for the family is to leave them where they are for now as long as the location is safe. (Use your judgment and common sense—if you think the location is safe enough for the mother to survive, leave the kittens with her. Remember, the mother is best able to care for her kittens. You can assist in providing food, water, and [shelter](#). Monitor the family daily and make the environment as safe for



them as you can. If you have decided you don't have the time or the resources to foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, then you can trap, neuter, and return the whole family when the kittens are 8-weeks-old or two pounds. If you can foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, the ideal window is when the kitten are between six weeks and 12 weeks old. The best thing for the mother cat is to be trapped, spayed, and returned to her outdoor home.

- If the kittens are too young to be separated, and you believe it is safer for the whole family to come indoors—you can trap the mom, trap or scoop up the kittens depending on their age, and bring the whole family inside to a quiet, small room like a bathroom, where they can live until the kittens are weaned and it is safe to get them all neutered. Learn more about how to care for an outdoor cat family indoors in the sidebar at left. From there you can decide what is best for the kittens and either return mom outside if she is feral or find her an adoptive home if she is fully socialized. **IMPORTANT:** It can be very traumatizing for a truly feral cat to be brought indoors with her kittens, not to mention potentially dangerous. [Learn how to tell the difference between socialized \(stray\) cats and feral cats.](#)
- If the mother is feral and the kittens are old enough to be separated from her, you have a decision to make: commit to foster, socialize, and adopt out the kittens, or trap, neuter, and return the kittens when they are 8 weeks or two pounds.
- If you trap a cat and discover at the clinic that she is a nursing mother, get her spayed immediately and return her to the area where you trapped her as soon as she is clear-eyed that evening, with approval from the veterinarian. Many times, you only learn this after she is at the clinic—make sure the clinic knows your plans for returning nursing mothers as soon as possible; they may have an anesthesia protocol that will enable her to wake up from surgery more quickly. It may seem counterintuitive to separate her from her kittens, but it's difficult to trap her again—this may be your only real chance to spay her and prevent further litters. Try to find the kittens (following the mother after you return her) so that you can trap and neuter them when they are old enough. *Note: Nursing mother cats continue to produce milk after being spayed, and can continue to nurse their kittens.*
- If you discover at the clinic that you have brought in a pregnant cat, have her spayed by an experienced veterinarian who has performed this surgery before. It may be necessary to allow an extra day for recovery and extended observation. For many people, this is a difficult aspect of trapping and returning, but as with nursing mothers or any cat in a trap, it may be difficult to trap her again—this is your opportunity to protect her from the health risks and ongoing stresses of mating and pregnancy.

## HANDLING HOMELESS ANIMALS

Please be sure to exercise caution with an unfamiliar animal. Even a tame cat or friendly dog can become aggressive and bite when they are frightened or injured. State law requires that a pet that has bitten a person must be quarantined – in an official shelter - if unvaccinated. Since all homeless and feral animals have uncertain vaccination histories, it's especially important that you exercise caution in handling unknown animals.

**Animal Resource Center**  
**[www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp](http://www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp)**



## THINK BE CAREFUL

To minimize the risk of being scratched or bitten, we recommend the use of humane box traps for feral cats. Even for friendly strays, we suggest that you put tuna fish (intended for human consumption) in the back of the carrier. A little hunger makes the cat more likely to enter the carrier. After the cat has completely entered, close the door with a gloved hand (an oven mitt will work, too). If the cat will not go in or if you do not have a carrier, you can call the local animal control or shelter to borrow a humane trap.

Traps can also be rented from some local rental companies. (Please see the section titled "Community Cats" for more info on potentially feral cats and resources.)

### HOW TO REPORT A STRAY

- **Charleston Animal Society is an open admissions animal shelter serving Charleston County.** If you find a pet in Charleston County, you may bring it to Charleston Animal Society during our regular operating hours.
- **If you find a pet outside of Charleston County,** please contact the animal shelter in that county. Charleston Animal Society cannot accept pets that are found outside of Charleston County.
- **If you find a pet after operating hours,** please consider holding onto the pet until Charleston Animal Society opens the next day. If you cannot keep the animal overnight, please call your local police non-emergency number for guidance.
- **If you find an injured stray animal** after Charleston Animal Society is closed for the day, you may take the animal to an Emergency Animal Clinic:  
North Charleston: Veterinary Emergency Care 843-744-3372. Mount Pleasant Animal Emergency Clinic 843-216-7554.
- **You will not be charged** for turning in a stray animal, but you will be asked to verify that the animal is stray, so please take your ID to provide necessary information.

### LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

You should always report having found a stray/lost animal so that the owner, if there is one, can find them. Doing this does not mean that you must relinquish all concern for the animal. While we prefer you bring the animal in so we can assist in locating its family, you may still keep in touch with us to follow up on the status of the animal and assist with placement once he/she is available for adoption. Charleston Animal Society scans all incoming dogs to locate a possible owner. We are required to hold dogs for five days, but if you are interested in adopting them, we would allow an individual to put a possible hold on them while they are in our care.

Even though you're not legally required to notify the shelter, you'll still want to let us know that you have a stray. If the owners of the animal are looking for their pet, they will most likely start by calling the shelter, so it's very important that we know that you have found the pet.



### IF YOU WANT TO TRY TO FIND THE OWNER(S) YOURSELF

Besides notifying your local shelters and having the animal checked for a microchip (required by law), you'll want to check lost-and-found ads in the local newspapers. Try placing an ad in the lost-and-found section yourself. Another good strategy is to post flyers in the vicinity where the animal was found.



A typical ad describes the type of animal, the location where he/she was found, and the coloring and other distinct characteristics of the animal.

You want to leave out some crucial characteristic, though, so that when someone calls claiming to be the owner, you can verify that the animal really belongs to him/her. This helps guard against turning strays over to animal abusers. For example, you could leave out the gender of the animal, or the fact that she has white socks on her front feet or a really bushy tail. Don't forget to give your phone number and times you can be reached.

### **Be wary of dishonest callers.**

When someone answers your ad, make sure the person gives you a detailed description of the animal. To ensure that you have found the animal's real owner, here are a few additional tips:

- Ask the caller to bring a photo of the animal to the meeting place.
- Ask for their veterinarian's phone number, and make a follow-up call.
- Watch how the animal reacts to the caller in person. If you are not satisfied, ask for more proof of ownership.
- Remember to get the owner's phone number and address.
- Ask them to bring their photo ID.

### **FINDING A NEW HOME FOR YOUR NEW FRIEND**

If you do need to find a new home for a pet, you'll want to advertise as widely as you can, in as many places as possible. Creating a flyer is a great way to start.

When you've made copies of the flyer, post them throughout your community, wherever a good prospective adopter might see them. Ask to put them up at veterinarians' offices, pet supply stores, and the workplaces of your family and friends. Places like health food stores, supermarkets, libraries, churches, and health clubs often have community bulletin boards where anyone can post flyers.

**\*\*For additional resources on rehoming an animal, please see the section titled "Finding a New Home"**

**First and foremost, we recommend that all pet owners consult with their veterinarian. The information contained herein is meant to be a resource. It is not exhaustive, nor does it indicate an endorsement or recommendation from Charleston Animal Society. Please use your own due diligence in researching these sources and making the best choice for your pet(s).**

**We'd like to give thanks and credit to the following organizations, whose published resources were utilized in addition to staff research for this compilation:**

Nevada Humane Society [www.nevadahumanesociety.org](http://www.nevadahumanesociety.org)  
Best Friends Animal Society [www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)  
Alley Cat Allies [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

**If you still need assistance after reviewing the information on our website, please either email or call our Animal Resource Center at [help@charlestonanimalsociety.org](mailto:help@charlestonanimalsociety.org) or (843) 329-1554.**

**Animal Resource Center  
[www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp](http://www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp)**