



Companions for Life

A BC SPCA Intermediate level unit focusing on responsibility and empathy development

BCSPCA

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Companions for Life

Introduction

Companions for Life an Intermediate level unit developed by the BC SPCA to teach students about the interconnectedness between humans, animals and the environment.

Companions for Life focuses on responsible animal care, animal needs, the role pets play in society, and how our actions affect others – people, animals and nature. The unit fulfills a wide range of curriculum objectives outlined on page seven and eight.



Teachers can use *Companions for Life* as a theme unit or integrate individual lessons into existing lessons. The activities focus on building empathy, understanding responsibility, making good, informed choices and valuing the relationship between animals and humans. The similarities and differences between humans and animals are an important aspect of building empathy and can then be used as a springboard to developing empathy towards others. For students who don't have pets or may not want a pet it is still important for them to understand that animals are sentient beings and that animals, humans and the environment are all interconnected.

Companions for Life is designed around a presentation on the responsibilities of pet guardianship. Introductory activities lead up to the presentation and follow-up activities are included to build from the presentation. These activities can stand-alone and are a good way of introducing empathy to a class. An appendix provides preparatory reading material for teachers and reproducible sheets for the outlined activities.

The Presentation

This unit was developed to enhance the skills learned in the *Companions For Life* presentation that is done by a BC SPCA representative. We encourage your to use the introductory activities prior to the presentation and follow-up activities after the presentation. These will help ensure the learning outcomes are met and that the messaging will have the intended impact.

Learning Objectives

- compare needs of humans to non-human living animals
- develop empathy
- understand the responsibility of pet guardianship
- identify the five freedoms needed to ensure a quality life for pets.
- understand the human benefit of having animals
- identify items that are harmful to pets

How does this unit fit the curriculum?

The activities in this unit have been developed with curriculum learning objectives in mind. The links to the curriculum for various grade levels are listed on page seven and eight.

Providing new ways to achieve these objectives will add variety to your teaching methods and will build on a subject to which most students are interested. This unit can be integrated into many different subject areas. It can be used as a theme unit or as enrichment to your existing program.

How will this unit benefit students in my class?

The two main concepts that are the focus of *Companions for Life* are empathy and responsibility.

Empathy is a skill essential for pro-social behaviour and is a prime indicator of the potential success of a child. Empathy can sometimes be difficult to teach, yet incorporating animals as the subject, gives students a neutral ground in which to start. Once empathy is developed using animals it is easy to make the transition to people and the environment.

Responsibility is something students need to understand in order to feel confident. Students must understand that their actions and words are their responsibility and affect others around them. Pet care responsibility is quite common for students though many times it is not one that is given the serious consideration that it deserves. Having used pet care as a base to introduce responsibility students can then be expanded to their responsibilities as citizens within the community. By using critical thinking skills students will come up with their own ideas of community, national and global responsibility.

How does *Companions for Life* fit in with anti-bullying programs?

Research shows that childhood cruelty to animals can lead to violence towards humans. Virtually all serial killers have a history of abusing animals as children. These dramatic examples aside, the research indicates the prevalence of childhood animal cruelty is high. What is relevant for educators is that those that engage in acts of violence including those that witness them, become conditioned to accept and engage in violence as adults.

Early intervention is the key. Lack of empathy development is a common thread in those that abuse others. *Companions for Life* is designed to help develop empathy skills in children. For more information of the link between animal abuse and other forms of family violence visit our website at spca.bc.ca/link.

Curriculum Links

English Language Arts

Grade 2-3

- describe the main topics or ideas in communications they read and view
- identify and describe details and feelings conveyed by illustrations
- offer direct responses to their reading, listening or viewing experiences supported by reasons, examples and details
- demonstrate an interest in using information from documentaries, news broadcasts, newspapers and electronic sources
- collect specific information from a variety of sources, including print, oral discussions, electronic media, and computer technology
- contribute relevant ideas to discussions
- demonstrate a willingness to communicate a range of feelings and ideas
- seek opinions and consider the responses of others

Grade 4

- describe and recount key ideas or information from various media
- identify the main information given in illustrations
- show empathy for characters by projecting their feelings into the events portrayed in print, audio and visual works
- demonstrate an awareness of the positive and negative influences of the mass media on in society
- gather information for specific purposes and identify sources including people, print, audio-visual media, and electronic media
- identify the purpose of and audience for oral, written and visual communication
- create a variety of communications to express personal feelings and thoughts
- demonstrate an awareness of the diverse languages, ideas, opinions, cultures and contributions of their peers.
- demonstrate an awareness of how to use language to connect their own understanding and experience to those of others

Grade 5

- demonstrate understanding of the main ideas or events in print and in non-print media
- categorize roles and describe stereotypes portrayed by characters in various print and non-print works
- identify and use sources of information, including people, print, audio-visual media, and electronic media
- select and shape information appropriately for specific audiences and purposes
- assume a variety of roles when interacting in groups
- listen to and express interest in the ideas of others

- demonstrate respect for the diverse languages, ideas, opinions, cultures and contributions of their peers
- demonstrate an awareness of how they can use language to display empathy and make connections with others.

Health and Career Education

Grade 4

- Steps in decision making• use appropriate vocabulary to express feelings

Grade 5

- factors affecting decision making
- benefits of personal support networks

Visual Arts

Grade 4

- make 2-D and 3-D images using a variety of design strategies, variety of media, to communicate ideas

Grade 5

- make 2-D and 3-D images using a variety of design strategies including selection, to communicate ideas and engage more than one of the senses.

Social Studies

Grade 3

- apply critical thinking skills to selected problems or issues gather information from a variety of resources
- create a presentation on a selected topic
- formulate a response to a relevant community problem or issue
- identify changes that occur in a community over time

Science

Grade 4

- determine how personal choices and actions have environmental consequences.

Introductory Activities



You and Your Pets Future

Introduction

It is important to remember that getting a pet means taking care of it for its entire life. Many people do not think of their future plans or possible changes in life that could affect their ability to care for a pet.

Objective

- Demonstrate an understanding of the responsibility and commitment required to care for a pet.

Activity

Students will use the table to figure out how old they will be when each pet is very old. Next they will make a list of things that will likely be different in their lives 5-8 years from now and contemplate if those changes will affect their ability to take good care of their pet.

You and Your pets future

Pet	Average life span		Your age now		Your age when your pet is old
Dog	14	+		=	
Cat	17	+		=	
Rabbit	9	+		=	
Turtle	40-80	+		=	
Guinea Pig	6	+		=	
Hamster	2	+		=	
Horse	25	+		=	
Parrot	80	+		=	
Snake	20	+		=	

Make a list of things that will likely be different in your life when your pet reaches old age.

What is it all going to cost?

Introduction

Often people bring pets into their home without doing their research on the animal. One aspect of having a pet is the cost. Many people are often surprised at the cost of a pet and money is sometimes a reason guardians surrender their animal.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the costs of having a pet
- Identify the items needed to be a responsible pet guardian.

Activity

Have students come up with a list of items needed to be a responsible pet guardian. Have them estimate the cost of the items. Next, using local flyers, or specific web sites (because prices can vary dramatically between web sites so it is best to give them sites to use) have the students fill out the tables and compare them to the ones on the following pages and their initial estimates. Is it more expensive than what they first thought?

What is it all going to cost?

The following pages show average costs to keep pets. Students should fill in the worksheet on page 21 and use flyers or other resources to find out the costs. These sheets are for teacher reference.

Costs for a Dog

To keep a medium sized, mixed breed dog. The yearly cost will be approximately

Food	12 bags dog food (18 kg) @ \$45	540.00
Biscuit treats	1 boxes per month @ \$5.00	60.00
Veterinary Care	Yearly Visit – exam and vaccinations	120.00
Nail clipping	every month @ \$10.00	120.00
Grooming	every 4 months @ \$65	195.00
Dog License	every year (spayed or neutered)	35.00
Vacation (boarding)	1 week dog care @ \$45/day	315.00
Total		\$1385.00

Initial Costs

Adoption fee (includes tattoo & neuter/spay) at the SPCA	295.00-475.00
Cost to purchase a dog	500.00 -1500.00
Spaying (female) and tattoo	200.00
Neutering (male) and tattoo	125.00
Food and water dishes	30.00
Collar and leash	50.00
Brush and comb	25.00
Toys - balls, Frisbees, etc.	25.00
Crate	75.00
Dog Bed	50.00
Training	120.00
Total adopted from the SPCA	\$670.00 - \$850.00
Total purchased female, unspayed	\$1075.00- \$2075.00
Total purchased male, unneutered	\$1000.00- \$2000.00

These are average basic costs and do not include emergency medical care, initial vaccinations, items that they might destroy or the cost of fencing.

Costs for a Cat

To keep a domestic long-haired cat, the yearly costs will be approximately

Food	7 cans of cat food every month @ \$2	\$168.00
Dry cat food	1 bag (3.6kg) every month @ \$20.00	240.00
Cat treats	every month \$3.00	36.00
Veterinary Care	yearly visit - exam and vaccinations	100.00
Litter	1 bag of cat litter every month @ \$12.00	144.00
Nail clipping	every month @ \$5.00	60.00
Cat care Vacation	1 week @ \$20.00 per day	140.00
Total		\$888.00

Initial costs:

Adoption fee (includes tattoo & neuter/spay) at the SPCA*	145.00
Food and water dishes	15.00
Collar, leash and harness	25.00
Brush and comb	15.00
Litter pan and scoop	20.00
Small scratching post	30.00
Cardboard travelling box	15.00
Toys and miscellaneous	20.00
Total	\$285.00

* Below is an explanation of the services included in the BC SPCA adoption fee. This breakdown is similar for dogs and rabbits.

Cat needs	Free Cat	BC SPCA Cat
Spay/neuter	\$150	Free
Vaccinations	\$45	Free
Flea control	\$55	Free
De-worming	\$35	Free
ID - microchip or tattoo	\$50	Free
Vaccinations	\$50	Free
Health check	\$45	Free
Vet insurance	\$45	Free
Hide, Perch & Go cat carrier	\$20	Free
	\$495	

These are average basic costs and do not include emergency medical care, initial vaccinations, the cost of an outdoor cat run or bed.

Costs for a Rabbit

To keep a domestic rabbit the yearly cost will be approximately

5 lb bag of pellets	every months @ \$14	168.00
Fresh veggies & fruit	every month @ \$20	240.00
Timothy hay (not alfalfa)	1 flake every month @ \$5	60.00
23 litres of Care fresh litter/bedding	every month @ \$8	96.00
Annual vet exam	once/year	46.00
Nail Trim	every 2 months @ \$10	50.00
Total		\$660.00

Initial costs

Adoption fee (includes neuter/spay)at the SPCA	65.00
Habitat/Hutch	75.00
Spay/Neuter (neuter is less)	75.00
Litter box	15.00
Rabbit care book	15.00
Dishes, water bottle	15.00
Misc. Brush, harness, leash	20.00
Total for rabbit adopted at the BC SPCA	\$205.00
Total for purchased rabbit	\$280.00

These are average basic costs and do not include care for your rabbit if you go on vacation, a large hutch or special medical attention.

Is there enough time today?

Introduction

In order to make an informed decision about which animal to get as a pet or if you should get one at all, it is important to know if you have enough time to properly care for a pet.

Objective

- Evaluate the time required to properly take care of a pet;
- Assess personal lifestyle to see if they have the time needed to care for a pet.

Activity

Students will decide what type of pet they think they would like. As a class, discuss the needs of different types of pets so that students include all the time necessary for taking proper care of their pet (refer to spca.bc.ca/youth/about-animals/pet-care).

Next, they will mark in the times on their schedule when they think they will make time for their pet. Then they can either take home the worksheet where they will keep track of the things they do before and after school and note if anyone else is home during the day or they can fill it out based on what they know they do each day of the week. For the weekends they will keep track of their activities for the whole day. This can be reviewed to see if there were any conflicts in the time they thought they would make time for their pet and when they were busy doing other things.

Discuss with each student if their choice would be a good one for both the animal and themselves based on the information gathered.

Is there enough time today?

Day/Time Mon. Tues. Wed Thurs. Fri.

Morning

Lunch

After school

Evening

Day/Time	Saturday	Sunday
8 a.m. – 11 a.m.		
11 a.m. – 1 p.m.		
1 p.m. – 4 p.m.		
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.		
6 :p.m. – 9 p.m.		
9 p.m. – 11 p.m.		

Presentation



Background Information:

At the BC SPCA we pledge our energies to inspire and mobilize society to create a world in which all animals, who depend on humans for their well-being, experience, as a minimum, five essential freedoms:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

You do not have to address these directly but use the following information to cover all of the freedoms. The freedoms listed are for your info, it is not necessary to discuss the freedoms specifically with the students.

Responsible pet care should include the following information.

- Basics – Food, Water, Shelter, medical attention, clean living space, exercise (Freedoms 1,2,3,4 &5)
- Most important – care and love (Freedoms 3,4 &5)
- Necessary for most pets – training, ID, grooming (Freedoms 4&5)

It is also important to realize that when getting a pet you are making a commitment to that pet for its entire life.

Comparing pet needs to human needs is a good way for children to empathize with pets. Discussing how they would live without these elements is a good way to reinforce the importance of pets needs.

***To the Presenter – Do's and Don'ts**

Do:

1. Role modelling is extremely important during the presentation. Students may not remember all the information covered but they will remember your actions.
2. Keep your animal(s) as stress free as possible. Let the children know how their actions make the animal feel.
3. Always use positive reinforcement when managing your animal, and impress upon the students how this works to build a trusting relationship with your animal.

Don't :

1. Don't make your animals do tricks. This reinforces the idea that animals entertain us and they should be respected for their animality.
2. Don't use choke or pinch collars on dogs. This is negative reinforcement.
3. Don't dress up animals. This is for our benefit not theirs.

Materials:

Cards on pages 33-36:

Items for household hazards grab bag

- medicine,
- plants,
- electrical cords,
- chocolate, raisins etc.

Photos of small animal habitats

Evaluation for Teacher

The Presentation

The following is an example of what to include in a presentation

Introduction

Introduce yourself and your connection with the BC SPCA.

Ask students what the BC SPCA stands for and what they think we do.

The BC SPCA is the police for animals. When someone sees an animal being injured, neglected or abused they call the BC SPCA and we go out to make sure the animal is ok and if it isn't we can take the animal into our care. We also have shelters.

Ask students, where does the BC SPCA get their animals? *They are surrendered when people can no longer care for their animal, people have allergies to the pet, animals that have been seized because people are not caring for their pet, etc.*

Why do people have pets? *Answers will vary. Talk about the importance of pets in our life and our responsibility for the animal.*

How long should you keep a pet? *Answer will vary. Reinforce the idea that pets are to be kept for life.*

When you get a pet it is a big commitment. What does that mean? *Clarify this.*

What qualities make an animal a good pet?

Wild/Exotic/Domestic

First let's talk about what type of animals make good pets.

Do you think it is a good idea to keep squirrels, skunks or raccoons as pets? Why not? *They are wild animals and it is illegal to keep them as pets.*

Should people in other countries keep wild animals from Canada as pets? Why?

Are there any animals that are wild in other countries that we keep as pets? Why do we keep them as pets if they are wild? Is it good for the animal?

What are some problems you might have keeping an exotic animal as a pet in order to care for it and provide it with all it needs? *(vet care, proper habitat so that they can behave in a natural way, may not like to be handled by humans, may not be able to tell if it is sick, proper food might be hard to find, they might live for a very long time – parrots, turtles can all live over 50 years) Some animals like iguanas need a place to swim and proper humidity levels. Hedgehogs sleep during the day and don't like to be handled.*

Basic Needs of all Pets

What are some things you need to think about before you get a pet? *The teacher should have done an activity around this topic with the students, but if not make sure these points are covered:*

- life-span of the animal (ask them how old they think a cat lives and then how old they are now. Ask them if they got a kitten now how old would they be when their cat is very old? Talk about the long life-span of animals such as turtles, iguanas and parrots.)
- expectations of the relationship with the animal (why do they want a pet and what are some things they want to be able to do with the pet)
- time you can spend with the animal (different animals have different time requirements)
- affordability (unexpected veterinary costs must be provided)
- allergies (do you know everyone in your family is not allergic to the kind of animal you want - test it out by pet sitting for a friend)
- who will be primary person responsible (adult must be ultimately responsible)

Let's take a look at what things humans and animals need to be healthy and happy? *Hand out the cards (page 33-36) On a board write "Human" and "Animal". Ask the students to come up one at a time and put their cards up under the correct heading. Then ask them to match the cards in each column to equivalent needs, for example ID/Voice*

Food – all pets need special food to keep them healthy. They need different food from people to stay healthy. Some foods that we eat can be very dangerous for pets.

Water – All pets need to have FRESH water available all the time in a bowl or water bottle. Dirty water can get germs in it and make your pet sick. Some animals need water to sit or swim in.

Commitment: There are many things to consider before you get a pet. It is not a decision you should make quickly. You must learn whatever you can about the animal before bringing it into your home.

Shelter - All pets need some sort of protection from the weather and a warm, comfortable place to sleep. For dogs, the best place for most dogs is inside with you. They like to be with people and should spend at least part of their day with your family but when they are outside on their own they should have a fenced yard, not just tied up on a leash. If they must sleep outside they also need a house that will protect them from rain, sun and cold. Small animals need to be in a large secure cage to prevent them from becoming lost or being stepped on.

Exercise – dogs need to be walked on a leash or taken to a special running park EVERY day. Leaving them in a yard does not give them enough exercise. Caged animals need to have an exercise wheel and toys, as well as regular handling and play with people. Rabbits and guinea pigs need a large secure area where they can run and hop. Cats need play time to chase or jump at pretend prey.

Grooming - Just a people need to have a bath regularly, brush their teeth, trim their nails and comb their hair, animals need grooming care as well. This differs with each pet. Did you know that for indoor cats and all dogs need to have their nails trimmed. This is usually done best by a groomer or veterinarian. Animals with long hair should be brushed regularly to prevent tangles and mats.

Brushing your dog's teeth is a good way to keep his breath fresh and his teeth and gums healthy. Some animals are pretty good at keeping themselves clean. Cats are very good at grooming themselves but long haired cats need to be brushed to avoid matting.

Veterinary Care - All animals should be taken to a veterinarian for regular check-ups, just like we should see our doctor regularly. Cats and dogs need to get needles/vaccinations so they won't get sick. Through out your pet's life they will likely have to see a veterinarian at other times as well. They may hurt themselves or drink something that makes them sick.

Training – teaching your pet to behave helps him by not getting into trouble and helps you so that you can enjoy a well-behaved pet. Training teaches you to communicate or talk with your pet. It helps you understand them better and helps them stay safe.

Identification – Make sure your pet has some sort of way of letting people know whom they belong to. There are different ways to do that. The easiest way is to put an ID with its name, your address and phone number on its collar. Sometimes collars fall off so you can take your pet to the veterinarian and have him put a tattoo on your pet or the veterinarian can insert a microchip under your pet's skin so that if your animal gets lost and is taken to a veterinarian or SPCA they can scan your pet and your name, address and phone number will come up on a computer screen.

But one of the most important things to give your pet is love, friendship and attention. By treating your pet with kindness, giving them lots of attention, petting them gently and knowing when to give them time to themselves you will be giving your pet a happy life.

Now let's take a look at what it costs to have a dog.

For each item under the Dog column estimate the cost. You can use this chart to help you.

Food	12 bags dog food (18 kg) @ \$45	540.00
Biscuit treats	1 box per month @ \$5.00	60.00
Collar and leash		50.00
Brush and comb		25.00
Crate		75.00
Dog Bed		50.00
Training		120.00
Veterinary Care	Yearly Visit – exam and vaccinations	120.00
Nail clipping	every month @ \$10.00	120.00
Grooming	every 4 months @ \$65	195.00
Total		\$1355/yr

If a dog lives on average 14 years what is the cost of the basics for his life time? \$18970

What about the initial costs of adopting or purchasing a dog? A dog license? Boarding when you go on vacation? Replacing items the dog has chewed? Emergency vet care? Toys? This could easily add another \$2000 - \$8000+ depending on the dog.

Talk about the dependence animals have on their guardians to be happy and good companions. There are many different kinds of animals people get as pets. Talk about small animals such as mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, cats and dogs. All of these animals are available for adoption at the SPCA.

What are some things people may do that are not good for a pet?

- o leave them tied up alone,
- o don't clean the litter box regularly,
- o use pinch/choke collars,
- o hit them when they don't do what we want,
- o let them run out of water
- o don't check to make sure the animal has clean water,
- o don't take them to the veterinarian regularly or when injured/sick etc.

Would you like it if someone did those things to you? *Make comparisons as to how their responses could be similar in human terms. Ex. Unclean litter box – not being able to flush the toilet*

Habitat

Using the small animal habitat pictures or the small animal care guides, talk to students about the need to provide enough space for animals to exhibit natural behaviours. For example hamsters and gerbils like to create tunnels and chew cardboard.

Talk about dogs needing exercise but that living in a backyard is not enough. Dogs don't get exercise plus they need to get out to sniff and be social with other dogs and people.

Cats are safest kept indoors but they need to be able to play, pounce, jump and scratch to exhibit natural behaviours. Playing with your cat with toys is imperative and having places where cats can perch, jump and scratch.

This is a good lead into why keeping exotic animals is not a good idea. Their habitat is hard to simulate in order for them to exhibit natural behaviours.

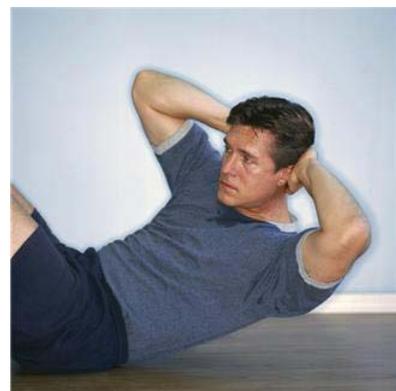
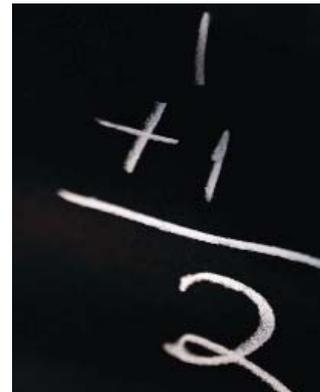
Household Hazards grab bag

Talk to students about things around the house that can be hazardous to pets. You can ask students to come up one at a time to pick something out of the grab bag or get students into groups and give each group an item and have them discuss what animal it might be a hazard to and why it is a hazard to their health.

Conclusion

Congratulate the students on their knowledge and reinforce that animals are a lot like us. Animals have feelings and need many of the same things as we do.

Thanks them for inviting you into your classroom. Role model by saying that animals are very important in your life and that students can help improve the lives of animals by treating them with kindness and sharing things they have learned about caring for animals with others.



brush

Voice

house

Training

school

Doctor

exercise

Food



collar/ID

food

leash

bath

water

veterinarian

water

cage

Follow-up Activities



Getting the Message Out

Introduction

Many people are not aware of the dangers of leaving a pet in a car on a hot day, even with the windows slightly open. Or the dangers of dogs loose in the back of pick up trucks. What happens to domesticated animals released into the wild? Are they prepared to live on their own? What happens when non-indigenous species mate with indigenous ones? What happens when pets are left to roam and are not spayed or neutered? What are the consequences to the community?

Objectives

- Identify the dangers of leaving animals in cars on hot days
- Identify the dangers of allowing dogs in the back of pick up trucks
- Identify the effects on indigenous species when a non-indigenous species is introduced into the wild
- Identify the dangers to a domestic animal released into the wild
- Identify the consequences to the animal and community when a pet is not spayed or neutered
- Inform others in the community of these dangers to pets and wildlife.

Activity

Discuss these topics with students and challenge them to come up with solutions.

Have the students make posters or flyers to inform their school and community on these topics.

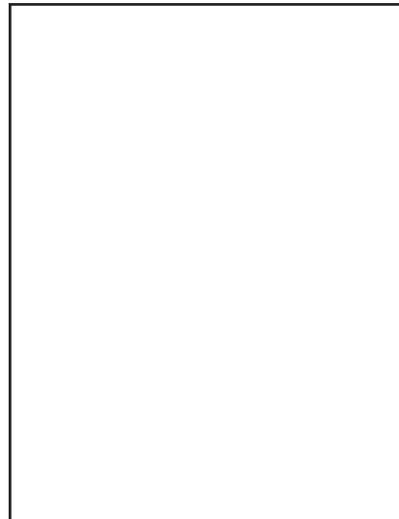
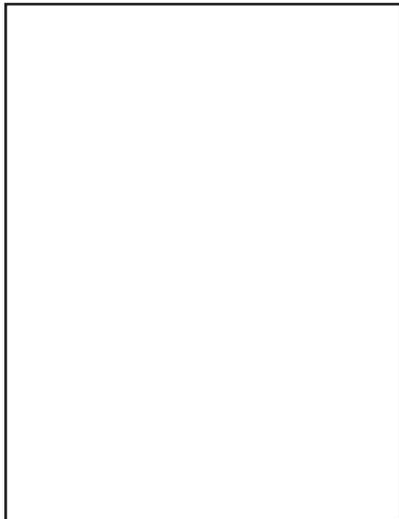
Classroom Discussion/Research topics – Students can discuss or research these topics.

- Dogs in left in cars on hot days
- Dogs in the back of pick up trucks
- Release of rabbits or other species in the wild
- Importance of Spay/neutering to the community and the animal

Getting the Message Out

When making effective posters that communicate a message, it is important to plan. Think about what will catch the audience's eye, what is the important message. Look at example of advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Pick out ads you like and try to determine what it is you like about them. What catches your eye? Is it colour, font, angle of a word, size, a graphic? Look at ads you don't like and determine what makes them less effective.

Draw a small scale version of your poster on the templates below, to test out ideas. Try several different ideas and have friends review them to see what works best to get your message across. Don't put too much detail into this, but get an overall look of the poster. Once you have decided which of your small versions works best its time to move on to the real poster. Always sketch things in pencil first. Then add colour and detail.



Diorama

Introduction

Now that students are aware of the needs of pets it's time for them to create a model of the ideal surroundings.

Objectives

- Demonstrate their understanding of the needs of pets;
- Create a replica of a safe, happy home of a pet of their choice.

Materials

Plastercine, wool, toothpicks, any scraps or materials available.

Activity

Students make a diorama of the ideal home for a pet of their choice. Their diorama should include enriched environment and an indoor setting.

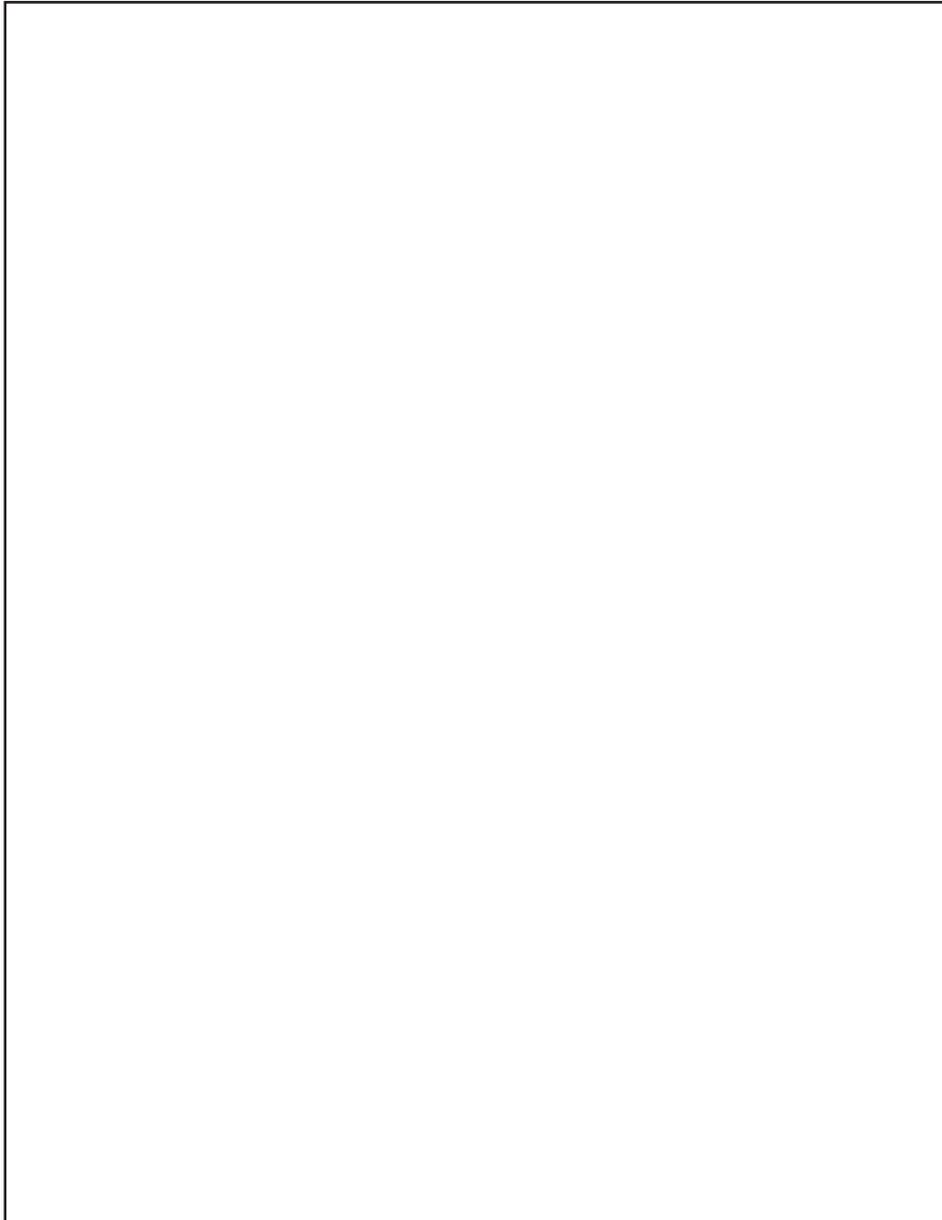
Extension

Make a diorama of your ideal bedroom/house.

Diorama

Now it's time to pretend you are an animal designing your own living space. When people build a house they design it first on paper and then start building. Draft a plan for your pet's living space in the square below. Once you are satisfied everything will fit and all the necessities are there start building a small-scale version (a shoebox or something similar is a good base for your diorama).

Remember to cover all the basics of food, water, shelter and exercise but also include some props that will enhance your ability to express natural behaviours. Do some research to find out what kinds of activities the animal likes to do, dig, hunt, run, chew etc. You may want to display these in your school and educate others on the needs of pets.



Will You be My Best Friend?

Introduction

Role-playing is a good way for students to develop empathy. They must put themselves in the pet's "paws" to find a perfect guardian and home that will meet their needs and wants.

Objectives

- Identify the 5 freedoms needed to appropriately care for a pet
- Demonstrate an understanding of the need to match guardian expectations with the right animal
- Demonstrate empathy skills through role-play

Activity

Students write a description of a pet on a card or use a description of an animal from the BC SPCA web site – bcpetsearch.com The card should include the animal's needs and wants. Have a person role-play a pet and others role-play potential adopters. Have the pets interview the potential guardians to find the right home. The pets must cover each of the 5 freedoms (page 26) to ensure their needs are being met. Switch roles so everyone gets a chance to play the part of a pet.

For those who have pets, have them write down why that pet was chosen and how it works for their family. Is there something they can do to improve the life of the animal? Would they choose this type of pet again why or why not?

Those who don't have a pet write down which pet they would choose and why.

Extension

Pretend you are interviewing for a new brother or sister. Write interview questions for them.

Will you be my Best Friend?

Pretend you are a pet up for adoption at the SPCA. If you had the chance to interview potential guardians what would you ask them? How would you know they are the right person/people for you? If you have a hard time imagining what it would be like being in a shelter check out pets available for adoption at bcpetsearch.com Make sure your questions cover all your needs (Five freedoms) and wants. Then as a class activity have some students pretend to be potential adopters and some students pretending to be the pet. Set up an area in which interviews can take place. You may even want to make props to help get you into your character.

Topics to cover in interview

1. Food/water (type of food required by that animal and fresh clean water)
2. Veterinary care (yearly vaccinations, emergency situations may ask what would you do if ...(ex. I cut my paw)
3. Attention/time requirements (how much time will you spend playing/exercising with me)
4. Comforts (housing/bedding requirements)
5. Natural behaviours (how would they handle barking, digging, scratching, nibbling, burrowing, etc)
6. What are the adopters expectations of you?

Write your interview questions here.

Pet Matching

Introduction

Students must take what they have learned from the information presented and see if they can choose appropriate guardians for pets.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the requirements to be a responsible pet guardian
- Identify the needs of pets and the expectations of guardians

Activity

Students are to choose a kind of pet for each guardian scenario and then write down the reasons they chose a particular pet for that situation or why they thought the family should not get a pet.

Two options:

1. They can go to **bcpetsearch.com** to find a suitable animal for each situation.
2. Use the animals listed on pages 48 & 49 to match with each family.

Extension

Talk about why we have certain people as friends and what qualities make a good friend.

Pet Matching

Below are descriptions of people thinking of getting a pet. Decide if they should get a pet and if so choose one from the animals listed or find a suitable pet at bcpetsearch.com. Include reasons why you chose that pet for them.

1. The Wilsons have a big, fenced backyard. They spend a lot of time outside in their garden. Their oldest son, Rob is 12 and likes to play outside with his friends. In the summer the Wilsons go to their cabin on Bridge Lake. The kids come home every day for lunch and dad works part time from home.

The Wilsons should/should not get a _____ because

2. The Moffles live in a condo. They don't have children and like to travel. They have busy jobs and don't spend much time at home.

The Moffles should/should not get a _____ because

3. The Julians live in an apartment. Their son, George has allergies. He spends much of his spare time on the computer. The Julians both work full time but are home most evenings and weekends.

The Julians should/should not get a _____ because

4. The Kellys have 2 children and live in a townhouse. The kids are aged 5 and 8. Mr. and Mrs. Kelly work full-time. Both kids like animals. No one has allergies.

The Kellys should/should not get a _____ because

4. John and Marsha live in an apartment. John is allergic to cats but would like a pet. John is working part time and going to school and Marsha just started a new job. They are usually home on the weekends and evenings. They are not into outdoor activities.

John and Marsha should/should not get a _____ because

6. Ashley lives alone in a small house. For exercise she likes to go for walks. She has a good job not far from home. She gets along well with neighbors and depends on them in case of an emergency.

Ashley should/should not get a _____ because

Name: Tilly
Guinea Pig
Female
Colour Orange / White
2 years old

Tilly is a very interactive young lady, who loves to cuddle with people, and she even knows a few tricks! While they can be shy at first, once comfortable, Guinea Pigs can be very social. They make wonderful pets, are somewhat low-maintenance, and can give a household the warmth and interaction of having a pet.



Name: Mimieux
Domestic Longhair Cross
Female
Black / White
Spayed
1 year old

I'm super sweet - I love showering my human companions with love & affection. If you like to unwind after a long day at work I'd be more than happy to help you relax with my calm, warming presence.



Name; Cody
Lab Retriever/Coonhound
Male
Neutered
5 years old

Cody would do great in a family with an active lifestyle. He likes his car rides and is good with children, other dogs, but definitely not cats. He thoroughly enjoys going for his daily walks and just playing and enjoying his family. He is an easy going dog who loves attention from people.



Name: Charlie
Mini Pinscher Cross
Male
Neutered
2 years old

Charlie is full of energy and life....and a lot of love thrown in there too! He is used to being inside most of the time and only outside in the winter to do 'his business'. If it's cold or rainy, he'd much prefer to be snuggled up with his human companions on the couch. But on sunny days, he enjoys his long walks and is a very social young dog.



Name: Ferdinand
Rat
Male
7 months old

Ferdinand is well socialized and is fine with handling.

Rats are clean, intelligent, affectionate animals which bond to their human companions in much the same way as dogs and provide a comparable level of companionship.

Rats become very attached to their owners, make playful, sensitive pets, and can be taught to come by name and learn a variety of tricks. Rats are a fairly high maintenance pet. They need playtime outside their cage daily. Rats can suffer greatly if not given enough attention, free-range time, and environmental stimulation. You should provide lots of toys such as an exercise wheel; and ropes or swings for climbing.



Name: Moo
Hamster
Male
3 months old

Moo is young, so he can easily bond with a new family. He will live alone and will need a home where he can be the center of attention.



Do All Animals Make Good Pets?

Introduction

This topic is covered in the presentation, but if you have not had a presentation or the presenter didn't cover this information this activity will gain an understanding of why some animals don't make good pets

Some animals do not make good pets because they are not domesticated. Yet, defining what a domesticated animal is can be a challenge. Typically domesticated animals are ones selectively bred by humans for specific characteristics that are compatible for living with humans thus making the animals dependent on humans for food, care, protection from prey and habitat.

Should we try to domesticate wild animals? For what purposes? Are we disrupting the natural web? For those animals that are in the process of domestication, that may be considered tame (fallow deer, bison), or that we are keeping as pets but are not domesticated (iguanas, hedgehogs) can we provide the five freedoms (see presentation section) for these animals?

Objectives

- Define wild, domestic and exotic animals;
- Differentiate between wild, domestic and exotic animals;
- Identify reasons for domestication of animals;
- Identify reasons why some animals should not be kept as pets.

Activity

This activity can be done as a class or in smaller groups. Students are asked to make a list of animals and then categorize them into wild, domestic and undecided. Next, from their list of wild animals, they further categorize them into wild and exotic. They must then come up with their own definition of wild, exotic and domestic and then compare their definitions listed on the next page.

Do all animals make good pets?

Make a list of wild and domestic animals. You may also want to make another list of undecided. From your wild animal list, which animals would you consider exotic. Now looking at your list, define domestic, companion, exotic and wild animals without using a dictionary. Once you have done that look at our undecided list and see why those animals don't fit either category. Next the students will answer/debate the following questions within their group and then as a class.

Note to Teacher: Most students will agree that wild animals shouldn't be kept as pets. The definition of exotic being, introduced from another country, will create some debate which pets should be defined as exotic. The real issue is which animals should be kept as pets and why, looking at the benefits to the animals over the benefits of their care givers. This activity should create some great discussion.

Define (without the use of a dictionary):

Domestic Animals

Companion Animals

Wild Animals

Exotic Animals

Domesticated animals: Animals that have been chosen by humans to breed over hundreds and often thousands of years so that the animals are dependant, calm, predictable, and controllable.

Companion animals: Domesticated animals that are bred to live and thrive with humans that benefits both humans and animals.

Wild animals: Animals that live in the wild that depend on and are depended upon by other animals and their surrounding environment.

Exotic animals: Wild animals that are non-domesticated, not born in the local/regional environment, whether captured from the wild or captive-bred.

Discussion Questions

What's the difference between wild and exotic animals?

Do you think that all of the animals that are listed as domestic make good pets (with the exception of farm animals)? Why or why not

It is illegal in BC to keep a wild animal as a pet? Why is it not illegal to keep some exotic animals as pets?

Are exotic animals wild or domesticated in their country of origin?

Does keeping a wild animal in captivity make them domesticated?

Does keeping an exotic animal as a pet make that animal domesticated?

What is your opinion on keeping exotic animals as pets?

Is it safe for animals raised in captivity to be set free in the wild? Why or Why not?

How do animals benefit from domestication? What are some disadvantages?

How do we as humans benefit from domesticating animals? Keeping them in the wild?

Discuss the complexities of keeping exotic animals as pets – Veterinary care (are vets specialized), proper nutrition, proper habitat, and providing for natural behaviours.

Why do people want exotic pets? Is it for their own benefit or the animals?

Is it right to keep wild animals as pets? Why or Why not?

Are there any animals listed as domesticated that would benefit more in the wild?

Kindness in Our Classroom

Introduction

Many times kind deeds go unnoticed but if acknowledged they can bring good feelings to both parties involved. These activities are ways to make students more aware of good things happening around them and promote doing good things for others.

Objectives

- Increase awareness of kind activities that occur everyday;
- Increase awareness of feelings associated with kindness;
- Increase kind behaviour in the classroom/school.

Activity

Discuss how kind acts affect both the people doing the act and the person on the receiving end. Students can provide examples of acts of kindness they have done and some that others have done for them and their feelings associated with the kind acts. Also make a point that it is usually easier to do something kind for someone who is kind to us but it takes extra effort to do something kind for people we don't know well or may not like as much, but the good feelings that you get doing these kind things are even better. It is important for students to do acts of kindness without getting something other than a good feeling in return.

Kind Journals – Provide students a special journal just to keep notes on kind acts they have done and kind things others have done for them. Time should be given near the end of each day for students to reflect on their day and make notes of kind deeds. When students are feeling down or having a bad day they may take comfort in reviewing their journal. Note: Because these may be very personal to some students you may want to keep them in a locked or teacher only cabinet and distribute them during the reflection time.

Extension

Students should be encouraged to write thoughtful notes to others who really made a positive impact on their day.

Kindness Tree – On a bulletin board put up a cutout of a bare tree. Have precut leaves available for students to write about kind acts that occur in the classroom. The leaves should be put up anonymously (students hand in leaves to the teacher) but the person who performed the kind act should be acknowledged.

Environment Police Needed

Introduction

Knowing that we share the earth with many living beings, it is important to remember that we are responsible for our actions that can have an effect on other living beings.

Objectives

- Identify activities that are harmful to the environment;
- Identify alternatives to activities that are harmful to the environment.

Activity

Read the story (see appendix) about a family that is not aware of their responsibilities to the earth. Underline all the things this family did that showed they were not responsible citizens. Rewrite the story making it a story about a family that is very responsible and aware of the environment.

Changes to the story to make it more environmentally friendly.

1. walk or bike instead of drive.
2. find a proper parking spot (no need for a parking spot if they walked or biked)
3. use reusable plates, cups, tablecloth and cutlery
4. buy one large container of juice instead of individual juices
5. package food items in reusable containers
6. keep dog on leash
7. pick up dog poo
8. throw something up the tree to get Frisbee out
9. bring flowers from home or make a recycled centerpiece or nothing at all
10. gently move bugs off table to safe natural place
11. leave bugs alone
12. don't feed birds bread (it fills them up and is not nutritious)
13. don't leave food on the ground for wildlife to eat
14. leave fledgling in natural surroundings. Mother bird is likely nearby.
15. pick up any litter. Never leave anything behind
16. never feed wildlife
17. respect other people's property

How is each of these things harmful to the environment? What should be done differently? Rewrite the story in which the family does things that are respectful of the environment.

Environmental Police Wanted

Read the following story and underline all the things the family does that could be done in a better way for the environment, animals or people. Then rewrite the story so that the family does things that show they care about environment, animals and others.

Jacob decided he wanted to have a picnic in the park for his birthday. His mom made sandwiches, potato salad and chocolate cake, his favourite. His mom, dad and older brother packed up the car with the food, Lucky their dog and games and drove down the street to the park. The parking lot was full so dad pulled the car up onto the grass. As he backed in he hit a tree. When he got out of the car he was happy to see he didn't damage the car.

Everyone got out of the car and raced to the picnic table by the pond. Lucky ran free and chased the squirrels. He stopped briefly to have a poo and then ran into the pond after the ducks. Jacob and his brother Marty were playing Frisbee. Marty threw it too high and it got stuck in a tree. Jacob climbed the tree and swung from the branches to grab the Frisbee. He got it but as he grabbed it the branch snapped and he fell to the ground. This looked like fun so Marty joined him and soon there were broken branches covering the ground.

Mom spread out the paper tablecloth and set out the Styrofoam plates and plastic forks. Mom decided the table should look special so she went to the flower garden and picked some flowers. She filled a cup of water from the pond and set the flowers in it for the centrepiece. She brought out the sandwiches that were each wrapped with plastic wrap and the potato salad that was in a disposable container. After setting out the juice boxes, lunch was ready.

Mom called the boys to come have lunch. Everyone sat down and started to eat.

A caterpillar was crawling towards the potato salad so Dad quickly squished it.

"Aw, I wanted to take that home in my insect jar" said Jacob.

"You can find others," said Dad " I didn't want that one eating our salad." Jacob and Marty quickly finished their lunch but saved the bread crusts so they could feed the ducks. They ran off to the pond and threw the crusts to the birds. The ducks quickly gobbled them up and wanted more. "Is there anything else we can feed the ducks?" asked Jacob. "Maybe there will be some left over cake" said mom.

"Cake! How could I forget about the cake?" said Jacob. They

raced back to the table where mom already had the candles in the cake. Everyone sang Happy Birthday. Jacob made a wish and blew out all but one candle. "Jacob has one girlfriend," said Marty. Jacob blushed and said, "Do not" and blew out the last candle. "Where's Lucky?" asked Dad. They all looked around. Lucky was nowhere to be seen. They all got up from the table and went in different directions to find him. "Luuucky" they called. At the other end of the park was a forested area. Jacob and Marty thought Lucky might be lost in there. There wasn't a marked trail so they left a trail of jellybeans so they could find their way back. They searched for a few minutes and then heard barking. "That's Lucky." They ran towards the bark. Sure enough Lucky was barking at a small bird that was fluttering on the ground. "Look at the little bird. It must have fallen from the tree. We better take it home or it may die out here," said Marty. Jacob distracted Lucky and Marty picked up the little bird and carefully placed it in his baseball cap. They followed their jellybean trail back to the park and ran back to the picnic table. Mom and Dad were relieved to see Lucky and were surprised to see the bird in the baseball cap. "We'll take him home and feed him until he is strong enough to fly," said Mom. "I better collect some bugs in my jar to feed it," said Jacob.

During all the excitement no one seemed to notice that the wind had blown all the plates and forks off the table. "Good thing I brought extra," said Mom.

Everyone sat down and ate their cake. As they were eating they spotted a deer.

It looked like it was looking for food. "Let's leave our plates here so the deer can have some cake too," said Dad. "That saves me from cleaning up," said Mom.

Just then it started to rain. So they gathered up the toys, called Lucky and ran to the car. They quickly got into the car just as it started pouring. This made the ground very wet so when Dad drove away his tires spun and splashed up mud onto the car beside him. "Oh well, the rain will wash it off," said Dad. When they got home it was time to open presents. Jacob ran into the house and was surprised to find his friends waiting. He now could celebrate his birthday again.

Why do you think the family does these things?

What influences people's attitudes toward the environment or their non-environmental habits?

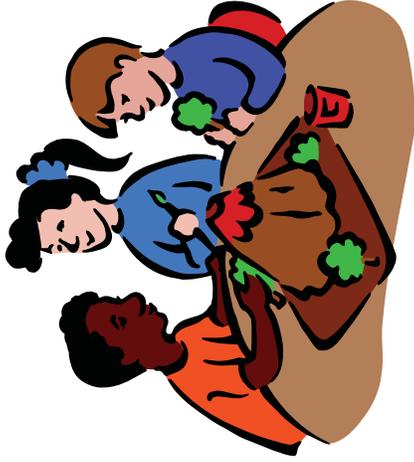
Now on a separate sheet of paper, change the story to make it more environmentally friendly.

Making a Commitment

An important aspect of this unit is to empower students to make a commitment to making the world a better place. The final activity is a written commitment they make to themselves to do something that will have a positive impact on the world around them.

It must be something achievable. For example, I commit to not littering, or commit to spend ½ hour each day playing with my pet, or looking for products that are cruelty free.

Discuss different examples and if students are comfortable sharing their commitment with others they should do so. This, along with signing a “contract,” reinforces the idea of commitment.



In order to do my part to make the world a place where
people are kind to each other, animals and nature
I commit to

Signature

Date

Appendix





BCSPCA

Classroom Program/Presentation

Companions for Life

Dear Parent:

Your child's class is planning to participate in the *Companions for Life* program designed to teach children responsibility, empathy towards animals, people and the environment through teaching about responsible animal care, animal needs, the role pets play in society, and how our actions affect others – people, animals and nature.

A special feature of this program will include the inclusion of a classroom visit by a well socialized dog. This dog will be under adult control and has been temperament tested to ensure the children's safety. This visit provides a wonderful opportunity for children to learn about the nature of dogs and actively participate in meeting a dog in a safe and educational manner.

In rare instances, the presence of an animal can adversely affect allergy sufferers. If this is the case with your child, please advise your child's teacher. Also, some children may have an intense fear of dogs due to a traumatic incidence in the past. Please advise your child's teacher. If you have any further questions, please call the teacher.

Teacher:

Date:

Teacher comments:

Parent signature:

Parent comments:

Classroom Pets

Many teachers have classroom pets. This can have positive effects for the students but it must be done with the utmost care and respect for the welfare of the animal. The following is the BC SPCA's position statement on classroom pets.

Animals in Education: Classroom Pets Position Statement

The BC SPCA opposes the keeping of all exotic or wild animals as classroom pets.

The BC SPCA condones the keeping of domesticated animals in schools only when all of the following conditions are met:

- the animal is not permitted to breed.
- inclusion of an animal in classroom activities is contingent upon the teacher of that class already being that animal's guardian;
- the animal is kept in order to contribute to a structured humane education curriculum;
- the animal is not a nocturnal species (and accordingly has a sleep pattern that is compatible with the school day);
- the teacher and, when necessary, a second adult caregiver take sole responsibility for the care and welfare of the animal. This includes care over the weekend, holidays and school breaks.
- the caregivers thoroughly research the animal's nutritional, social and environmental needs prior to acquiring it;
- the animal's Five Freedoms are ensured at all times;
- the animal has access to regular and emergency veterinary care;
- the animal is handled only when the following criteria are met:
 - when it does not endanger or adversely stress the animal; and
 - when the animal is handled according to species-specific handling instructions; and
 - when handling the animal is directly related to the curriculum being taught; and
 - when the handling is supervised by an experienced teacher or adult caregiver.

For more information on animal care go to spca.bc.ca/AnimalCare/

Pet Facts

At the BC SPCA we believe all pets should be considered part of the family. This means ensuring all their basic needs are met (food, water, shelter, medical care) and that they receive the attention and love to provide them a quality life within the home amongst the family. Understanding that animals and humans share the world and that sharing our lives with animals should be beneficial to both the animal and their human guardian.

The following information is a basic guideline for understanding the needs of each specified pet. This will help students with a variety of the activities in this unit.

Cats

Cats are wonderful companion animals. They are good for people who don't want the responsibility of exercising their pet but still want companionship. They are less work than a dog but need your attention, care and time.

Life span: Average 14-17 years; reported oldest 30 years.

Origin: Believed to have originated from Egypt.

Status: Domesticated thousands of years ago from wildcats of Africa.

Diet: Cats are carnivorous. Commercial cat food has all the nutrients cats need.

Time: Cats though fairly independent do require your time. The minimum time required for a cat is 30-60 minutes a day.

Grooming: Though cats are impeccable self-groomers they do require some assistance. Long-haired cats should be brushed regularly and all cats need their claws trimmed. You may want a professional to do this but with care and patience most guardians should be able to do this themselves.

Play: A stimulating indoor environment for your cat allows him/her to express natural behaviours. Interactive toys that move and jump like imaginary prey stimulate their natural curiosity and instinct to stalk and pounce. A game of chase or peek-a-boo around doors and corners is a good way for you to play with your cat. Never let a cat play with string or yarn unattended. They can swallow it and cause intestinal problems.

Outdoor options: Ideally cats should be kept indoors. They lead longer, healthier lives. Supervised outdoor activities can enrich your cat's experience. Training your cat to be on a harness and leash or providing an outdoor enclosure are ways to provide outdoor access.

Pros: While more independent than dogs, cats enjoy being around people. They are clean, quiet and require little space. Cats can be easily litter box trained and remain indoors all the time.

Cons: You must clean out the litter box daily. Cats also require regular grooming and their nails trimmed. Cats will scratch furniture unless you provide a scratch post and train them to use it. Cats require regular veterinary check-ups, vaccinations and spaying and neutering which can be expensive. Outdoor cats are more likely to require veterinary care.

Info: Cats require identification in case they get lost. There are special cat collars you can buy. Remember to have your cat spayed or neutered.

Dogs

Dogs are a very social animal and make great pets. They require your time and patience to learn their language and understand their needs. It is very important to train dogs so that they will have a good relationship with their family. A positive reinforcement training method is the most effective for dog training. (shock collars, choke chains and pinch collars are all negative reinforcement training methods and are not recommended)

Life span: Average 10-15 years.

Status: Domesticated thousands of years ago. Origin believed to be wolf-like ancestors.

Diet: Dogs are omnivores eating meat, grains and vegetables. Good commercial dog food has all the nutrients dogs need.

Time: Dogs require more time than most pets. Outdoor exercise is important. Staying in a backyard is not exercise. They need to run or walk for 30 minutes at least 2 times a day plus quality time with you or the family.

Grooming: Depending on the breed of dog you will also be required to groom him/her. You may choose to take them to a professional groomer but it is a good idea to get your dog used to being brushed. Tangled, matted hair is very uncomfortable and can lead to skin problems.

Dental care is also important. Brushing your dog's teeth weekly will keep their teeth and gums healthy. This could prevent costly vet bills.

Play and pet: Play is an essential part of providing for your dog's well being. Invest time to interact with your pet everyday. Your pet will thrive and you will strengthen the bond you share.

Pros: Dogs are social animals who like to belong to a family, which they regard as their pack. Properly socialized dogs will be loyal companions. They are fun to play with and quite easy to care for.

Cons: Need lots of space and time. Cannot leave alone for long periods. You must always clean up after your dog. Dogs require regular grooming. Vet bills can be expensive. Dogs need to be trained which takes time and patience. Puppies need to be house trained.

Info: Make sure you have a well made collar and leash for going on your twice daily walks. All dogs must have a dog license and identification. Remember to have your dog spayed or neutered.

Rabbits

Rabbits can be great pets, but they require gentle handling and should not be handled without adult supervision by anyone under the age of 12. They must be picked up properly as they can kick quickly and seriously injure themselves (back injuries are common). They develop bonds with their guardian and can be very affectionate. Knowledge about handling, behaviour and care is essential

Life span: Average 7-12 years (depending on breed).

Origin: Tame rabbits were bred from the wild European cotton-tail.

Status: Domesticated. Bred as pets, food animals and laboratory animals. Many breeds and sizes available.

Diet: Commercial pellets, hay (do not feed alfalfa); supplement with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Time: Rabbits require social time out of their cage in a secured area on a daily basis. Cages/hutches need to be cleaned once a week and litter should be changed every second day.

Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Unique personalities. Diurnal (awake during the day). Quiet, rarely make a sound. Can be easily litter box trained.

Cons: Some are skittish and territorial. Require calm environment and a habitat that allows for ample daily exercise. Rabbits will chew plants, electrical and phone cords so you must "rabbit-proof" your home. Easily injured if dropped. Therefore rabbits are not a good choice for small children.

Info: Adapt best when raised in a social environment. Require a large habitat or exercise area with items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Males are called bucks and females are called does. The young are called kittens. Consider spaying or neutering your rabbit. It does help with some behaviour issues and if they escape they will not contribute to the overpopulation problem.

Guinea Pigs

Life span: Average 5-7 years.

Origin: Peru.

Status: Domesticated over 5,000 years ago.

Diet: Herbivore. Fresh fruits, vegetables, hay, and special commercial pellets containing vitamin C.

Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Unique personalities. Diurnal (awake during the day). Quiet, but have a range of calls and chatters.

Cons: Some are skittish. Require calm environment and a large habitat that allows for plenty of daily exercise. The habitat requires regular cleaning. Long haired guinea pigs need to be groomed.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex. Males are called boars and females are sows. Enjoy being handled. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Do not climb and are content in a large habitat (six square feet minimum).

Gerbils

Life span: Average 4-6 years.

Origin: North African and central Asian deserts. Also known as Mongolian desert mice.

Status: Captive bred since 1960's.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial gerbil mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets, fresh fruits, vegetables, and hay.

Time: Gerbils need their cage cleaned once a week. They are fun to watch and with care can be handled.

Pros: Sociable. Seldom bite. Very active, curious and adventurous both day and night. Very clean.

Cons: Require a habitat that allows for ample daily exercise. Small, fast moving animals can be difficult for young children to handle. Can nibble on fingers and be easily hurt if squeezed. Easy to lose if they escape from habitat.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex from birth. Adapt best when raised in a social environment. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Habitat requires plenty of room and nest building material as well as a medium for burrowing. Require warm, dry environment with a temperature range of 18-23°C.

Hamsters

Life span: Average 2-3 years

Origin: N. China, Siberia, Iran and Mongolia.

Status: Captive bred since 1930's. Several breeds are now available.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial hamster mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets; also fresh fruits, vegetables, and hay.

Time: Hamsters are fairly easy to care for but need to be checked regularly to make sure they stay healthy. Since they are nocturnal the best time to play with a hamster is in the evening. Do not disturb them while they are sleeping. Their cages should be cleaned weekly. Food and water must be available to them at all times.

Pros: Exceptionally clean. Can be tamed to accept handling.

Cons: As nocturnal animals hamsters should not be disturbed or handled during the daytime. Shy, solitary creatures. Require calm and quiet daytime environment. Require a habitat that allows for ample nightly exercise. Prone to nip. Can be easily hurt if squeezed.

Info: Enjoy solitary living, though two females could be kept in the same habitat if born and raised together. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth.

Rodents - Domestic Rats and Mice

Life span: Average 2-3 years.

Origin: Asia; several strains of domestic rats and mice now exist.

Status: Tame; through thousands of generations of selective breeding.

Diet: Omnivore. Commercial gerbil or hamster mix containing seeds, nuts and pellets. Supplement with hay, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Time: Rats and mice are quite easy to care for and can be fairly social animals if handled regularly. Their cages should be cleaned twice a week.

Pros: Easily tamed, if handled regularly. Seldom bite. Intelligent, curious and adventuresome both day and night. Very clean.

Cons: Require a habitat that allows for a lot of daily exercise. Small, fast moving animals can be difficult to handle. Tend to nibble on fingers. Can be easily hurt if squeezed or dropped. Easy to lose if they escape from habitat.

Info: Best kept in pairs of same sex from birth. Must have items to chew to wear down constantly growing teeth. Habitat requires plenty of room and nest building material. Require warm, dry environment with a temperature range of 18-20°C.

Other Pets

What about Birds?

Birds can be fun. Many birds are tame and bred locally as pets while others are wild caught and shipped to Canada. Some exotic wild birds such as parrots may become endangered if they continue to be taken from the wild.

Parrots are cool but they do not make very good pets. They live anywhere from 40 to 100 years, and require a special diet and a lot of attention. Most budgies, parakeets and cockatiels have been captively bred as pets and are smaller and easier to care for. Remember, birds need a varied diet. You cannot feed birds just seeds.

Do Reptiles Rule?

The BC SPCA is opposed to the importation or sale of exotic animals as domestic pets. Animals such as iguanas, snakes, salamanders and turtles are fascinating creatures but require special care that is very difficult to provide even for experts. Often people who purchase these animals as pets become disappointed with them after a short while. They find that the animals either take too much time to care for, grow too big, cost too much to keep, or are too boring to make good pets. Also, many of these animals come directly from the wild and do not do well as pets, often suffering silently and then dying an early death. These animals deserve to be left in the wild.

Fish are Fun?

Fish are amazing! With the right equipment which includes a large tank and accessories, keeping fish can be a lot of fun. However, remember that many exotic fish come from countries where fish catchers destroy the natural reef areas to harvest exotic fish for the pet stores. Ask your aquarium store for locally raised fish for your tank.