Caring for our pets

This set of activities aims to make children aware of pets as living animals with **needs and feelings**. They learn that pets should be handled carefully and only when it is appropriate to do so. They should learn that owners have a responsibility to meet the needs of their pets and to keep them happy and healthy.

**Did you know?**

- Chocolate made for humans can be poisonous to dogs. Dogs should never be fed human chocolate.
- Onions can be poisonous to cats.
- Rabbits usually like to live with another friendly rabbit for company.
- Rabbit’s teeth grow continuously and their top front teeth grow at a rate of 3mm a week! Eating lots of hay and grass helps the rabbit to keep these down to the right size.
- Dogs need their own special food to keep them healthy – most human meals will not provide dogs with the nutrition they need.

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**Starter Activity**

- Ask the children which of them have a pet at their house. Those that do should describe their pet and what they have to do to look after him/her to the person sitting next to them. Ask some of the children who have done some good listening to describe what their partner told them about their pet.
- Using the five welfare needs symbols (see factsheet **Animals' needs**), establish with the children what are the five basic needs of pet animals. Explain that anyone who looks after animals must make sure that they have all of these things all of the time.
Main activity
Let’s meet our classroom pet!

- Using a toy animal, explain how to pick up or handle it correctly so that neither they nor the animal gets scared or hurt.
- See supporting presentation for top tips
  Useful Link: https://view.pagetiger.com/RSPCAKeepingkidssafe/issue1
- Using an appropriate brush, children groom the animal, taking care to only brush the same way that the fur grows. Children learn that some pets need to be groomed regularly to keep their fur clean and healthy.
- Optional - Sing My dog Ben and learn all about what he needs to be happy and healthy.

Play the memory game
Using a toy pet, the children take it in turns to hold the pet and add to the list of what they need to do to look after it. For example, the first child says: “I have got a cat and I need to… give him/her cat food every day.” The second child takes the cat and says: “I have got a cat and I need to … give him/her cat food every day and make sure he/she has clean water all the time.” Continue until the children have met all the needs of the cat (see teachers’ notes Pets’ needs).

Pet Care Items
Put out a selection of pet care items (see teachers’ notes Pet care items), pet photos (see collection of images Pets) and some sorting rings. Children can either sort the items according to which pet they are for, or according to their own criteria, or can just name or explore the items.

Vet Care Corner
Establish a veterinary or animal welfare clinic as a role-play area. Include some toy animals, toy syringes, stethoscopes, bandages, empty bottles and packets from veterinary medicines, an area for keeping animals that need to stay in, a waiting area, etc (see teachers’ notes Vet clinic role play area for a suggested layout). Stress that the medicines given to animals are special and animals should never be given medicine that is meant for humans.

Plenary Activities
Part 1
- An adult takes a ‘phone call’ about a pet that is not being looked after properly (for suggestions see teachers’ notes Animals in need). Invite a group of children to put on their RSPCA hats and accompany them to where the animal lives, where they find a toy animal. The children give suggestions as to what aspects of the pet’s care are lacking. They make notes for the owner about what needs to be done to improve the situation. They can then return later to check for an improvement, using the animals’ needs logos.
Part 2

- Independently role-play the work of an RSPCA inspector. Using toy animals and a notebook, the inspector goes to visit people who they have heard are not looking after their pets properly. They give advice about what the pets need in order to be happy and healthy.

What Next?

Extension Activities

- Storytelling: Read *Smoky’s new home* and show the supporting images. Ask the pupils to discuss how they think Smoky is feeling throughout the story.

Homework

**Arrange a photographic pet show.**
Ask the children to bring in a photo of either their own pet or a pet that they know and describe him/her to the rest of the class. These could then form part of a display (N.B. the RSPCA strongly discourages bringing live pets into school where their safety and welfare cannot be guaranteed at all times – see our *Education and animals guidance* for more information.)

**Take your pet home.**
One of the toy pets can be taken home overnight in turn by the children. Each child can ask an adult at home to help them to record what jobs they did to care for the pet during its time with them.

Want to explore the topic of caring for pets further? Try these lessons:

- **Exotic animals as pets**
  Explore the complex needs of exotic (non-domestic) pets and the responsibility involved in looking after them.

- **A nation of animal lovers**
  This lesson introduces the concept of animal cruelty and whether it is deliberate or based on neglect.

- **Looking after pets takes time.**
  Discuss the responsibilities of pet care, the amount of time and the activities required to look after pets properly.
We all have basic needs
Explore the similarities and differences between humans needs and pets need

How do we care for animals?
Building on the lesson ‘We all have basic needs’ explore the needs of pets further and our responsibilities as owners.