



I am your robot pet!

DISCOVERY ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

- To explore what having a pet means
- To explore the difference between a real pet and a robot pet
- To develop an understanding of our responsibilities when owning a pet
- To identify the needs of pets and companion animals
- Explore whether pets can look after themselves

RESOURCES

- Online resource - Chip the robot dog film
- Large sheet of blank paper or whiteboard
- Interactive PDF slides 'I am your robot pet' to guide pupils through the activities

Due to the topics covered in the Compassionate Class programme, it is important to consider how different children may react. For more information on creating a safe teaching and learning environment, see guidance on pages five to seven of the Teacher Overview downloadable at: rspca.org.uk/ccresources.

These activities could be delivered in the same lesson or spread over a few sessions, depending on the needs of your students. We have not specified timings to allow for flexibility for different settings.



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STIMULUS

Start by asking the class: 'What is a pet?' Make a list. Give them some examples to help them, e.g. they can play with me, they sleep on my bed, they like to run, they come to me when I call them, they like to eat food, I can stroke them, etc. You can come back to this list when you compare a real pet to the robot version.

Try to get some reactions about how a pet makes them feel, e.g. relaxed, happy when they stroke them etc. This is a good time to find out who has a pet (and what kind of pet) at home; perhaps request photos before the session is planned.



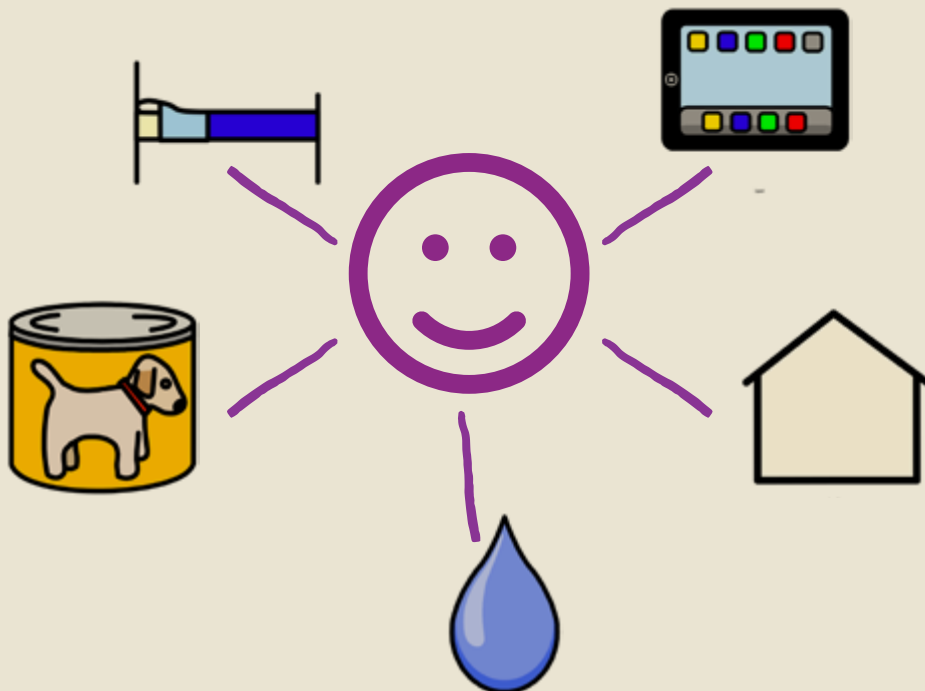
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INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

What are the responsibilities of a pet owner? Record their thoughts either on **slide two** or choose a medium that you can come back to later. This can be used as a baseline assessment to capture pupils' initial understanding and we encourage you to revisit these thoughts at the end of the session. Using their own experiences of need as a starting point may make it easier to understand the needs of animals later on. Some examples of how this might be done are suggested below but use any method that suits the ability of your class.

What do we need to be healthy and happy?

Start with a smiley face and talk about their needs first. Then draw animal ears on the face so it becomes, for example, a dog and go through the same labels and see if they think a pet's needs are the same.



SLIDE
2

I am your robot pet!

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION (CONTINUED)

Alternatively, you could show physical objects or photographs of different items, e.g. dog food, a bed, a welly boot, some of which animals would need and some that they would not. Ask the children to sort the items into ones that animals need and ones they don't, and ask them whether different animals need different things.

Do they need food? (Place into correct side of table)

Do they need a bed?

Do we need computer games?

PROMPT QUESTIONS

(For classes with higher levels of language capabilities)

- What would your pet do if you had to work long hours every day? Is it fair to have a pet if no one was home all day? What kind of pet wouldn't mind being alone?
- Could you have a pet if you don't have a garden? What kind of pet would be good to have? What kind of pet needs a garden?
- When might it not be a good idea to own a pet?
- What responsibilities do we have for different types of pet?
- What would you do if your pet changed its behaviour by drinking water all the time?



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STIMULUS

Short film about Chip, the robot dog



Watch the film on **slide three** together. You will go over it again after the next activity.

DISCUSSION

Discuss the information on **slides 4 – 7** with the class. Points for discussion at the level your class can manage:

- Like all animals, pets have feelings - they feel pain and can become unhappy. How do you know a dog is happy? Unhappy? In pain? Discuss some of the behaviours you might see. Explore animal communication such as tail use, vocalisations, asking for fuss, withdrawal etc. This is a good time for some role play!
- Pet owners must provide everything the pet needs to survive. Go back to the last whiteboard activity and remind them what they have just said an animal needs.

Ask questions that reinforce why it is our responsibility; can a pet open the cupboards or make food themselves, can they ring the vet when they feel unwell? How does an animal tell us it is hungry?

SLIDES
3-7



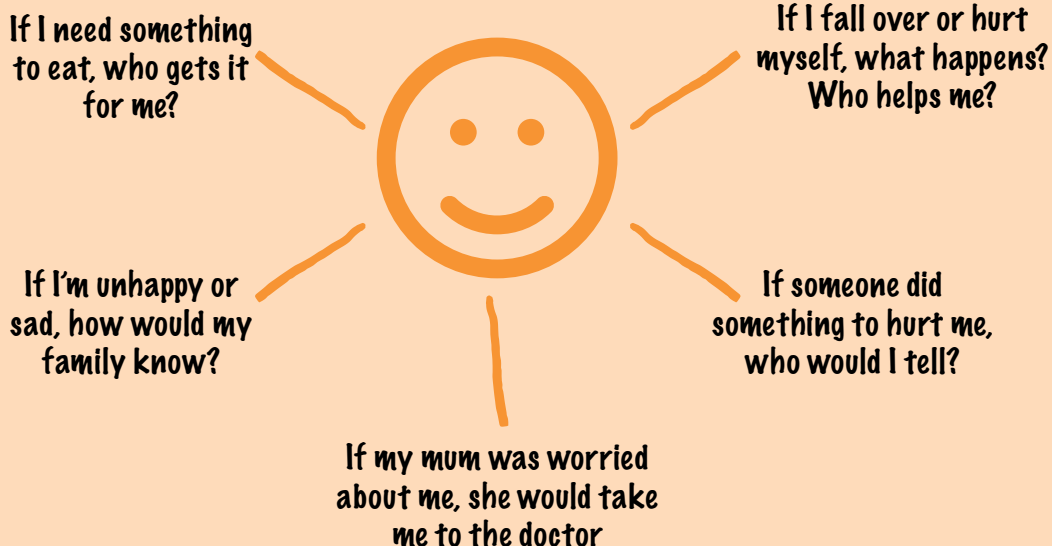
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DISCUSSION (CONTINUED)

- We have laws to protect pets as some people don't give their pets everything they need to be happy and healthy. This is being cruel or unkind to animals. Thought will have to be given as to how much you tackle this topic, but some might have seen things on tv by watching an RSPCA or animal rescue programme.
- If a pet suddenly changes its normal behaviour or shows signs of fear it could be a sign that the animal is bored, distressed or ill and it should be taken to the vet for a check-up. What might this different behaviour look like? (Sleeping, biting, hissing, hiding etc.)

As you work through each of the slides you could make another diagram to reinforce the discussions such as the one below.

As before, start with a smiley face and get them to reflect on personal experience first.



Now turn the smiley face into an animal. See if you can turn the human feelings and needs into an animal's and reinforce the fact that they need us to do or provide for all the above.



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CHIP THE ROBOT DOG?

Go back to the film and compare the needs of Chip to the needs of a real pet against the exercise you did at the beginning of the activity.

Next, ask them to think about what the robot dog couldn't do that a real dog could. Record these responses on the board (or slide) and encourage them to discuss and compare the differences.

WHAT CHIP CAN DO

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WHAT CHIP CAN'T DO

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Note: Highlight the fact that a real animal has feelings and the robot pet doesn't.

Humans have a responsibility to real pets to make sure they are healthy and happy. Refer back to the previous discussion points if needed.

Discuss with the class what they think the needs of the robot dog are. Use the diagrams from earlier to help remind them what they have covered. Compare the real pets needs and discuss: A bed would be its charging station. Food may be the electricity for the re-charge. It doesn't matter if it has company or not. If its behaviour changed, it might have a computer error but doesn't need a vet. If it's dropped or gets wet, it might need to be mended by a computer technician. If no-one played with it for a week, would it matter? Ask the same questions about the real pet and see if they can make good decisions.

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ACTIVITY

The following slides reinforce the five welfare needs that are covered in other Compassionate Class activities. This is a good time to reinforce past learning and assess retention.

Remember to refer to the Robot dog and see if he has any of these needs!

Environment (Slides 9 – 12)

Animals need a place where they can rest and sleep safely with plenty of space to move around, and access to an exercise space. This is a great place to explore their experience of providing these needs in their own homes or to talk about where they have seen others doing the same. Daily exercise will look different for each pet type. What kind of exercise do our animals need? What does our exercise look like?

Correct food and water (Slides 13 – 14)

Animals need access to fresh clean water and the right type and amount of food to keep them fit and healthy.

Discuss what types of food and drink all the categories and types need. This is often a surprise to many as dogs are often fed 'treats' that might not be very good for them!

Normal behaviour (Slides 15 – 16)

Animals should be able to perform normal behaviour. Whether they like to run, jump, dig, fly or slither, they should have the space and environment to do just that! We should give our pets toys that keep them interested and stimulated. What toys do their pets at home have? Are any the same as our toys? What would happen if we didn't have any? How would we feel? What might we do instead if we were bored? What do animals do when they are bored?

It might be a good idea to look on YouTube for destructive pets and see some of the damage animals can cause - the children may not be able to come up with what might happen by themselves unless they have had direct experience so this is a good way to demonstrate this concept.

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ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Company and friendship (Slides 17 – 18)

Many animals like to have the company of other pets or humans. Other animals like to live alone. Discuss the type of animals that like to live alone and wouldn't want to be placed with another 'friend', e.g. bears, sloths, snakes.

Protection from harm (Slides 19 – 20)

Animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. Pets and farm animals need regular check-ups from a vet. Wild animals need us to protect their habitats and to leave them alone as much as possible.

When did they last see the doctor/dentist? Have they had to take their pet to the vet? What would they do if they saw an animal in the wild that was injured?

ACTIVITY

To demonstrate the welfare needs you could show related objects or pictures and ask them to discuss which need this would help to meet. For example, show them a dog lead or dog toy that allows a pet dog to display natural behaviour through exercise and play. Use examples of a dog so that they can relate it to the robot dog clip, but if you are able to extend this to include objects that help meet the needs of cats, hamsters, rabbits etc, this means they are able to make generalisations and shows an understanding of the topic.

If they come up with extra ideas, add them to your spider graph or chart. This can be used for evidence of learning and achievement.



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REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Why do we have pets? They are a lot of hard work and lots of responsibility. Explore how the children feel about their pets and how they would feel if they were taken away from them. Remember, some may have lost pets in recent times which may evoke sadness.

For higher language levels, here are some extra questions to explore if you have time:

- How might an animal behave if you frighten it?
- Why are only some animals usually kept as pets?
- Is a robot pet a substitute for a real pet?
- What does it mean to be responsible?
- Who makes sure that a pet has everything it needs to live?
- Can children be responsible for animals?
- Could you be responsible for a monkey?
- Can a wild animal survive by itself?
- Is it fair to tame a wild animal?
- Do pets have responsibility for anything?

For more information, take a look at the **RSPCA's pet care hints** and their **welfare advice** for pet dog owners and explore the '**children and dogs**' content. There are some useful posters about appropriate ways for children and dogs to interact.

To take the learning from this discovery session further, you could explore our suggested extension resources.



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EXTENSION RESOURCES

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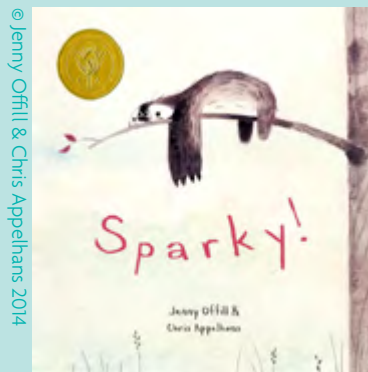
Books



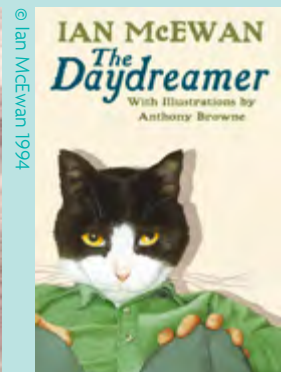
The Wild Robot
by Peter Brown



Children Make Terrible Pets
by Peter Brown



Sparky!
by Jenny Offill



The Daydreamer
by Ian McEwan

Online Resources

Online content about the future of robot animals and artificial intelligence e.g. **hidden animal camera**.

If you want to inspire your class with more films about animal welfare, take a look at the RSPCA's YouTube channel [youtube.com/rspcauk](https://www.youtube.com/rspcauk)



WHAT NEXT?

If this is your first Discovery activity, pick another stimulating activity to complete with your pupils.

If you've already completed at least two Discovery activities, choose an Advocacy activity that will provide your pupils with an entry for the Compassionate Class competition. We have included suggested Advocacy activities below which link to this Discovery activity.



Advocacy Activities

IF YOU LIKED THE 'I AM YOUR ROBOT PET' DISCOVERY ACTIVITY, WHY NOT TRY THESE ACTIVITIES



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ROBOT COMPANION

Children choose a pet, and design a robot companion that meets this animal's needs. Start by explaining what functions the robot companion has to meet the animal's needs, and consider whether there are needs that only a human can meet. Then;

- Write an imaginative story or comic strip about a pet with a companion robot and a human friend, and how the pet feels about them both
- Create posters, film an advert, draw, paint or write an instruction manual for their robot companion, including information about how to meet the real pet's needs
- You could share these with other classes in a school assembly

ADOPT A HUMAN

Imagine that instead of humans choosing pets, pets can choose the humans they want to live with. What sort of owner would the pet choose to make sure their needs are met? Then, either;

- Design adverts from a pet who is seeking a new owner, including information about how their needs can be met, and arrange to present them to another class
- Write an imaginative story or comic strip about a pet searching for a new human owner

