



Kindness Counts

A BC SPCA primary level unit focusing on animals and empathy development

BCSPCA

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Humane Education

When you hear the term “Humane Education” often the first thought is pet care. Though this is part of the content included in our units, our philosophy is based on educating people about their relation to other beings in the world. Humane education includes developing an ethic of care first of oneself and then extending that to include the family, the family’s pets and then the broader community, including nature. Humane education is about care and respect for others – people, animals and nature.

Empathy development is at the heart of humane education. Making the connection of similarities and differences we have with all living beings is the root of empathy development. Empathy is a skill to be learned that will enhance a student’s ability to think critically and act in a way that respects others. Empathy is also well recognized as a significant component of prosocial behaviour and successful learners. The tools used in our units to develop empathy are role modelling, experiential learning and cooperative learning designed to create a classroom atmosphere of caring for one another, animals and the environment.

We incorporate critical thinking skills by posing questions that examine our relationships with animals and challenge students to interpret their own feelings and values based on different perspectives. Armed with these skills students will generate their own viewpoints on an issue, form their own values and express behaviours that support those values.



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction: | 6 |
| Presentation | 6 |
| Learning Outcomes: | 6 |
| Curriculum Links..... | 7 |
| Introductory Activities | 9 |
| I Wish..... | 10 |
| How Do You Feel?..... | 16 |
| Grab Bag | 17 |
| Simon Says – You’re Like Me..... | 20 |
| Getting to Know Me | 21 |
| Presentation | 23 |
| Follow-up Activities | 29 |
| Who Lives Here? | 30 |
| What Makes a Good Friend?..... | 35 |
| How Does it feel? | 36 |
| The Kindness Tree | 40 |
| Making a Difference..... | 41 |
| Letter to Parents | 43 |
| Background information | 45 |
| Classroom Pets | |
| BC SPCA Position Statement on Classroom Pets..... | 46 |
| Pet Facts | 47 |
| Cats | 48 |
| Dogs | 49 |
| Rabbits | 50 |
| Gerbils | 51 |
| Hamsters | 51 |
| Rats/Mice..... | 52 |
| Guinea Pigs | 52 |
| Other Pets | 53 |

Kindness Counts

Introduction:

The BC SPCA's Kindness Counts is a primary level unit designed to teach empathy, caring and respect for others, animals and nature. Through participatory activities students will understand and demonstrate empathy by noting similarities and differences amongst people and animals. Further, by examining their own feelings students learn to recognize how their actions and words affect others and the world around them. The result is an awareness and acknowledgement of how kind acts affect other people, animals and the environment.

The purpose of Kindness Counts is to reduce the acts of violence to all living things through the development of empathy. Studies indicate that bullies often have very limited empathy skills and low self-esteem. By focusing on empathy development through the awareness of similarities amongst each other and animals, students will start to see how their words and actions affect those around them in both positive and negative ways.

The Presentation

The presentation section of this unit outlines how to properly handle and safely meet animals and how our actions can affect an animal's behaviour.

The presentation outlined in this unit may be done by a guest humane educator from the SPCA or by the teacher. The example provides a guideline for information that should be covered in an overview of how to handle a pet, and discussion of similarities between animals and ourselves.

Learning Outcomes:

- To develop ability to empathize
- To develop a sense of responsibility towards animals and the environment
- To increase and promote respectful, caring behaviour towards people, animals and the environment.

Curriculum Links

The following BC Ed. prescribed learning outcomes are covered in the Kindness Count Unit.

Health and Career Planning

Grade K

- opportunities to make choices

Grade 2

- opportunities to make decisions

Life Science

Grades K

- share with others information obtained by observing
- describe features of local plants and animals

Grade 1

- communicate their observations, experiences, and thinking in a variety of ways
- describe the basic needs of local plants and animals
- describe how the basic needs of plants and animals are met in their environment
- identify similarities and differences among animal species

Grade 2

- infer the probable outcome of an event or behaviour based on observations
- describe ways in which animals are important to other living things and the environment

Social Studies

Grades K-1

- gather information from personal experiences, oral sources, and visual representations
- present information using oral, written, or visual representations

Grade 2

- describe ways individuals contribute to a community
- identify factors that influence who they are



Introductory Activities



I Wish

Introduction

Students will come up with solutions for how to help make the world a better place.

Objectives

- Determine some solutions to problems in society
- Identify ways in which they can improve negative situations

Activity

Show students pictures of situations that could be improved by an act of kindness. The students choose one from each category (human, animal and nature) and draw a picture of a way they could make the situation better. Ask students what the problem is in each picture. How does this problem make each person in the picture feel? What could be done to make this a better situation?

Pictures:

Humans

- A girl is standing by herself looking sad/shy while others are having fun
- skipping.
- A group of kids are pointing and laughing at another kid wearing new glasses.
- A boy is sad because he forgot his lunch.

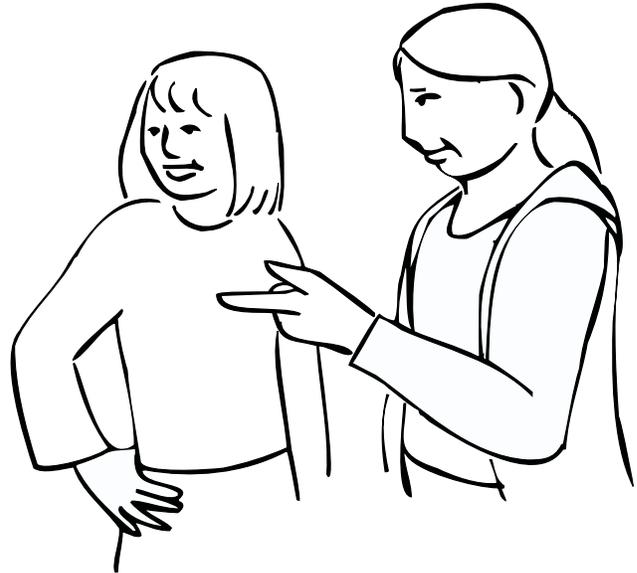
Animals

- A neighbour's dog is lying beside his doghouse looking sad.
- A guinea pig is in a small dirty cage.
- A stray cat has cut her paw on broken glass.

Nature

- Your neighbour is about to cut down a tree with a bird's nest.
- There is garbage all around a pond full of birds.
- Kids about to destroy a spider's web.

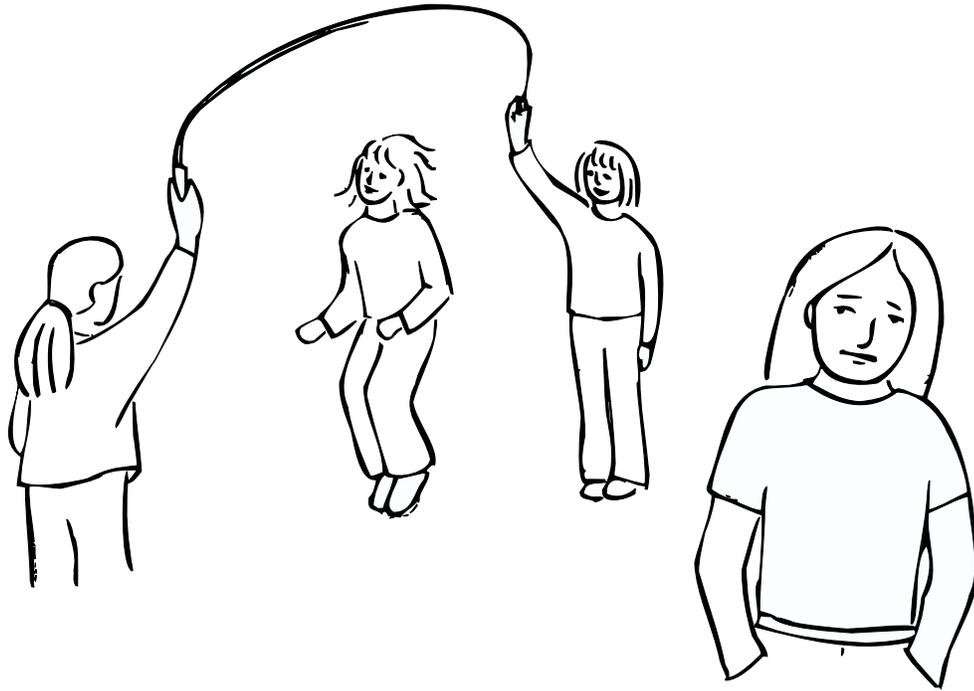
I Wish



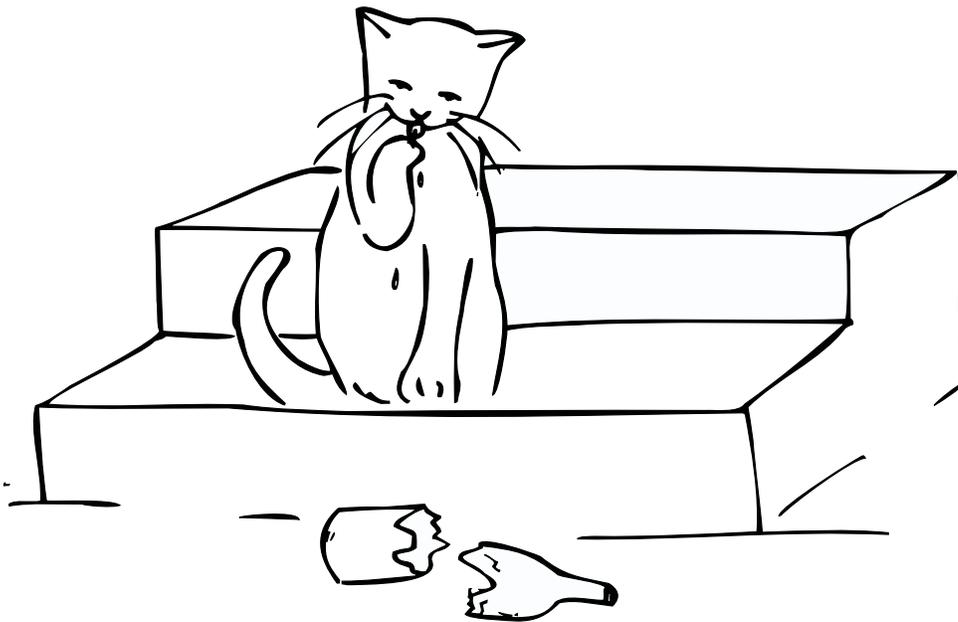
laughing at the girl wearing new glasses



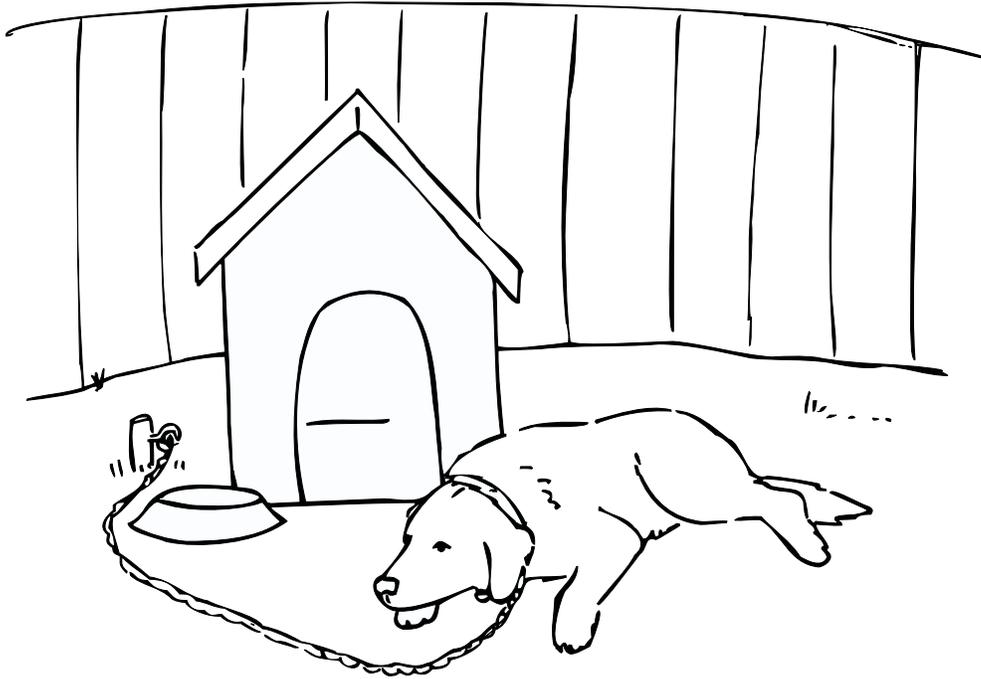
Boy without lunch



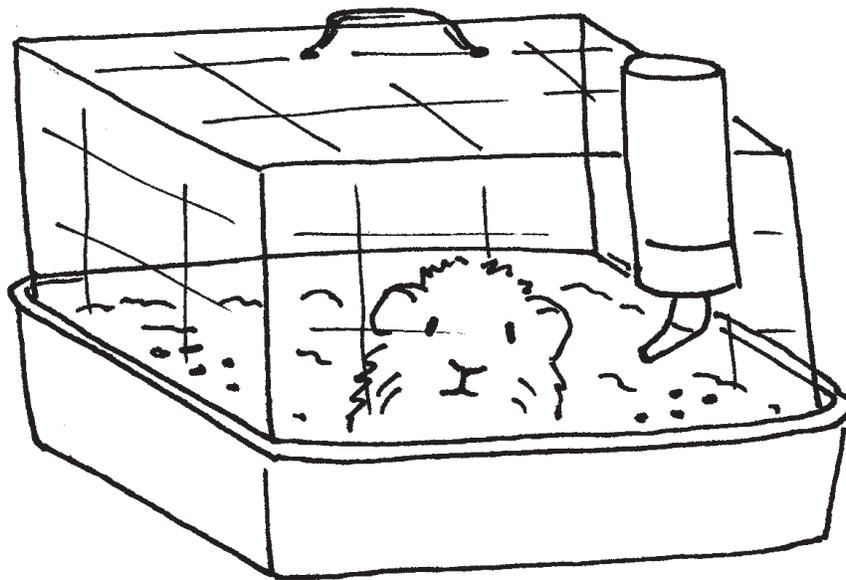
Girl left out of game



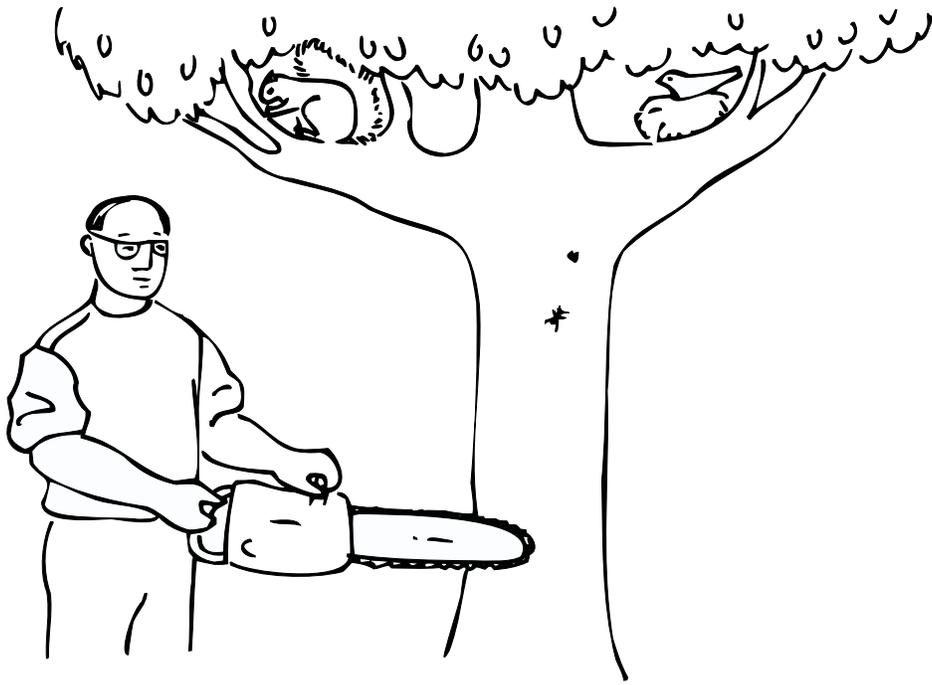
Injured stray cat



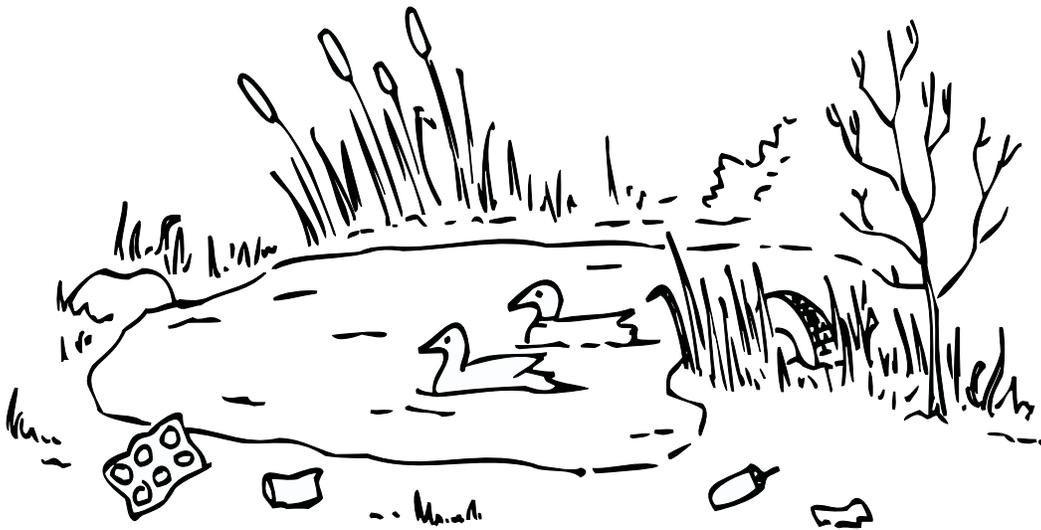
Sad, bored dog left outside on chain



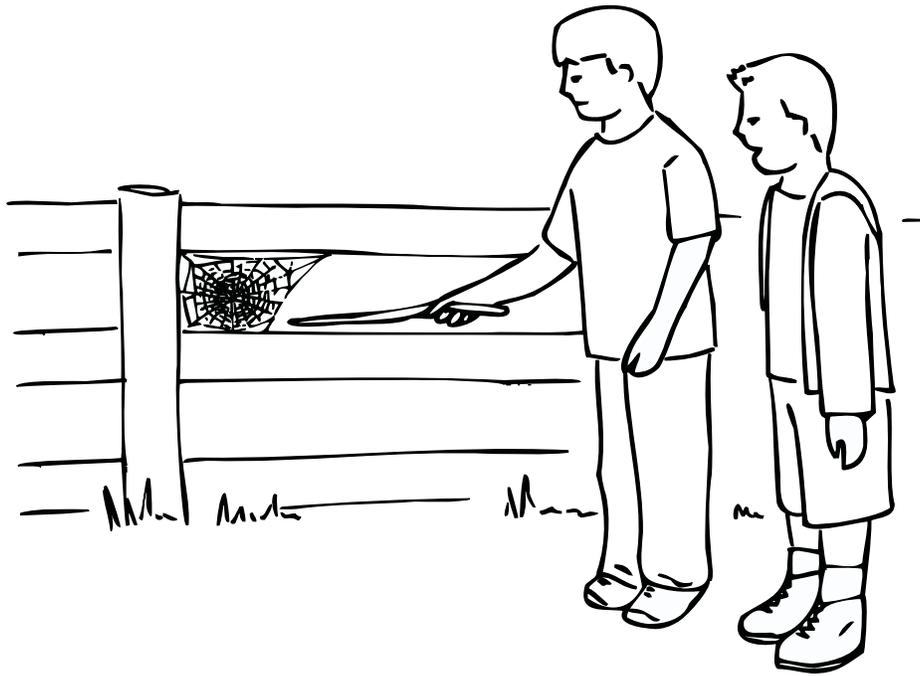
Gerbil in small dirty cage



Man cutting down a tree that is home for the squirrel and bird



Pond full of litter



Boys about to destroy a spider's web

How Do You Feel?

Introduction

Students will brainstorm ideas of situations that make them feel a certain way. It should be emphasized that it should be an action or words (ex. hugging my mom, when kids call me names, not - eating pizza, going to McDonalds, getting a present, playing game boy) though no idea should be disregarded once the brainstorm has begun.

Objectives

- Share ideas related to feelings
- Initiate discussion about situations that feel good or hurtful
- Increase awareness of how other people feel

Activity

A feeling word, such as happy, is written on the board. Instruct students to share their ideas on things that make them happy. Explain that you would prefer them to think actions that make them happy rather than things or objects.

Brainstorm ideas. When the board is full, talk about each idea individually and see how many students agree that the situation does make them happy.

Brainstorm again but use the feeling sad. Repeat discussion but include discussion on ways to make sad situations into happy ones.

Next have the students pretend they are a pet. Brainstorm ideas around happy/sad situations for a pet. Are there any situations which are the same or similar to humans?

Grab Bag

Introduction:

Students will pick pictures from a bag and will decide if it is a kind or unkind thing to do.

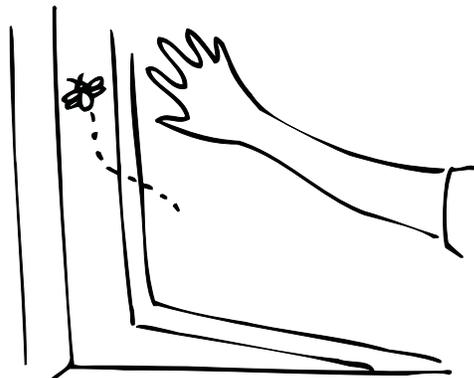
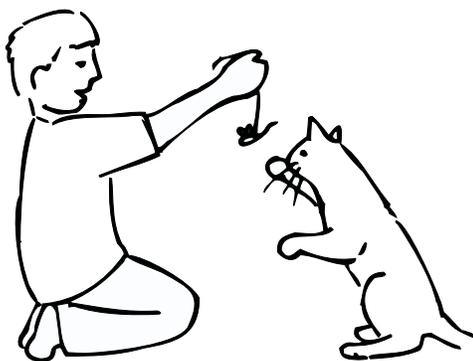
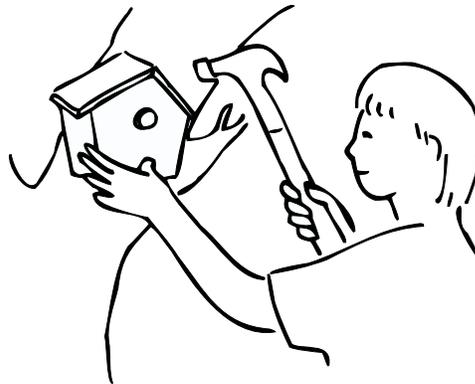
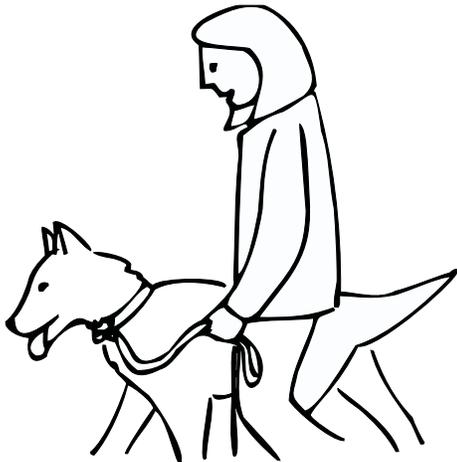
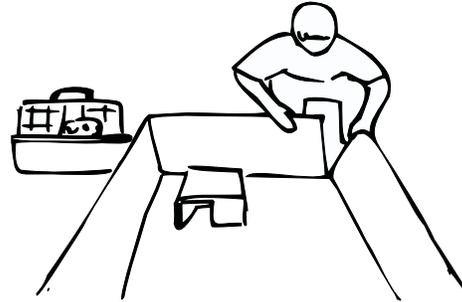
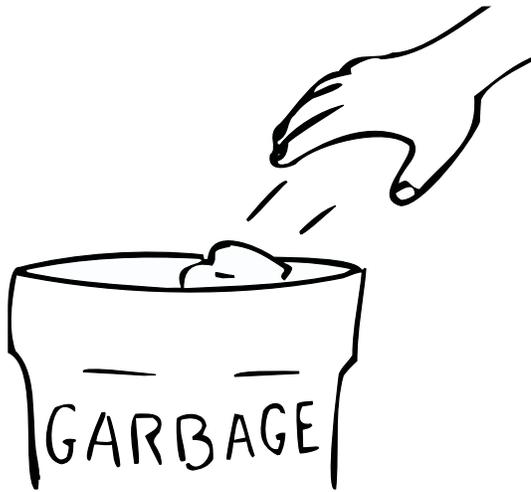
Objective:

- Differentiate between kind and unkind actions towards animals and nature.

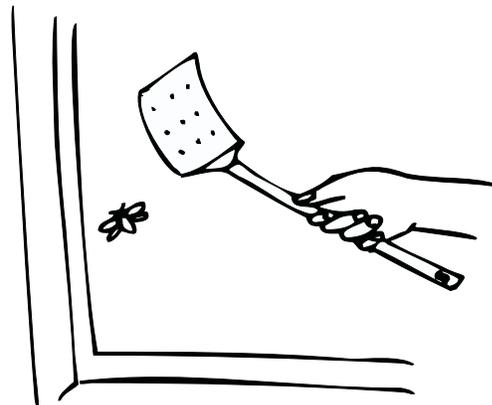
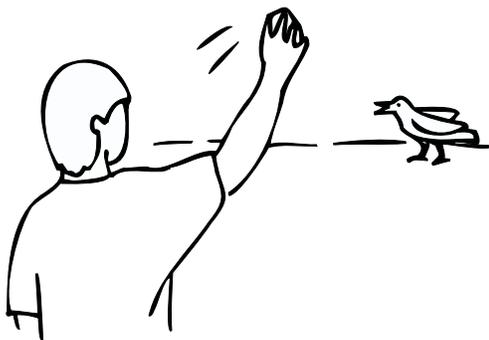
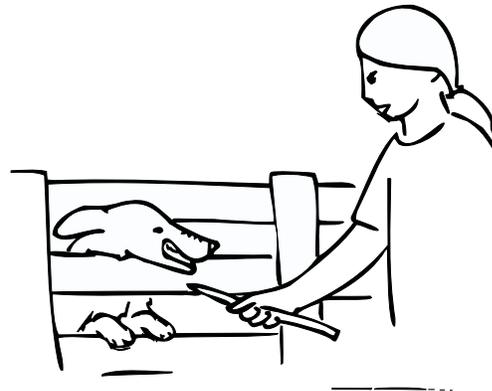
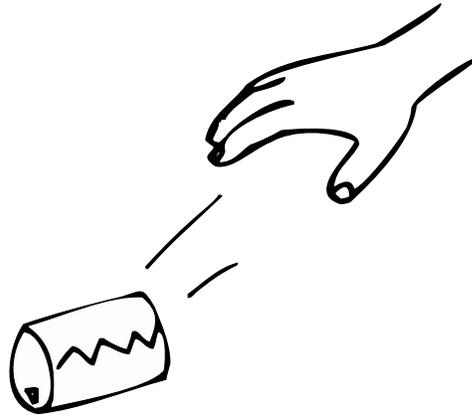
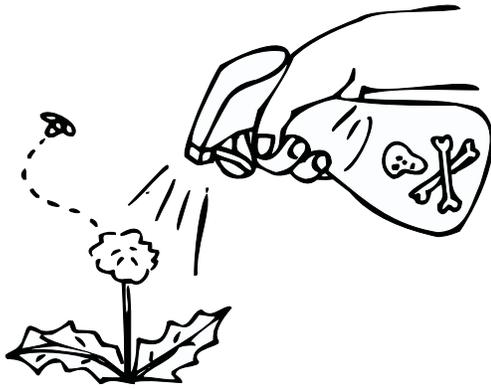
Activity:

Students can do this activity in a learning centre, as a small group or as a class. Cut out the pictures on the next two pages and place them in an opaque bag. Students will take turns pulling a picture from the bag and putting it into a pile of kind or unkind things to do to a pet/nature. Discuss why it kind or unkind. For the unkind pictures ask students to identify ways it could be changed to a picture of a kind act.

Grab Bag



Kind acts 1. throwing trash in trash can 2. building a larger habitat 3. walking dog 4. building a bird house 5. playing with cat 6. letting a bug back outdoors



Unkind acts. 1. spraying pesticides 2.littering 3. not walking the dog 4. teasing the dog 5. throwing a rock at the bird 6. killing bug

Simon Says - You are Like Me

Introduction

In this activity students play a version of Simon Says that explores similarities and differences first between classmates and the second game, with pets.

Objectives

- Identify similarities between students
- Identify similarities between people and animals

Activity

In this version of Simon Says students only respond to the commands that relate to them. First they must listen for the characteristic (ex. anyone who walks to school) and then for the command (ex. put your finger on your nose). Tell students that they must watch carefully because at the end of the first round of Simon Says they will have to tell you one new thing they learned about a classmate. In the second round they will have to tell you something they have in common with pets that they didn't know before.

Start with teacher being Simon and once students get used to playing this version have other students take turns playing the role of Simon.

1) Similarities with classmates

Simon says:

- “Everyone with a little brother, stand on one foot”
- “Everyone who lives across the street from the school, put your hand on your head”
- “Everyone who likes the movie _____, close your eyes”
- “Everyone who has dog, hop on one foot”

Choose categories that students may not know about each other.

2) Similarities with animals

Simon says:

- “Everyone who likes to play with friends,…”
- “Everyone who likes to sleep in a warm comfy bed,…”
- “Everyone who goes to the Dr. when they are sick,…”
- “Everyone who needs food to keep them healthy,…”
- “Everyone who likes to be left alone sometimes,…”
- “Everyone who likes to live in a clean house,…”
- “Everyone who likes to get yelled at when they misbehave,…”
- “Everyone who needs water to drink,…”
- “Everyone who likes to be told they are loved, …”

- *Talk about how animals and people are similar*

This activity is based on Simon Says “Who Are You?” from education-world.com

Getting To Know Me

Introduction

Students will get to know something about each other in class by sharing items they bring from home that represent their interests, family, etc. All items must fit inside a small bag that is given to them as a homework assignment.

Objectives

- Identify similarities between classmates
- Identify similarities between people and animals

Activity

Day one

1) The teacher shares some items from a bag that represent her interests, likes and dislikes (pictures and small items work best). (ex. chocolate bar, picture of cat, picture of outdoors,)

Day Two

2) Students are given bags to take home and are instructed to put in 3-5 items that represent something about themselves. Explain that the items should be small and if they have something large they would like to bring they should bring a picture of it instead. The picture could be a photo or a cutout from a catalogue or magazine. All students are then given the opportunity the next day to share the items with the class.

During the presentations you may ask if other students have similar interests. Students may be allowed to answer 1 or 2 questions from others if time allows.

3) The teacher now has a bag filled with items that relate to pets. As each item is discussed ask student how the pet's needs/wants are similar to their needs wants.

- items in the bag should include, toys, exercise related items (leash, exercise wheel), brush, collar, pet ID tag, etc.



Presentation



Presentation

Introduction

The following is a presentation that outlines how to appropriately handle a pet and increases awareness that animals have feelings and how animals and people are similar.

When using live animals it is important to know which students are afraid of the animal and not force them to interact. They may be encouraged to touch the animal/s once others have done so and they see there is nothing to fear or they may go up with a partner. It is also a good time to discuss why they have the fear and that there are good ways to behave around animals and not so good ways.

Learning Objectives

- To demonstrate proper handling of a pet
- To demonstrate an understanding that animals have feelings
- To develop and demonstrate empathy

Materials:

Stuffed: 12 rats, 1 rabbit,
Photo of hamster, gerbil, guinea pig, rabbit and cats (3)

Presentation

Introduce yourself and the animals you brought with you. Talk to the students about pets they own. Talk about the animals you brought and the need to act and handle them appropriately so the animals don't get hurt or upset. Make comparisons between animals and humans.

To begin the presentation you may want to set the mood of empathy development by telling the students a story something like the following or read the book "Tails are not for Pulling" to them.

"Imagine you live in a house of giants. When you stand next to a giant you can only see his feet. When you try to talk to the giants they can only hear you whisper. You see a huge hand coming down. You try to run away but you are trapped by a fence. You try to hide in a corner but the hand comes down and grabs you by the hair. You are kicking and screaming and that makes the giant hold on tighter. The giant holds you in front of his HUGE nose. He looks at you and says "AREN'T YOU CUTE" (shout this). It is so loud you have to cover your ears. Finally the giant puts you in his hand and starts gently stroking your head. He talks softly saying, "you're so small, don't worry I won't hurt you." You start

to calm down and lie down in his hand. Eventually you fall asleep. The giant puts his hand on the ground. You gently roll off, still asleep. When you wake up you find the giant has made you a soft bed. He builds you a little house and brings you your favourite food. Now when he wants to see you he lets you climb into his hand. He uses his quiet voice to talk to you. You and the giant become friends.”

“How did you feel when the giant hand was coming down on top of you?”

“What did you do when the hand came down?”

“How did it feel when the giant picked you up by your hair?”

“Were you scared looking into the giant’s face?”

“Guess what? Now you know what it’s like to be a hamster or guinea pig or rabbit or puppy. We seem like giants to these animals.”

Talk and demonstrate inappropriate behaviour (loud voices, pulling tail, picking them up inappropriately) using the stuffed animal. Ask students how they tell or show someone when they are hurt, upset or don’t like what that person is doing to them. Explain that animals squirm, bite, growl, hiss, etc to show they are not comfortable, happy and don’t like what is happening to them. It is important for students to know that if an animal shows any of these behaviours that they should leave the animal alone.

Talk about common things students might do that pets don’t like such as;
small animals - squeeze, hold tight, pull legs, etc.
dogs - pat hard on the head, pull tail, pet in the wrong direction, etc.
cats - chase, hold, squeeze, pat hard

Ask them how they think the animal feels when they do this and/or how they would feel if this was done to them. (If the giant story was told to them before this presentation you can use that to make comparisons).

Show the pictures of the hamster, gerbil and rats. Ask the students to identify these animals. Now using the stuffed animal demonstrate how to pick up or hold animals. For small animals ask the students to get into groups of two or three. Have one person be in charge of the small stuffed animal’s movements and the others are to cup their hands and let the animal come onto their hands. Once the animal is on their hands, the student should cover one hand over the animal and stroke it gently with one or two fingers. It is important to reinforce using quiet voices and gentle calm movements. These animals usually don’t like to be held for long. When they want to put the animal down they should bring their cupped hands close to the ground and open their hands and let them go.

(This is how they would put them back in their cage.)

Show the students the picture of the rabbit. Ask them to identify it. Explain to students that it is not recommended that anyone under 12 pick up a rabbit. This is because a rabbit that is picked up incorrectly can become scared, the back legs can jut out, twist and the worst-case scenario would be that their back could break and the rabbit would have to be euthanized. Instead have the children sit in a circle and place the stuffed rabbit in each lap. They learn that they must stay calm, pet her correctly and behave appropriately. Then you move the rabbit to the next child.

Show the students the pictures of the Guinea pig. Let students know that they would handle a Guinea pig similarly as the rabbit.

Show the students the two pictures of the unfriendly cat. Ask them if they think that cat wants to be pet. Ask them what signals the cat is giving that let you know that it doesn't want to be pet. Is the cat making any noise? It could be hissing or growling. We should leave that cat alone. Now show them the picture of the friendly cat. How do we know that cat is friendly? What might it do to show us that he wants to be pet? (rub up against you)

If you have a live small animal with you, always pick up the animal under the chest and rear. If the animal seems too stressed by the interaction explain the signs of stress to the children and tell them that the animal needs some quiet/alone time. This must be respected as well.

Do the same with other small animals, such as guinea pigs. This is an exercise in understanding how to handle a pet and understanding the needs/feelings of the animal.

Hamsters and gerbils are not recommended for school presentations as they move very quickly for small hands to hold. The proper way to pet and behave around these animals can be demonstrated using a stuffed animal.

If some children do not want to pet the animal respect that and don't push them into it. Ask them if they would like to hold the stuffed toy instead. This makes them feel included in the activity.

Meeting a dog

If you don't have a dog still go through the following information because most serious injuries between animals and children are with dogs.

"If you see a dog on the street that looks friendly is it a good idea to go up and pet it. Why not?"

“When is the only time we should pet a dog we don’t know?”

“When it is with the guardian and you must ask first to pet their dog. If the guardian says No then don’t pet the dog.

“What is the first thing we should do once the guardian says you can pet the dog?”

Offer your hand, palm up and let the dog sniff it first.

“Where should we pet the dog first?”

Under the chin or on their chest. Make sure the dog can see where your hand is.

“What are some things we do that might make a dog upset?”

Some answers may be: Pull it’s tail, squeeze him, take away his food, try to make him roll over, etc.

“What do you think a dog is thinking when he/she sees people running and getting excited?”

He/she gets exciting too and thinks it is a game.

“Dogs don’t always play the same kind of games we do so they play the way dogs play by chasing, jumping and nipping.”

“Would you like it if someone did that to you?”

“Are there times when you want to be alone and have no one bother you?”

“Dogs need that time too. They can’t tell you in words but you can tell when they walk away and lie down away from people. Don’t follow them and pester them. Let them have time alone.”

If you do have a dog with you this is a good chance for each student to come up one at a time and practice meeting your dog. You can show them where he likes to be petted or scratched. Mention that these are things most dogs like people to do.

“You’ve all done a great job. It’s important to think about how animals feel.

Before you play or pick up an animal think about what you would like if you were that animal. All animals have feelings just like you and me.”



Follow-up Activities



Who Lives Here?

Introduction

Students will learn about different animals in different habitats and how they are dependent on their surroundings.

Objective

- Observe living creatures in nature
- Identify ways we can be harmful and kind to nature
- Identify living organisms in different habitats

Activity

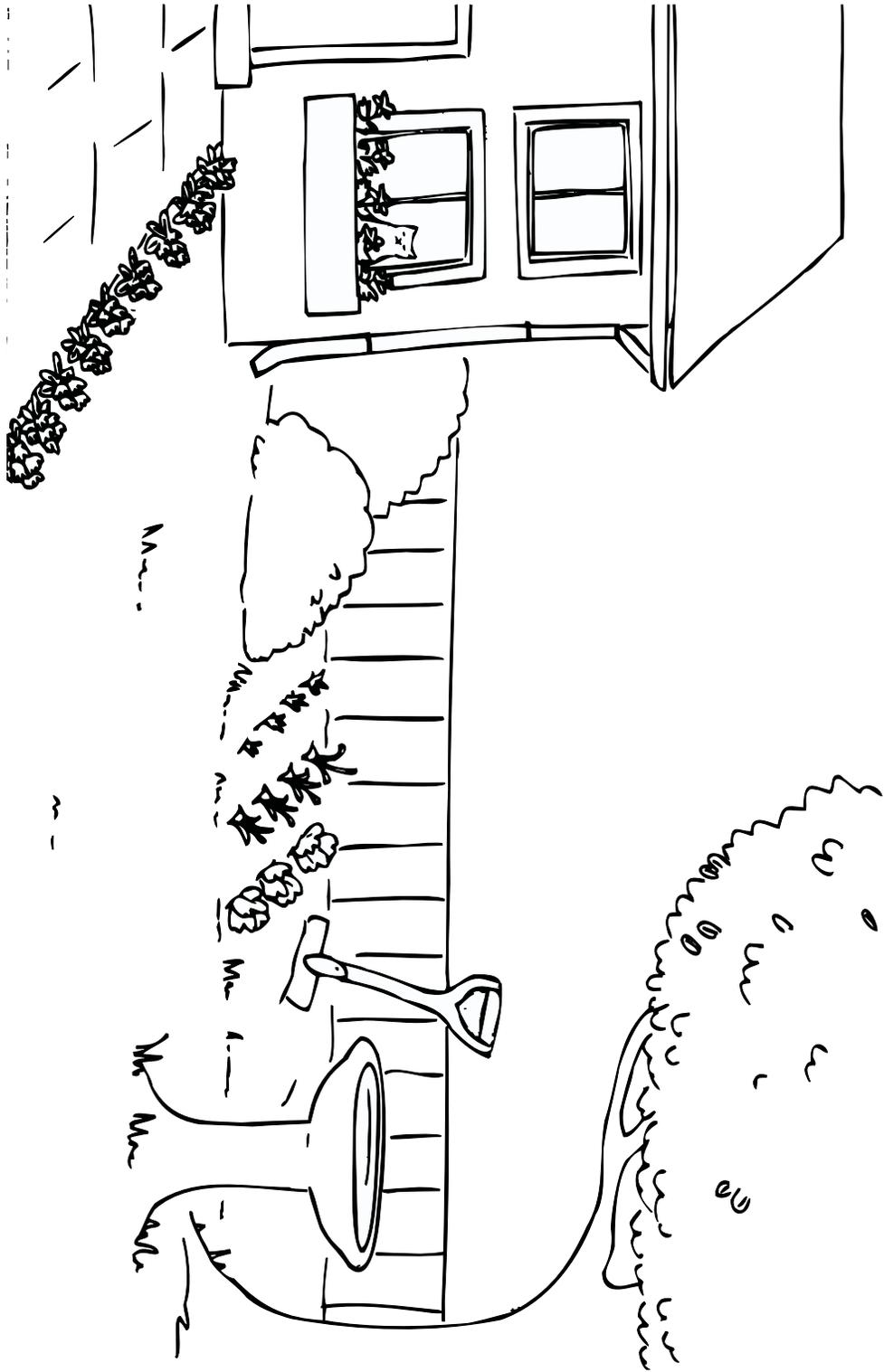
Go to a park, forest, flower garden or pond and have students look for all the living things in that habitat. Ask students questions about the habitat for each creature. What makes this habitat good for these creatures and not for others? Compare how we need to behave when visiting another creature's "home" and ask students to think about ways people disturb the homes of these living things and ways people can be more respectful. Come back to class and make a list on the board of all the living things the students saw on their field trip.

Students will choose a habitat from the next four pages to add some of the living things (pictures from magazine, or hand drawn) that can be found in those habitats.

Who Lives Here?

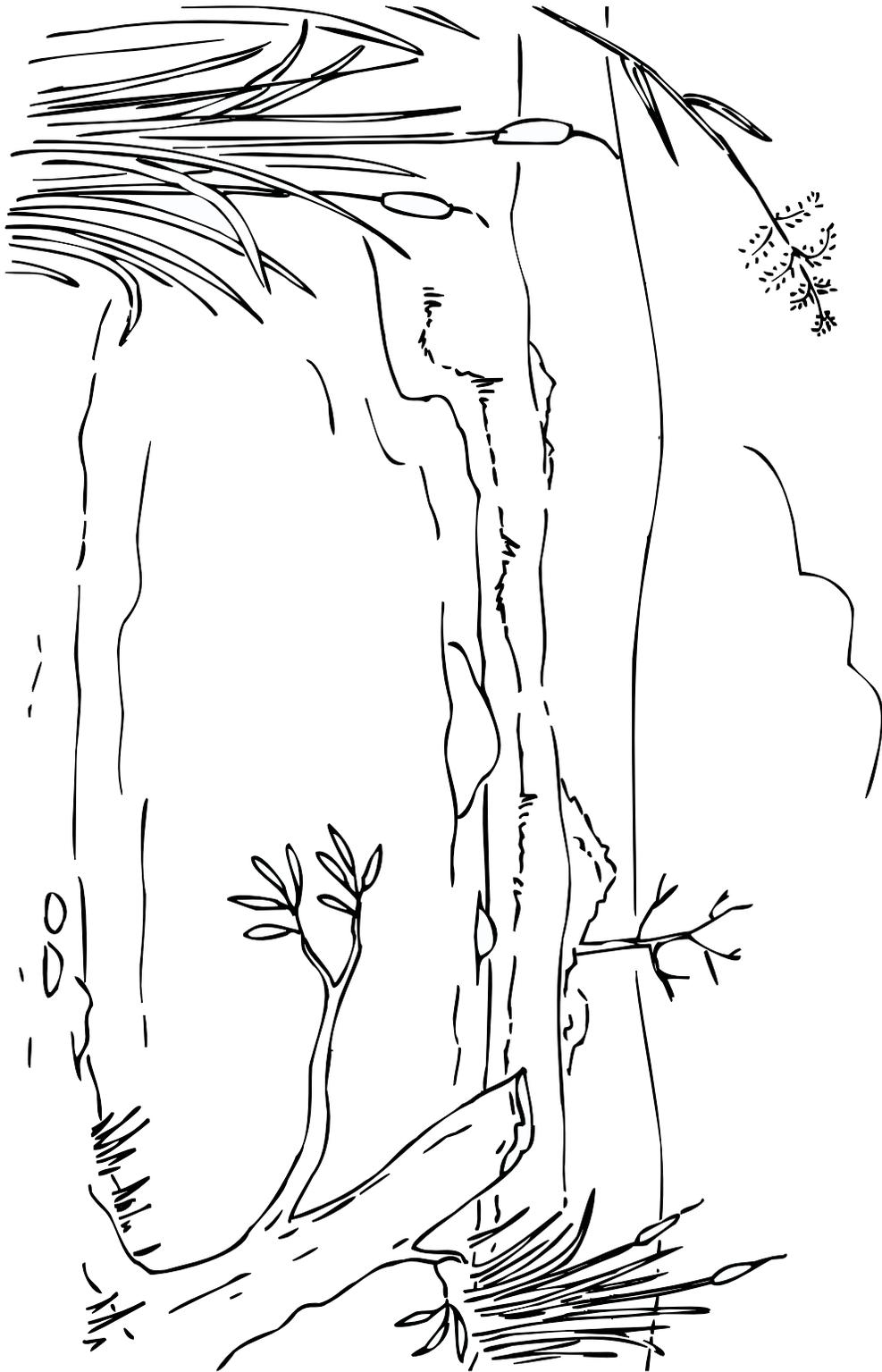


forest



garden

pond





What Makes a Good Friend?

Introduction

Understanding and recognizing traits in others and in yourself that are qualities of good friends is an important life skill. These qualities are targeted throughout the duration of the unit or can be continued throughout the year. These traits are also important to being a friend to your pet as well.

Objective

- Recognize specific character traits in oneself and others
- Demonstrate an understanding of character traits that are important to being a friend to others and to a pet.

Activity

At the beginning of each week, discuss a specific character trait that is a quality of a good friend. Ask students what makes a good friend. Discuss what actions express that trait and how this can also be shown to animals and the environment.

On a bulletin board put up that character trait and have students share with the class when they see someone demonstrating that trait. You may want to set times throughout the day to ask for feedback to put on the poster. Students will take pride in seeing their name up on the poster. You may consider sending a note home to the parents regarding this positive behaviour.

Character traits to focus on: responsible, kind, caring, generous, loyal, honest, trustworthy, friendly, forgiving, patient, helpful, sincere, optimistic, reliable, thoughtful.

How does it feel?

Introduction

Students will learn empathy by relating feelings to given situations. The activity can be done in four stages, student's own feelings, feelings of others, feelings of animals, impact on the environment.

Objective

- Increase awareness of other people's feelings
- Identify their own feelings
- Demonstrate an understanding of how human actions can have an environmental impact
- Increase empathy towards animals

Activity

Cut out the sentences on the next three pages into strips and put them inside a bag. Have students come up one at a time to pick a paper out of the bag. The teacher will read it aloud and the student will either answer how they would feel in that situation or choose a student from the class to answer. You can vary it by having the students use expressions rather than words and have other students read their body language to come up with the answer.

How do you feel when . . .

A dog, cat or rabbit licks you.

Someone tells you that you did a good job.

Someone says they trust you.

Someone yells at you.

Someone makes fun of you.

Someone tells you that you are their best friend.

You aren't invited to a party.

You lose your favourite toy.

Drop an ice cream cone.

You are new at school.

Your friend invites you to play.

You score a goal.

How do others feel when you

Stick your tongue out at them.

Tease them.

Talk to them when they are sad.

Share your toys with them.

Tell them they are weird.

Don't let them play with you.

Hit them.

You always choose the game to play.

You break their toy.

How does your pet feel when you

Play with him/her

Come home.

Pet her gently.

Yell at him/her.

Don't spend time with it for days.

Don't clean the cage.

Forget to take him/her for a walk

Leave him/her by her/himself outside all day.

The Kindness Tree

Introduction

Encouraging acts of kindness in and around school and acknowledging them is a great motivator. We are often overwhelmed by all the negative news and it is important not to forget all the good things that occur everyday. Acknowledging the positive and down playing the negative will create a more positive atmosphere at school. Depending on the level of the students, acts of kindness can be recorded by the teacher or by students. Students are not allowed to share their own acts of kindness they should be noted by someone else. Be aware of students that don't get noticed and make an extra effort to watch out for something to note.

Objectives

- Increase positive interactions amongst students
- Increase awareness of kind actions of others

Activity

This activity should be done all year long. Introduce the "Kindness Tree" or "Friendship Tree" at the beginning of the school year. An image of a tree should be posted on a bulletin board. Leaves will be added to the tree as students report acts of kindness at school. (the kind act should be written on the leaf). You may want to set a time each day or week to acknowledge the students or you may just put up the leaves and let the children notice them on their own.

Vary the kindness "tree" theme throughout the year. Here are some suggestions, Xmas tree lights or Hanukkah candles in December, dragons for Chinese New Year, hearts in February,

Making a Difference

Introduction

The goal of this unit is not only to teach children about empathy but to have them continue to apply their empathy skills in their daily life.

Objective

- Demonstrate empathy skills in everyday life

Activity

Students will decide upon one thing that they can do to be more caring and understanding of others, animals and nature. (ex. ride my bike or walk whenever I can instead of getting a ride, ask a new student to play, take my dog on outings whenever possible, pick up litter, keep my cat indoors). They will write down this commitment on the certificate on the following page. The certificate can be reviewed monthly.



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 _____



Kindness Counts

BCSPCA
Classroom Program/Presentation

Dear Parent:

Your child's class is planning to participate in the *Kindness Counts* program designed to teach children empathy towards animals, people and the environment by discovering their similarities and differences and how our actions can have positive and negative consequences.

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:



Background Information



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/pet-care

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.

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.

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 2 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.

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 (6 square feet minimum).

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.

