

Animal-friendly schools

How can schools be animal-friendly?

Animal-friendly schools do more than just teach about animals. They encourage both teachers and pupils to think about animals' needs and to develop a sense of care and responsibility for them.

The benefits

An animal-friendly school:

- promotes a sense of responsibility and respect towards all living things
- teaches pupils about animals and their needs
- is aware of and abides by animal welfare legislation
- looks at important contemporary moral and ethical issues like animal experimentation and the effect of humans on the environment
- encourages empathy and understanding of animals
- is relevant to everyday life.



How the RSPCA can help

- The RSPCA's free education service supports teachers to develop informed, responsible and active citizens, and helps schools to become more animal-friendly.
- Our education website – www.rspca.org.uk/education – has a variety of resources, linked to the English and Welsh curricula, which are free to download and include factsheets, activity sheets and photos.
- We have a team of education training and development advisers who can arrange ITT and INSET sessions to demonstrate how animal welfare can be used as a focus or context for the delivery of the National Curriculum. For contact details, visit www.rspca.org.uk/education

Areas to think about

Curriculum opportunities

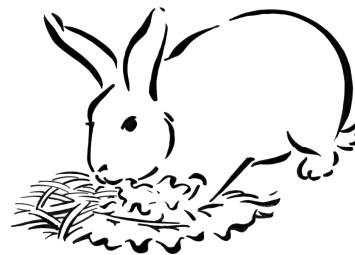
- Animal welfare can be a cross-curricular topic or integrated into a specific subject such as science, citizenship or PSHE and English.
- The current citizenship curriculum offers specific opportunities for teaching animal welfare topics at primary and secondary level.
- Visit www.rspca.org.uk/education for more information.

After-school clubs

- Animal welfare could be a priority for after-school clubs – children and young people with a special interest in animals will be eager to learn how to look after them properly.
- Visit www.rspca.org.uk and look at The Den site.

Animals in schools

- The RSPCA is opposed to the use of animals for education where distress or suffering is or is likely to be caused. The RSPCA believes children and young people can be taught about animals without keeping pets in the classroom.
- Some alternatives to using real animals include:
 - ✓ soft toys and props
 - ✓ role play and drama activities
 - ✓ books, videos, DVDs and CD-ROMs
 - ✓ observing animals' behaviour in their natural habitat
 - ✓ developing a wildlife area in the school grounds.



- The RSPCA strongly discourages the keeping of animals in schools. Schools can be noisy and frightening places for some animals and it is very difficult to look after any animal's needs properly in a classroom environment. This applies to any animal, including African land snails and fish.
- Any members of the school's staff who are responsible for an animal or animals being on the school premises – whether on a permanent or temporary basis – are now subject, as a result of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, to the legal obligation to ensure that those animals' needs are met. These include:
 - ✓ its need for a suitable environment
 - ✓ its need for a suitable diet (food and fresh water)
 - ✓ its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - ✓ any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
 - ✓ its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

These responsibilities do not end when the school day ends, but continue so long as the animal remains at school and include evenings, weekends and holidays. Personal responsibility exists irrespective of whether the animal in question was purchased by the school or is owned by one of the pupils or their parents. If an animal's needs are not being adequately met whilst at school, criminal prosecutions could in theory be brought against all persons over the age of 16 who had responsibility for that animal, including school staff.

- Visit <http://www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/general> for information on the specific needs of animals kept as pets.

Breeding animals in school

- The RSPCA opposes breeding animals in schools. This includes the use of egg incubators, butterfly and snail breeding kits, worms, ants and frogspawn.
- It is difficult to guarantee the welfare of animals bred in the school environment and the RSPCA believes that such programmes of study do not promote responsible attitudes to animal care and husbandry.

Dissection

- The RSPCA is opposed to the dissection of vertebrate and invertebrate animals in schools and believes the dissection of any animal in school – including invertebrates – can lead to desensitisation and a lessening of respect for life among pupils.
- Alternatives for teaching animal anatomy include models, videos and computer simulations.

Visitors with animals and animal events

- Many visiting speaker schemes and other animal-related events do not put the animals' needs first.
- Animals are often transported in unsuitable conditions, and the noise and unfamiliarity of a school environment can cause them distress.

- The RSPCA is opposed to events and fundraisers at schools involving animals as their welfare cannot be guaranteed at all times. These include donkey derbies, pig, sheep and snail racing, birds of prey displays, pet shows and events where animals are used as prizes.
- It is illegal to offer an animal as a prize to a person under 16 who is not accompanied by an adult, except in limited circumstances provided in the Animal Welfare Act 2006.
- Balloon releases may be fun but the balloons can harm the environment and animals if they eat them.
- Alternatives to animal-related events include:
 - ✓ sponsored litter clearances
 - ✓ sponsored dog walks
 - ✓ a photographic pet show where pupils can bring in pictures of their pets or favourite animals.



The school environment

Some of these ideas might be suitable for **school councils** to consider:

- **School grounds**
The RSPCA recommends that you develop your school grounds to make them more animal-friendly. This includes removing litter and other hazards and managing areas to encourage and protect wildlife. For more information see the 'school grounds' lesson resources on www.rspca.org.uk/education
- Wildlife and conservation areas in school grounds will attract a wide range of wildlife. Pupils can learn about the animals and their habitats and explore environmental issues such as biodiversity and interdependence.
- **Litter**
Every day, RSPCA inspectors rescue pets and wild animals trapped or hurt by litter. Even rubbish that has been put in a rubbish bin may end up on an open landfill site and could be a danger to animals.
- Find out what happens to the waste from your school. Encourage recycling and make sure the waste is safe for animals:
 - ✓ Plastic can holders can choke – cut them up
 - ✓ Plastic bags can suffocate – tie a knot in them and dispose of them properly
 - ✓ Broken bottles can cut – recycle safely
 - ✓ Tin cans can trap – take the lids off, put them inside and pinch the opening shut
 - ✓ Balloons can kill if eaten – avoid balloon releases and cut up used balloons
- **Food**
The RSPCA is opposed to all forms of farming that cause distress or suffering, or deprive an animal of the opportunity to express natural behaviour.
- The RSPCA works to encourage changes in attitudes to farm animals and the development and implementation of systems that satisfy the specific physical and behavioural needs of individual species.
- Freedom Food, set up by the RSPCA, is a farm assurance scheme that concentrates primarily on animal welfare. The RSPCA sets the standards for each of the species covered and these are based on scientific research, veterinary advice and practical farming experience. Freedom Food-labelled products are produced on farms inspected to RSPCA welfare standards. For more information see www.freedomfood.co.uk
- Encourage school catering providers to introduce menus that are more animal-friendly (e.g. using Freedom Food-labelled farm products).

- **Cleaning products**
Encourage cleaning and catering staff to use cleaning products that have not been tested on animals.
- The RSPCA is opposed to the use of animals in the testing of inessential items, such as cosmetics and toiletries, non-medical products such as garden chemicals, DIY products, pesticides, household products and food additives.
- We support the development of techniques that will result in the principles of 'the 3 Rs':
 - ✓ replacement - methods that avoid or replace the use of animals
 - ✓ reduction - minimising the numbers of animals used
 - ✓ refinement - improving experimental procedures, and other factors affecting animals such as their housing and care, to reduce suffering and improve welfare throughout the animals' lives.

Code of conduct

- The RSPCA recommends that schools draw up a code of conduct for studying animals in their natural habitats. For example:
 - ✓ show respect for animals and the places where they live
 - ✓ never handle animals – draw pictures or take photos instead
 - ✓ move quietly and slowly so you do not disturb animals – and take care not to step on any animals that crawl/fly away
 - ✓ leave animals' homes exactly as you found them – if you turn over rocks and logs put them back the way you found them
 - ✓ do not drop litter.



School trips

- Observing animals in captivity, including zoos, farm and safari parks, rescue centres and sanctuaries, raises a number of animal welfare questions:
 - ✓ Are the animals behaving naturally?
 - ✓ Are their needs being met?
 - ✓ What are pupils learning about the animals and their needs from seeing them in captivity?
- The RSPCA recommends using the following checklist before taking pupils to an animal venue:
 - ✓ Visit the venue before the trip to assess animal welfare issues that may be raised and identify any health and safety considerations.
 - ✓ Ask pupils to think about the animals, their needs and their natural lifestyle before the visit. Identify what they will be looking for and why.
 - ✓ Draw up a code of conduct for the visit with pupils to ensure that disturbance to animals and their homes is kept to a minimum.
 - ✓ Highlight the animals' needs and question whether they are being met throughout the visit – encourage students to focus on the quality of the animals' environments.
 - ✓ Follow up any animal welfare issues raised after the visit.

For more information see www.rspca.org.uk/education or e-mail education@rspca.org.uk

Illustrations: Stuart Trotter

Supporting teachers to develop informed, responsible and active citizens