



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.
- Rabbits' 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 keep these teeth 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.

1 Starter activity

- Ask the children which of them has a pet at home. Those who do should describe their pet and what they have to do to look after them 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 the five basic needs of pet animals are. Explain that anyone who looks after animals must make sure they have all these things, all the time.

2 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: 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've got a cat and I need to... give them cat food every day." The second child takes the cat and says: "I've got a cat and I need to... give them cat food every day and make sure they have clean water all the time." Continue until the children have met all the needs of the cat (see teachers' notes [Animals' needs](#)).

DOWNLOADS



Worksheets:

[My dog Ben – song](#)

[Smoky's new home – images](#)

[Smoky's new home – story](#)

[Factsheet – pets' needs](#)

Teachers' notes:

[Vet clinic role-play](#)

[Pet care items](#)

[Pets' needs](#)

[Animals in need](#)

Supporting materials:

[Presentation – visual prompts \(see downloads\)](#)

[How kids should not interact with dogs](#)

[How kids should interact with dogs](#)

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 care 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 symbols.

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 they know, and describe them to the rest of the class. These could then form part of a display (N.B. the RSPCA strongly discourages taking live pets into school where their safety and welfare cannot be guaranteed at all times – please see our [Pet Factor](#) activity sheet for guidance).

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 their 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' needs.
- [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.