

Instructor Introduction

The Perfect Home (Grades 3-5)

Students will review the basic needs of all animals and the concept of responsible pet guardianship and commitment. Students will learn about the different time and care commitments of pets by species and understand that different pets are appropriate for different families.

Excerpts from the MSPCA's Statements of Belief:

"The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals believes that responsible pet owners protect the welfare of animals kept as pets, while at the same time ensuring that their pets do not impact negatively on other animals, the public, or the environment."

The MSPCA defines a responsible pet owner as one who:

1. Provides for the physical, behavioral, and psychological needs of a pet for its lifetime. These needs include, but are not limited to: preventative and curative medical care, adequate and sanitary housing, a nutritionally balanced diet, appropriate grooming, sufficient training to ensure the pet's safety and a comfortable lifestyle, companionship and attention, and adequate exercise;
2. Obeys the laws relating to animal care and control;
3. Is mindful of and does not contribute to the pet overpopulation problem; and
4. Will provide a humane and appropriate alternative for a pet if for any reason he or she can no longer keep the animal.

The following bullets list the important elements behind this lesson plan. For more information on any pet care questions, please contact an MSPCA Education Coordinator.

- companion animals have many physical and psychological needs:
 - quality food and fresh water
 - appropriate shelter
 - exercise and play
 - training and socialization
 - love and attention
 - regular grooming
 - veterinary care
- when acquiring a pet, a commitment should be made for the life of the animal; animal life expectancies vary greatly by species
- when parents acquire pets for children, the initial excitement will most likely wear off, and it is the responsibility of the parent to assume care of the animal if this happens
- pet guardianship is a major commitment in which lifestyle, time availability, housing, family members, children's ages, allergies, and finances should all be considered

Humane Education Lesson Plans

Lesson Title: The Perfect Home (Grades 3-5)

MA Curriculum Strands:

Science Frameworks:

Biology 3-5 (Structures and Functions)

3. Recognize that plants and animals go through predictable life cycles that include birth, growth, development, reproduction, and death.

Comprehensive Health Frameworks:

K-5, 5.3 Define character traits such as honesty, trustworthiness, self-discipline, respectfulness, and kindness and describe their contribution to identity, self-concept, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships

Lesson Summary:

Students will review the basic needs of all animals and the concept of responsible pet guardianship and commitment. Students will learn about the different time and care commitments of pets by species and understand that different pets are appropriate for different families.

Preparation: time to make copies, collect animal care items

Lesson Time: 1-3 lessons, each lasting 45-60 minutes

Materials:

- white board and markers
- animal care items for reference (optional)
- coordinating handouts for students (optional)

Discussion Outline:

Common Needs

Begin the lesson by reviewing the basic needs of all companion animals: food, water, shelter, exercise/play, love/socialization, and vet care/grooming.

Discuss how these needs apply to all pets, but how the specific items companion animals need are different by species; for instance, a cat needs cat litter, a litter pan, and a litter scoop when it relieves itself [goes to the bathroom], while a dog needs a “poop bag” and a leash walk or space in a fenced-in area to relieve itself

Pet Needs by Species

Have students think about the needs of specific pet species and how they are different from each other. It might be helpful to start with the basic three: dogs, cats, and rabbits.

Ask

- What are a dog's specific needs?
 - food: good quality dog food, fresh water, and dishes for food and water
 - shelter: dogs should live in the house with owners, but might have their own bed, crate, or kennel
 - exercise and play: all dogs need collars and ID tags and a leash for walks, plus toys to play with so that they aren't bored
 - love and socialization: dog owners should have the time to socialize their dogs and give them love and attention, and train them to have manners and be safe around other animals and people
 - vet care and grooming: all dogs need yearly vet exams and vaccines (shots) to keep them healthy, plus regular grooming (brushing, bathing, and dental care)
 - safe preventative medicine including a flea/tick prevention product (Frontline) and a heartworm prevention medicine (Heartguard)
 - for bigger or more active dogs, it's usually helpful for families to have a larger home or a fenced-in yard to give the dog more space to exercise
 - dogs usually need several walks a day, while cats can get all their exercise in a house and rabbits need time outside of their cage each day to stretch their legs

- What are a cat's specific needs?
 - food: good quality cat food, fresh water, and dishes for food and water
 - shelter: it is safest for cats to live indoors, but they might have their own bed
 - cats who are indoor-outdoor face more dangers than indoor-only cats; to keep them safer it is best to always bring them in at nighttime and "train" them to stay near the house
 - people who live near busy roads should not let their cats outdoors
 - exercise and play: cats should have toys to play with so that they aren't bored
 - love and socialization: cat owners should have the time to socialize their cats and give them love and attention
 - vet care and grooming: all cats need yearly vet exams and vaccines (shots) to keep them healthy, plus regular grooming (nail trims and a scratching post, fur brushing)
 - all cats should wear safety collars and ID tags in case they get outside; microchipping is also a great way to give them permanent identification

- What are a rabbit's specific needs?
 - food: good quality timothy hay and pellets, fresh vegetables, and dishes for food and water
 - shelter: rabbits should live in spacious indoor cages, with a hut or box inside for hiding and a safe bedding material that is changed daily
 - exercise and play: rabbits should be given time outside of the cage to stretch their legs every day
 - love and socialization: rabbit owners should handle their rabbits daily and give them love and attention

- vet care and grooming: rabbits should have yearly vet exams and regular grooming (nail trims and fur brushing)
- What are some other animals a family might keep as a pet, and what do they need that might be different?
 - birds need spacious cages, special bird food, safe toys so they aren't bored, and time out of the cage for exercise
 - fish need fish food, specialized and spacious tanks and chemicals for the water, a water heater and pump to keep it clean, and items for inside the tank like stones and structures to hide in or behind
 - small mammals like gerbils, mice, and rats need many of the same items as rabbits, but they usually get exercise on wheels (with no spokes) or in exercise balls; each has their own dietary requirements
 - reptiles like snakes and turtles need much of the same equipment as fish, including special food and heat lamps

The Perfect Family

Discuss what students think about the perfect family for each of these animals. Point out that every animal needs its family to provide three very important things, though the amount of each might be different.

- 1) time- it's important to clean cages, walk animals, and give them attention every day
- 2) money- it costs money to buy food and other pet care items, and to pay a veterinarian
- 3) commitment- families should be committed to their pets for the life of the animal, which means promising to take care of that animal for as long as it lives, and keeping it safe and happy

Ask

- When we get a pet, how long do we have to take care of that animal? (For the rest of its life!)
 - small mammals like gerbils, hamsters, and mice can live 1-4 years
 - rats can live 3-6 years
 - guinea pigs can live 5-7 years
 - rabbits can live 10 years
 - parakeets can live 15 years
 - dogs can live for 16 years
 - cats can live for 20 years
 - turtles can live for more than 30 years, and tortoises and large parrots (not recommended for pets!) can live 70+ years!
- Why do people sometimes give away their pets?
 - sometimes people give away their pets because they lose interest, move, have hyper or untrained dogs, don't have the time or money to take care of the animal, develop allergies to the animal, or sometimes the animal's behavior changes and it isn't a safe animal for the family anymore

- there are usually things people can do to help a situation before giving the animal away, like attending training classes for dogs, finding new housing that accepts pets, or budgeting more carefully so they can afford animal care items
 - sometimes things happen in our lives that makes it very difficult to keep an animal, like having to move very far away or having an animal that is no longer safe for the family
 - the responsible thing to do is to find a suitable new home for your pet if you cannot keep it
- Before getting a pet, what should families think about?
 - how long will I want to care for this animal?
 - will I have time every day to clean its cage, walk it, and spend time playing with it/ handling it?
 - can I afford to pay for its food, vet bills, and other things it needs?
 - is this animal a good match for our family?
 - if I have to move, can I take the animal with me?
 - is there someone to take care of my animal when I go on vacation?
 - What are some other things a pet owner can do to help homeless or unwanted pets everywhere?
 - adopt a pet from a shelter or rescue group instead of buying one from a breeder or pet store
 - spay or neuter their pet to keep it healthy and help prevent unwanted litters, and ask other people to do the same thing!
 - educate friends and family about the pet overpopulation problem and how to support animal shelters
 - treat animals kindly and ask others to do the same!

Humane Learning Outcome

“A family considering pet guardianship should consider the needs of that pet and whether or not that pet is a good match for the family. Guardianship should be considered very carefully, because animals can live a long time, and their dependency on humans lasts for that animal’s life.”

Activities:

- Handouts:
- “Before You Get A Pet” (Pet Pals 3-4)
 - “Think First” (Pet Pals 3-4)
 - “A Pet’s Point of View” (Pet Pals 3-4)
 - “Opposites Overlap” (Pet Pals 3-4)
 - “Operation Pet Care” (Pet Pals 5-6)
 - “Choose a Friend for Life” (Pet Pals 5-6)
 - “Pets 4 Life” (Kind Teacher Volume 29)
 - “Let’s Compare” (Kind Teacher Volume 29)
 - “Pet Care: Dollars & Sense” (Kind Teacher Volume 30)