





Topic: Animal welfare

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ARE YOU A GOOD FRIEND?

As well as plenty of affection, animals have basic needs, just like you do. They include:

- Regular nutritious meals and fresh water.
- Clean, comfortable, safe places in which to live.
- Exercise, in the case of many animals.

A good rule of thumb is if you're in doubt about what an animal might be feeling about something is to ask: how would I feel about that?

ASK THE QUESTIONS

If you're thinking of getting a pet, you need to be realistic. A young rabbit, puppy, mouse or kitten won't always be an undemanding, cute little ball of fluff that spends a lot of time sleeping.

These are some of the things you need to ask yourself before you get a pet. If you already have one, how do your answers to these questions stack up?

- Will you be a good loyal friend to your pet and spend quality time with it?
- Your pet will make demands on you and might cost your family a lot of money, not only for food, but also for vet bills. Are you prepared for this?
- Do you and your family have time to make sure your pet's home is hygienically maintained? Will you clean out a cage every few days or change your fish's water?
- Do you have time to do essential activities such as take your dog for walks and keep the knots out of your cat's fur?
- Is your house or flat a safe place for an animal? Are there dangerous things lying around — electrical cords, snail pellets, human medicine and food such as chocolate, which is bad for dogs?
- Is your swimming pool or fish pond fenced off from a puppy which may not know how to get out if it falls in?
- Do you have a compost heap that might have food scraps in it that are safe for humans but poisonous for dogs (avocado and onion for example)?
- Is there an aggressive cat or dog next door that might hurt your new pet?
- Who will look after your pet if you go away on holiday?
- Do you know that it's dangerous to leave an animal in a car, even on a day that isn't particularly hot?
- Sometimes it's hard to love a puppy which has just chewed your favourite shoe or made a puddle on your new bedroom carpet. But remember that when you were a toddler you sometimes made mistakes and had little accidents. Instead of focusing on punishing your pet's "bad" behaviour, will you be patient enough to reward the good?





ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL

Many animals benefit from welfare organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty for Animals (RSPCA). It has been active in Australia since 1871 and believes humans should treat animals “humanely” – in other words, with “sympathy, consideration, compassion and tenderness”. The RSPCA is particularly focused on the treatment of farm animals.

DOGGY MANNERS

Did you know the RSPCA will come to your school to talk to you and your classmates about animals? Or your teacher could organise a visit to the RSPCA headquarters in Malaga. Animal topics might include responsible pet ownership, humane foods (such as free-range eggs), animal welfare and social responsibility.

One of the things the RSPCA education officers – and their education dogs – teach students is what to do when meeting a new dog. Dogs might bite if they’re approached by a stranger in a sudden and unexpected way.

So when you meet a dog you haven’t met before, these are the “CAMP” steps to take:

Check: Always check with your parent or guardian before meeting any new people or dogs.

Ask: You need to ask the owner if it is OK for you to meet their dog.

Meet: Turn side-on to the dog, put your hands by your side, curl your fingers in and stand still. Now, wait for the dog to show you it is happy to meet you. The dog may come up and sniff you.

Pat: Once it has smelled you, you can gently pat it on the chest – not on the head.

**For more information about the RSPCA: rspca.org.au.
To organise a school visit phone the education unit on 9209 9325 or email education@rspca.asn.au.**





GIVE THAT ANIMAL AN A!

The more scientists find out about animals, the more they discover that they're much cleverer than many people think.

Stanley Coren, at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada, found that dogs were as smart as the average two-year-old human. They understood up to 250 words and gestures and could count up to five.

And while we might think all sheep look the same, the average sheep can remember up to 50 sheep faces and can distinguish a friend in the flock from a bully. Graeme Martin, from the University of WA, carried out this research recently to help farmers better understand the bond between a ewe and her lamb.

Other bright sparks of the animal kingdom include:

- Bees, which perform a dance to tell other bees exactly where to find the best pollen of the day.
- Bonobos, a kind of ape which never fights (unlike some humans).
- Male dolphins, which give their female friends "bouquets" of seaweed.
- Elephants, which perform funeral ceremonies for their dead.
- Crows, which use "tools" such as twigs to dig grubs out of the ground.
- Homing pigeons and other migrating animals including mammals, birds, fish and insects which travel enormous distances around the globe before returning home, often to have their young.

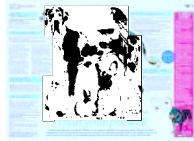
Do you think knowing more about the intelligence of animals means we should treat them differently?

FOR A HAPPY 'HOOD, ADD DOGS

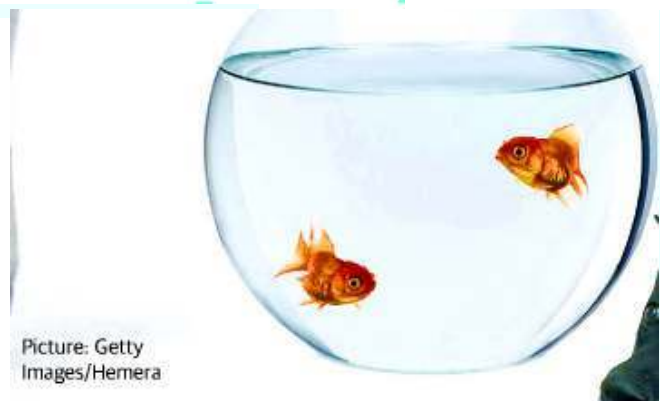
Pet owners are more likely to be involved in their local community and to exchange favours with neighbours.

And dogs motivate their owners to be more physically active and get out walking in their neighbourhood, according to researchers at the University of Western Australia.

"Once we started looking, we were staggered to find how many examples there are of pets contributing to the social fabric of society and helping people. In Australia, 63 per cent of people own a pet and of these, about 40 per cent have a dog," said Associate Professor Lisa Wood from UWA's Centre for the Built Environment and Health.



Sharing your life with an animal, whether it's as small as a goldfish or as big as a horse, brings you a lot of happiness. In fact, the more love you give your animal, the more you get back. When your puppy wags its tail, your cat purrs on your lap, or your budgie cheeps when it sees you, you know you've got a friend for life.



Picture: Getty
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