

Animals in Schools

Position: The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) supports animals in schools only when their use is justified, a primary adult caretaker exists, and their welfare can be maintained in a school setting.

Definitions:

Classroom Pet: An animal that primarily lives in a classroom setting. Classroom pets are used to model empathy and responsibility to younger students and may also be used to develop observational skills. Classroom pets are not used for experiments, dissection, or other invasive procedures.

Summary

- Alternatives to using animals in schools exist and should be considered before an animal is brought to school.
- If an animal in school is justifiable and they can be adequately cared for, their welfare should be prioritized and a designated responsible adult should oversee their care.

Rationale

- Animals are sometimes used in schools as classroom pets, as part of hatching projects, and as part of other learning experiences.
- Classroom pets are typically used to model and develop empathy and responsibility in students through their care.
- EHS does not recommend hatching programs due to zoonotic risks, mortality rates, and availability of alternatives.
- Animals may be temporarily brought into classrooms as part of learning experiences, such as presentations from zoos, rehabilitation facilities, and other groups which house animals.
- Classroom pets are not recommended for children under the age of 5 due to risk of disease transmission.
- The *Animal Protection Act* applies to classroom pets, meaning animals in classrooms must be cared for and should not be subjected to neglect or distress.
- Teachers should consider alternatives to animals, if animals are necessary to achieve curricular goals or to model behaviour, and if all care requirements can be met for an animal before acquiring a classroom pet.
- Zoonotic risk should be assessed prior to acquiring a classroom pet or bringing animals into schools. Corresponding cleaning, sanitization, and hygiene practices should also be established.

- Animals must be cared for by a designated responsible adult caretaker when in school, when school is not in session, such as weekends and holidays, and in emergency situations such as evacuations.
- Caretakers must be knowledgeable of the animal's care requirements, arrange for necessary veterinary care, and be capable of safely guiding student-animal interactions.
- Animals should be ethically sourced and bred.
- Wild animals and their hybrids should not be classroom pets.
- Animal care requirements to consider include:
 - Environmental and housing requirements;
 - Whether an animal is a prey species, and the provision of adequate hiding areas and choice in interaction;
 - Compatibility between the animal's circadian rhythm and classroom light and activity;
 - An animal's sensitivity to noise and movement;
 - Dietary requirements and feeding patterns;
 - Natural behaviours and providing appropriate outlets for their expression;
 - Availability of vet care, and if a species-specific veterinarian is required;
 - Social needs, such as living in a pair or group;
 - Their susceptibility to stress, fear, and anxiety; and
 - Exercise requirements.
- Alternatives to animals in schools include:
 - 3-D models, videos, live streams, and photos;
 - Animal themed projects;
 - Field trips to ethical animal care facilities;
 - Observing animals outdoors and during nature walks;
 - Caring for a plant to teach about life stages and environmental conditions; and
 - Humane education from responsible, humane, and ethical animal care facilities.

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