



Animals Have Feelings Too

PURPOSE

Children are often curious about animals, but they do not always know how to interact with them in safe and appropriate ways. When teaching about animal feelings, it is important to keep both children and animals safe. Learning to care about the feelings of others—including the feelings of animals—helps to develop prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behaviors are voluntary actions intended to help others.

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the feelings that our animal companions have and how to understand dog and cat body language. Then, they practice how to safely approach an animal companion. They make sculptures of dogs and cats out of clay and show the animals expressing certain feelings. Students also discuss the circumstances under which an animal might express each of these different emotions.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to...

- recognize that dogs and cats have feelings.
- identify the body language of a dog or cat who does or does not want to be petted.
- safely approach and pet a dog or cat.

1. Warm Up (5 min.)

- Ask students: "Who has spent time with dogs and cats?"
- Lead a discussion about the students' experiences with dogs and/or cats.
- Explain that it can be fun to spend time with dogs and cats, but we have to know how to treat them with kindness and respect.

2. Safety Around Animals (3 min.)

- Ask students if they have ever felt shy. (Explain that *shy* means feeling nervous around others, especially those who are new.)

AGES 3–5 years

TIME 45 min.

SEL COMPETENCY

- Relationship skills (Communication, Social engagement)
- Self-management (Impulse control)
- Social awareness (Perspective-taking, Empathy)

SKILLS

Cultivating gross motor skills,
Developing fine motor skills,
Speaking and listening

MATERIALS PROVIDED

- *Pet and Do Not Pet* animal photos
- *Ask, Sniff, Pet* poster

MATERIALS NOT PROVIDED

- Dog or cat stuffed animal or puppet
- Play-Doh or eco-dough

VOCABULARY

- Body language
- Guardian
- Shy

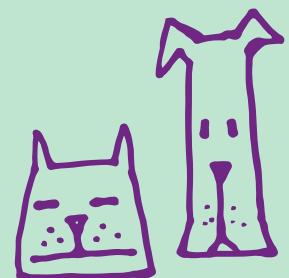
RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- *May I Pet Your Dog?* by Stephanie Calmenson
- *Tails Are Not for Pulling* by Elizabeth Verdick

RESOURCE LINKS

American Academy of Pediatrics.
"Dog Bite Prevention Tips."
<https://bit.ly/2UqJ6ih>

Best Friends. "Dog Safety: Staying Safe Around Dogs." <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/dog-safety-staying-safe-around-dogs>



- Explain that dogs and cats can feel shy too, especially when they meet new people.
- Let students know that they will be learning how to meet a new dog and cat in a way that makes the animal feel safe, which will help the students to be safe too.

3. Understanding Animal Body Language (10 min.)

- Explain that, just like people, sometimes animals do not want to be touched. Unlike people, animals cannot use speech to express how they are feeling. Instead, animals use body language to tell people when they do not want to be petted.
- First, using the *Pet and Do Not Pet* animal photos, show students a photo of a dog who would be comfortable being petted. Ask students what the animal is doing to show that he would be okay with someone petting him.
- Then, show students a photo of a cat who does *not* want to be petted. Ask students what the animal is doing to show that she does *not* want to be petted.
- In small groups or pairs, have students sort the *Pet and Do Not Pet* animal photos of dogs and cats into two categories: those who are comfortable being petted and those who do not want to be petted.
- As a group, discuss how students divided the photos.

4. How to Approach an Animal (10 min.)

- Explain to students that there are three steps to meeting a new dog or cat.
- Refer to the *Ask, Sniff, Pet* poster and explain the following:

 **Ask:** It is important to ask the animal's guardian if it is okay to come up to say hello to their pet. The guardian knows the animal best and whether that animal is generally comfortable being approached by a new person. Even if a dog or cat seems friendly, it is necessary to respect what the guardian says. Animals sometimes act differently with strangers, or they may be feeling sick. Sometimes when they get older, they lose their eyesight, so they may be more nervous than they used to be. These are all reasons a guardian might say that they do not want you to pet their animal. (Give students an opportunity to practice saying, "May I please pet your dog?" in unison. Discuss how to respond if the guardian says "no." For example, suggest that students say "thank you for letting me know.")

 **Sniff:** If the animal's guardian says that it is okay to pet their dog or cat, put the back side of your hand a few inches in front of the dog or cat and allow the animal to come to you to smell you. Many animals use their sense of smell to become familiar with someone new. Using the back of your hand with your fingers down, rather than showing them your palm, prevents the animal from thinking that you are going to grab him or her. (Ask students to imagine that there is a dog or cat near them, and have students practice putting the back side of their hand down and slightly in front of them. Discuss how they should respond if the dog or cat does not come toward them, or if the dog or cat is expressing body language indicating that she or he is not feeling comfortable in the situation. In this case, students should slowly stand up and calmly walk away.)

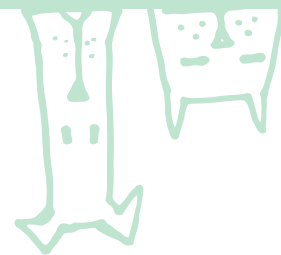
 **Pet:** If the guardian has given permission, and the animal has sniffed your hand and is showing that she or he is comfortable, you can then calmly and gently pet the animal. It is always a good idea to pet the shoulders or back of an animal you are meeting for the first time (rather than the belly or face). As the animal gets to know you better, she or he may feel comfortable rolling over for a belly rub or getting stroked behind the ears; but the animal's body language should make it clear that this kind of contact is welcome before you attempt to touch these more sensitive areas of the body. (Demonstrate these gentle ways to interact with an animal while you explain them.) We do not ever want to pull on a dog's

Educator Spotlight

Mickey Kudia

Chicago Program Manager, HEART:

Many children love animals and enjoy petting them. However, there are many people who do not like dogs or cats because they had an unpleasant experience with an animal at a young age. Teaching young people how to safely approach an animal is necessary, and it can also be fun. This activity will help young people learn how to bond with animals and to better understand their points of view.



or cat's tail, paws, ears, or whiskers, as this may hurt the animal. For very small animals who are safe to pet, it generally helps to bend down to their level so that they can read our body language better (and see our eyes), which builds trust. We do not want to stare animals in the eyes or attempt to hug them, because these actions might be scary to animals who do not know us. (Ask students to pretend that they are gently petting an animal on the shoulders or back.)

- Using a puppet or stuffed animal, have students practice the three steps.
- Students can either practice petting the puppet/stuffed animal one at a time or in small groups.

5. Animal Sculptures (12 min.)

- Ask students to choose one of the *Pet and Do Not Pet* animal photos. Explain that they will be sculpting out of clay (such as Play-Doh or eco-dough) a dog or cat like the one in their chosen picture.
- Demonstrate the activity by choosing a photo and showing how you would make a sculpture of that animal. For example, you might begin by showing students how to make the body of the animal by rolling the clay (such as Play-Doh or eco-dough). Then, ask the class to name another body part and demonstrate how you would make it.
- As you are demonstrating how to make the sculpture, explain your logic for making the ears, mouth, or tail look a certain way. For example, if you are demonstrating how to make a "do-not-pet" animal, you will have the animal's teeth showing, ears back, and tail between their legs.
- As students are making their sculptures, monitor their work. Ask them to share the details that they have included. For example: "I see you are making a sculpture of a dog who does not want to be petted. What is the dog doing with his body language to show that he does not want to be petted?" or "I see you are making a sculpture of a cat who would be comfortable with someone petting her. What is the cat doing to show that she is okay with being petted?"

Note

Making certain parts of the animal's body, such as the teeth, will be more difficult than making others, so let students know they are not expected to make all these parts of the animal's body. Let them know that their sculpture does not have to be perfect and that they should do the best they can and have fun.

6. Wrap Up (5 min.)

- Ask students the following:
 -  What are the three steps to meeting a new dog or cat?
 -  What are some examples of what dogs or cats do with their bodies when they want to be petted and when they do not want to be petted?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. **Read Aloud:** After reading the book *May I Pet Your Dog?* by Stephanie Calmenson to the class, ask:
 - Were there any dogs in the book who did not want to be petted or who should not be petted? Which dogs?
 - Why did the boy not pet these dogs? (If needed, explain that it can be dangerous to pet an animal who does not want to be petted. Also, discuss how it is not a kind thing to do, because it can be scary or uncomfortable for the animal.)
2. **Read Aloud:** After reading the book *Tails Are Not for Pulling* by Elizabeth Verdick to the class, ask:
 - How do the animals in the book show that they want to be petted?
 - If pets could talk, what do you think they would say about how they want to be treated?

When you meet a new dog or cat...

♥ Ask

♥ Sniff

♥ Pet



Pet & Do Not Pet Animal Pictures
Introduction Photo Cards



Pet Pictures



Pet Pictures



Pet Pictures



Pet Pictures



Pet Pictures



Do Not Pet Pictures



Do Not Pet Pictures



Do Not Pet Pictures



Do Not Pet Pictures

