

Broken Bonds

OBJECTIVE

To understand why companion animals are relinquished to animal shelters. Students will gain empathy for these animals and an understanding of how some of these situations could have been prevented.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Students will break into four teams. Each team will be given a description of a pet that was relinquished to the Dumb Friends League. Each team will write a story that demonstrates what steps could have been taken to avoid that situation, and how the animal might feel.

MATERIALS

- 🐾 Sample situations copied for each group
- 🐾 Poster paper

ACTIVITY

Preliminary Discussion

- 🐾 Why are pets relinquished by their owners?
- 🐾 Discuss situations the students are aware of first-hand and those they believe could happen.
- 🐾 How could some of these situations have been prevented?
- 🐾 How do animals feel when they are separated from their families?
- 🐾 Put yourself in the "shoes" of a pet that has been relinquished. How would you feel?

Procedure

The students will break into four teams. Each team will be given a situation focusing on a pet that was relinquished by their family. Using poster paper, each team will write:

1. What's the "problem?"
2. What steps could have been taken to prevent this situation from turning into a "problem?"
3. What feelings does the pet have?
4. How could the owners have educated themselves, prior to this situation?

Each team will then write a story about their situation. They'll focus on resolving the situation by making positive choices for the pets. They'll also articulate what they believe are the feelings and emotions of the animal. This will give the students the opportunity to "walk a mile" in the shoes of an animal.

Plan a trip to the Dumb Friends League to learn about the pets that are being cared for there. Coordinate with the Educator to learn about the relinquishment stories of several of the animals. Discuss how the animals are evaluated once they're relinquished and what factors determine their adoptability. Discuss why some of the animals may not be able to be put up for adoption, but must be euthanized (humanely put to death).

Post-Discussion

- 🐾 How did each group arrive at their solution?
- 🐾 Discuss the commitment of adopting a pet into your family and what is involved with that responsibility?

🐾 What resources in your community can help you care for your pets?

🐾 How did it feel to "walk a mile" in the shoes of another?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Have each student write a short essay on what the meaning of commitment is, in relation to caring about others.

1. Broken Bonds...

A family adopted a young puppy into their family. They had two young children, under the age of five, which kept the parents very busy. They didn't have the puppy neutered and left him outside most of the time. When they did bring the puppy inside, he jumped on everyone and knocked the children down. The puppy whined when he was outside and continually pawed at the screen door. The family became tired of dealing with this behavior and decided to relinquish the puppy to the Dumb Friends League. What could this family have done differently to prevent the human-animal bond from breaking?

2. Broken Bonds...

A seven-year-old Akita-mix dog was owned by a man who kept him chained up in the yard his entire life. The dog wasn't allowed in the house and he rarely had any contact with his owner. The Dumb Friends League Animal Cruelty Investigations staff talked to him several times about providing his dog with water. The owner refused to cooperate, so they impounded the dog. When the dog was brought to the Dumb Friends League, he was afraid to walk on the floors and was unresponsive to staff members. What could the dog's owner have done differently to prevent this tragedy?

3. Broken Bonds...

A teacher bought two gerbils, a male and a female. She kept them in an aquarium in her classroom. She wanted the pair of gerbils to breed so her students could witness the joy of birth. The gerbils began to breed and soon there were too many for the teacher to handle and she was unable to find homes for them. She brought three 10-gallon aquariums filled with gerbils to the Dumb Friends League. What could she have done differently to prevent this unfortunate situation from occurring?

4. Broken Bonds...

A couple had a cat they adopted seven years ago. They needed to move to another apartment across town because they had changed jobs. The apartments they liked in that area didn't allow animals. The couple decided to relinquish their cat because they wanted to live in a nice apartment, close to where they worked. What could they have done differently to prevent having to give up their feline companion?