

Problem Solving: The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma

OBJECTIVE:

To gain a better understanding of the pet overpopulation problem, why companion animals were domesticated and why people are responsible for their populations.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

The students will be divided into small groups and given a variety of problem-solving scenarios.

MATERIALS:

- 🐾 Worksheet: "The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma"
- 🐾 Notebook paper
- 🐾 Pencils

ACTIVITY:

Preliminary Discussion

- 🐾 Define "population."
- 🐾 How is the population of animals different than that of people?
- 🐾 How is the population of wild animals different than that of companion animals? Explain that wild animal populations are controlled by themselves and environmental conditions, while companion animal populations need to be controlled by people.
- 🐾 Define "domestication." Discuss why certain animals were domesticated, such as dogs and cats. Dogs were domesticated from wolves, 12-14,000 years ago. When wolves were scavenging for food at the campsites of ancient people, the people began to form relationships with them. They realized how mutually beneficial these relationships could be: people provided food and shelter for the wolves and the wolves became their hunting partners and protectors. Over thousands of years, wolves evolved into dogs and now dogs are domesticated and depend on people for all of their needs.

Cats were domesticated about 4,000 years ago when people used them to hunt mice and rats in their stores of grain. This relationship was beneficial for both the people and the cats and eventually the cats began living with the people and became their pets.

- 🐾 Since companion animals are domesticated, it's our responsibility to control their populations. Discuss the variety of ways that their populations can be controlled:

SPAY/NEUTER SURGERY: This is a simple surgery that veterinarians perform on animals, to prevent them from having babies. When a female animal is spayed, her entire reproductive system is removed, including the uterus, ovaries and oviducts. When a male animal is neutered, his testicles are removed. Spay/neuter surgery is one of the most important things we can do to help end pet overpopulation. In addition, this surgery improves an animal's temperament and prevents serious health problems from occurring.

ADOPT PETS FROM ANIMAL SHELTERS: There are a variety of places where you can get pets. It's important to know where these pets come from and the motivation of the people who are selling them. The majority of pet stores that sell puppies get them from "puppy mills." Puppy mills are breeding facilities that mass-produce puppies for resale in pet stores. The puppies and dogs are subjected to an unsanitary environment, inadequate housing, malnutrition, lack of socialization and improper or lack of veterinary care. The puppies are bred strictly for profit and quantity. In addition to puppy mills, there are also thousands of pets that come from "backyard breeders" who breed pets in their homes for profit. These pets are often subjected to the same kinds of

inhumane conditions that exist in puppy mills. If you get a pet from a pet store or a backyard breeder, you are supporting their business, and therefore contributing to the pet overpopulation problem.

The best place to adopt a pet is an animal shelter, like the Dumb Friends League. The Dumb Friends League takes in thousands of homeless pets every year that have been lost or abandoned by their owners. Three of the most common reasons why people give up their pets are behavior problems, a lack of pet-friendly housing and a lack of understanding about responsible pet ownership. The goal of the League is to find loving homes for the pets in its care and to end the pet overpopulation problem by eliminating the reasons why animals are abandoned and relinquished. The Dumb Friends League has many programs in place to alleviate these problems.

Procedure

Divide the class into four groups and give each group a scenario. Ask them to find a solution using the ideas that have been discussed, write it down and present it to the class.

Post-Discussion

- 🐾 What did you learn from these situations?
- 🐾 Discuss the fact that the pet overpopulation dilemma is complicated and there are usually many factors involved in any situation.
- 🐾 How can you do your part to help solve pet overpopulation?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Have the class create an educational presentation about pet overpopulation to present to another class.

The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma

A family went to see the movie, "102 Dalmatians." They thought the Dalmatian puppies were cute, so they bought a Dalmatian puppy at a pet store the next day. A year later, the puppy had grown into a big energetic dog that jumped on people and destroyed the children's toys. The family became frustrated and decided they didn't have the time or energy to take care of the dog. They brought him to the Dumb Friends League, hoping someone else would want him. How could this situation have been prevented? What steps should this family have taken to choose the right pet? What issues were created when the family gave up their dog to the animal shelter?

The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma

A family had a female cat they allowed to go outdoors. Eventually, she became pregnant and had a litter of six kittens. The kittens were energetic and mischievous and caused a lot of damage to the house. The family was so aggravated that they put the cat and her kittens outside and abandoned them. The mother cat and her kittens made their home behind a dumpster in an alley and ate garbage to survive. When the kittens were about six months old, three of them became pregnant and each had a litter of babies. What steps should this family have taken to prevent this situation? What issues were created when the family abandoned the cat and her kittens?

The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma

A mother and father bought a puppy from one of their neighbors as a holiday surprise for their two children, who were one and three years old. At first, the puppy spent a lot of time in the house. However, the children became afraid of the puppy because it constantly nipped and scratched them, so the parents made the puppy live in the backyard. The puppy whined and barked all day and dug big holes in the yard. Eventually he dug his way out of the yard and wandered away from home. A kind neighbor found the puppy and since he had no identification tags, brought him to the Dumb Friends League. How could this situation have been prevented? What steps should the parents have taken to choose the right pet? What issues were created when the parents decided to make the puppy live outside?

.....

The Pet Overpopulation Dilemma

A young, married couple adopted a rabbit from the Dumb Friends League. After a year, they both got new jobs and had to move across town. They couldn't find an apartment that would take their rabbit, so they ended up returning her to the League. What could the couple have done to prevent this situation from happening? What resources could they have used to help them with their problem?