

SPECIALIST EDUCATION SERVICES

Animal Policy

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1 INTRODUCTION

This document outlines our SES policy on the presence of animals in our homes and Learning Centres and summarises the key health and safety considerations related to handling and caring for them.

2 RATIONALE

There has long been an association between man and animals and over the past 30 years, scientists have become increasingly interested in the notion that 'pets are good for you'. Research has found that pets do promote a general feeling of well-being, and it is well known that happy children tend to be healthier children.

SES recognises that caring for animals can provide children with a rich and positive learning experience. It enables them to develop empathy, responsibility, and an appreciation for the humane treatment of living creatures. Animals naturally fascinate children, and recent studies show that this interest can enhance learning, support healthy development, and improve both human and animal welfare. A wide range of benefits—some unexpected—have been recorded. The therapeutic and educational advantages include:

Animals and pets have been found to:

- motivate children to think and to learn, as children have a high level of natural interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment of animals
- encourage a respect and reverence for life in children and thereby improve their relationships with peers, parents and teachers
- foster a sense of responsibility in children
- teach children to nurture and respect life
- lead to the development of hobbies / careers in animal care
- improve academic and learning achievement

Educators have also found therapeutic benefits for children with SEMH. For example:

- a calming effect on children, particularly those with behavioural or learning difficulties; improving behaviour and concentration, reducing stress and improving self-esteem
- encouraging expression and participation in more withdrawn children
- animals can help when working with the most vulnerable children
- educational improvements with low achievers

Pets and animals in learning establishments also have social benefits for the community:

- enhance the learning environment, creating a sense of security and family warmth for the children
- encourage the involvement of parents and the wider community in activities
- help to promote the establishment as an important nurturing influence in the community

Relationship, Sex and Health Education

- In addition to the moral and spiritual benefits, aspects of human health, safety and behaviour can be discussed in an absorbing, yet non-threatening way, by using pets and animals as a metaphor for humans.
- There is an emphasis on taking responsibility for one's actions and children are encouraged to respect others as they develop a better understanding of their needs.

Creative Arts

- The presence of animals stimulates creative work - such as art, essays, poems, public speaking and drama.

3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Principal is responsible for implementing this policy; they may choose to delegate day to day oversight to Senior Leadership colleagues. Everyone at SES is required to abide by this policy, as well as visiting adults and professionals. Representatives of the Health and Safety committee, as well as Senior Leadership Team colleagues, are responsible for providing information, advice and guidance to the team as and when required.

Decisions regarding children's pets will be considered by the key adults for the child (Case Coordinator, Personal Tutor, Link Tutor, Learning Mentor). The voice of the child must be included and listened to, but the final decision rests with the Principal (or their delegate). Long term considerations regarding pets will be based on the child's age, previous history, maturity and likely sustained commitment.

Before allowing any animal into SES establishments, the Principal (or their delegate) will determine whether it is likely to present a high level of risk to anyone. This may also include consultation with the company insurers.

A risk assessment process (see appendices for example) must be completed and animals deemed to be high risk will not be allowed onto the premises. Suitable arrangements for the well-being of animals must be made in advance of them being brought in; regardless of the length of time they are on the site. Wild animals taken (even if legally) from the wild, may not be brought into SES; the only exception for this would be caring for a sick animal whilst professional support is sought. The establishment may choose to have a therapy animal; usually a dog. A specific risk assessment would be required in this instance, in line with any animal coming into contact with the community.

4 ANIMAL WELFARE

Any involvement of animals in SES homes and schools must promote good practice in animal care. Children will be taught correct procedures in handling and caring for animals; visiting animals and pets provide an opportunity to do this.

Children will be encouraged to take a shared responsibility for the care of the animals, under direct supervision where required and appropriate to the age and maturity. Encouragement and praise are important. At all costs, children will be helped not to fail or feel inadequate in their pet care duties.

Standards of care must be high - children learn through observation.

If animals are not kept in scrupulously clean conditions or if they come into contact with animals from unreliable sources, it is not possible to assure they will remain disease free. Any animal looking sick or injured must be examined by a vet as soon as possible.

If a pet or animal becomes ill.

There must be total commitment to any animal that becomes ill. Sometimes the economic value of animals can be less than the cost of veterinary treatment; our animals will never be euthanised to cut costs. If animals are hospitalised during treatment, frequent progress reports will be given to the children. Children identify very closely with animals and the purpose of pet keeping is to instil a sense of responsibility and teach them how to care.

What if the pet dies?

The death of a pet provides an opportunity to discuss death and dying. Many children will have experienced pet loss and some the loss of relatives. Discussion about pet loss will be encouraged. Euthanasia **will not** be referred to as "putting to sleep" or "being given an anaesthetic" as children may develop fear of sleep or anaesthesia.

5 ANIMAL PROTOCOLS

When considering introducing pets or animals on a regular basis, we will...

- Involve a local veterinary surgeon in selection, assessment and care of pets
- Prepare a written care plan for each pet or animal residing in the home
- Obtain well socialised young animals from a reputable source
- Ensure that each animal enjoys an optimum environment, in social groups, if appropriate. Keep animals of different sex apart as breeding often leads to welfare problems
- Carry out routine preventive health measures as advised by the vet - vaccination of dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens; flea prevention and worm control
- Keep pets and their quarters clean and ensure that wild animals cannot get to the pets
- Feed a high quality diet, as recommended by the vet. A reputable, quality prepared petfood is best
- Ensure all SES pets have an annual health check if appropriate
- Ensure all wash hands after handling
- Promptly isolate any sick animals and arrange for them to be examined by the vet
- Know what is expected to be achieved through animal interaction - prepare written educational goals

Precautions to be Taken

Everyone involved in working with the animals should follow the principles of good hygiene to minimise risk. The following procedures should be followed:

- Not consume food or drink.
- Cover any open cuts or abrasions on the exposed skin of hands and arms with waterproof adhesive dressings.
- Immediately wash in running water any injuries sustained whilst working and report the injury immediately to the appropriate adult who will assess the injury and give first aid. All injuries to be covered with a waterproof dressing and medical advice to be passed on to parents/carers as necessary
- Wash hands with soap and water before and directly after handling animals.
- Wash hands before and after cleaning cages, tanks etc. Rubber or plastic gloves should be worn where possible.
- Keep animals away from the face.
- Restrain animals sufficiently so that they cannot damage themselves or the handler.
- Ensure dog foul (or any other animal waste) is cleaned immediately and disposed of appropriately by an adult.
- Not feed the animals anything other than their regulated diet
- Not eat food intended for the animals.

6 CAN PETS CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS?

Possible hazards include zoonosis, allergies and injuries. Long-term studies have shown that the incidence of such problems is very low. Our policies and procedures will minimise the chances of such hazards.

- Information regarding known allergies will be sought for all children. If there is a known allergen, all staff involved will be informed and measures will be taken to ensure that the child does not come into physical contact with the known allergen.
- Most infections that can be acquired from animals cause minor skin problems. However, healthy animals do not transmit diseases - diseases from other people pose a greater risk.
- Allergies can be caused by a variety of allergens, including house dust mites, pollen, mould spores, fabrics, foodstuffs and animal dander. Washing hands after handling animals will usually prevent symptoms, or reduce their severity. Close contact with animals is usually required to cause a reaction. People with an animal allergy are often only allergic to one species, most commonly cats or rabbits. Rarely, a severe allergy may preclude the presence of an animal in the environment.
- Bites and scratches - sociable animals are not likely to bite or scratch unless frightened or handled roughly. Children will be taught how to gently interact with the animals.

APPENDICES

7.1 Example Animal Risk Assessment

ANIMAL RISK ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

This form has been completed in line with the Health and Safety and Animal Policy

Name of Animal (Type): x (Dog)	Date Completed: xx.xx.xxxx	Completed by: xxxxxxxx	Review Date: xx.xx.xxxx
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Score	Action	Score	Action
1 – 4 Low	Deal with as per General Behaviour Management Policy	5 – 9 Medium	Record on file. Monitor closely. Consider specific strategies
10 – 15 High	Full Risk Management Plan required	16 – 25 Extreme	Extreme risk: Defer to directors

BEHAVIOURS				
Aspects	Specific Details/Potential Risks	I: Impact	L: Likelihood	Level of Risk I x L
Physical Aggression	<p>There is no evidence that x has ever been aggressive with either people or other dogs.</p> <p>Despite this, adults should be vigilant to x with regards to physical aggression as she may be in a position where she feels vulnerable and her instinct (against training) would be to defend herself. Adults will need to put in place clear and consistent boundaries (using gestures and commands) for x and ensure she is supported to develop positive relationships with young people through the planning of high quality activities for them to engage in with them and through the modelling of positive interactions.</p>	3	1	3

Inappropriate Sexualised behaviour towards the dog	There is a risk that x will be inappropriately touched. Adults should be vigilant to young people with regards to displaying sexualised behaviour as they can learn appropriate forms of touch effectively using dogs.	2	1	2
Barking	x rarely barks and responds to commands to stop her barking. Barking should be viewed as a warning signal that she is showing people she is concerned about something in her environment. When she is barking adults should direct her to “stop”, “sit” or “go to her bed” but be aware to a change in the environment that has caused her reaction.	1	3	3
Damage (all kinds)	Adults will need to be vigilant in relation to x causing damage of all kinds, not just to her own belongings and ensure that pro-active risk reducing strategies are followed and that in the case of damage being caused appropriate action is taken. X has been trained to not chew or bite furniture or other objects. She is aware of the toys that are hers and that she is allowed to chew. Adults should be made aware of where these are kept. To date we have not seen any evidence of this type of behaviour but adults are to remain vigilant.	1	1	1
Licking or sniffing	It is a natural behaviour for dogs to lick and sniff people. All adults and young people will be made aware of natural dog behaviours. X has been trained to not to lick people excessively through a programme of training with her handler.	2	2	4
Contamination of surfaces or spread of bacteria Allergic reactions	Staff, visitors and learners known to have allergic reactions to dogs must not go near the dog. Learning centre is cleaned regularly. x will only be allowed on the floor or in her bed and not on furniture. Everyone who comes into contact with x will be asked/reminded to wash their hands.	2	4	8

Fouling	All dog mess will be cleaned up as soon as reasonable possible and disposed of in a safe way.	1	3	3
Absenting Missing Absconding	It will be the responsibility of the handler/or owner to ensure that appropriate steps are taken. Adults should be vigilant to the potential for x to run off site when in a heightened state. Should x make an attempt to leave site, she should be prevented from doing so and contained safely by an adult. If x does leave site/activity an adult must follow her and maintain visual contact at all times. This is due to the high level of risk she poses in terms of her vulnerability and awareness of danger, coupled with his lack of familiarity regarding the local area. x is chipped. x should have a medal/identification tag with the name and contact of X House. x will be kept on a lead when moving between classrooms or on a walk and will be under the full control and supervision of an adult.	2	2	4
Regulation and Control	Dogs presents a high level of need in relation to regulation and control. x will need high levels of nurture and support in every aspect of her day to day life in order to be able to regulate her emotions. Adults must ensure they are vigilant to x's state of mind and should enforce clear and consistent boundaries for her at all times. Specific hand gestures, commands, and resources to use will be made aware to handlers. x should never be alone with young people.	1	3	3
Awareness of Danger	x has a poor awareness of danger. Adults should be vigilant to x's state of mind and ensure that they enforce clear and consistent boundaries for her whilst delivering a high level of nurture.	2	2	4
Classroom Behaviour	x will be used in the classroom in various ways.	1	2	2

	<p>All young people will be directed to interact with her by the handler.</p> <p>x will only be in learning centre or on site when she has timetabled lessons and specific activities to participate in. When she is having a programmed break she will be expected to be in her bed in a designated area of the learning centre.</p> <p>x is happy to be crated and can be crated in a quiet location when she is not directly needed, this will also allow her some time out and rest.</p>			
Phobias	<p>We currently have no young people at X House who suffer with a phobia of dogs. Adults must be alert to visitors or members of the team who may suffer with a phobia.</p> <p>All adults have and will be made aware when she will be on site and in the learning centre.</p>	2	2	4
Travel and Transport	<p>To date there have been no issues with x travelling in a car. "When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars."</p> <p>x should only travel in the boot of a vehicle or in an appropriate restraint. X should not travel in the house cars to minimise contact to prevent allergies.</p>	1	1	1
Fire	<p>x's name should appear on the fire list and follow the same procedure as the adults and young people at X House.</p>	1	1	1