



Moral and Ethical Responsibility to Animals

Subject: Opening blinders adults have toward specific animal species

Audience: Adults working in a shelter environment either as staff or volunteers – can be adapted to other audiences and ages.

Time: 1 ½ hours

Audience Size: 15-20

Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify their biases toward specific species of animals
- Participants will be able to identify support for making changes in their relationships toward specific species, if they so desire

Materials:

- A flip chart stand and pad + markers
- Tape
- Four signs for species and four for industries
- Books – Instructor should be familiar with the following books: Bernard E. Rollin's *Putting Descartes before the Horse* (Temple University Press, 2011) and *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (Prometheus Books, 2006)
- NHES Veg brochure

Introduction:

The purpose of this workshop is to help those serving in animal welfare positions (paid or volunteer) to investigate their beliefs about various categories of animals (i.e., animals used for food production, entertainment, biomedical research). According to Plato's doctrine, when dealing with ethics and adults, one cannot teach, one can only remind. With that doctrine in mind, the workshop will engage participants in a series of reminders through interactive exercises along with thought-provoking questions and demonstrations. Participants will be reminded of what brought them to the animal welfare field and what keeps them motivated. They will be reminded that their duty to one species does not preclude duties to others species. Understanding the various levels of ethics (personal, social, professional), participants can begin to see how their actions toward the welfare of animals helps or hurts the progress of animal care in their community.

Procedure:

Introductions (10 minutes)

1. Have participants introduce themselves with a brief statement of where they work and what animals they have in their home. Instructor introduces him/herself last.

Exercise on identifying biases (10 minutes)

2. Select four people from the audience and have them hold signs with the following species listed, one on each sign:
 - a. Dog
 - b. Mouse
 - c. Chicken
 - d. Monkey
3. Have a place in the room to designate four uses of animals in our lives:
 - a. Laboratory
 - b. Pet
 - c. Food
 - d. Entertainment
4. Have the people holding the signs place themselves where they most think their species belongs. Ask the audience if they agree with the placement or would they change where some of the signs belong. Possibly, participants will come to realize that all four animals can be placed in each of the four categories: All these species have been found in the laboratory—although chickens probably aren't in biomedical research labs, they are found in agricultural laboratories. All species can be food—mouse for snake, the rest for human use, dogs for food in Asian countries. All species can be found as pets. All species can be found in entertainment—though trained mice are probably not common.

Summary to first exercise (10 minutes)

1. Thought question: What is our ethical relationship to the animals in our lives?
2. Share the following: We seem to be a bit fractured on what our ethical relationship is, as Michael Pollan notes in his article "An Animal's Place."
"There's a schizoid quality to our relationship with animals, in which sentiment and brutality exist side by side. Half the dogs in America will receive Christmas presents this year, yet few of us pause to consider the miserable life of the pig—an animal easily as intelligent as a dog—that becomes the Christmas ham."
3. Have participants share other instances where we seem a bit fractured. Instructor can give a couple examples and then have participants share their own.
 - a. Example: We take our companions to the blessing of the animals on the feast day of St. Francis and then stop at a fast food restaurant for a burger and fries.

- b. Example: We deeply love our companion animals; and to prove it, we spend billions of dollars a year on products, food, and veterinary care. But we live in a world where violence towards other animals has become widespread and in many cases institutionalized and accepted, such as biomedical research, factory farms, canned hunts, circuses, and zoos.

Exercise on our personal relationships with various animals (15 minutes)

1. In small groups, have each group select a different category and then discuss their relationship with the animals in that category.
 - a. Companion animals
 - b. Food animals
 - c. Laboratory animals
 - d. Wildlife
 - e. Animals in Entertainment – zoos/circuses, movies, television
 - f. Pests
 - g. Hunted
2. Have students condense their feelings to a few words about their category and put those words on flipchart paper and tack around the room.
3. Depending on number of groups, give each group 5 minutes to report out their conversation.

Ethical considerations towards animals (15 minutes)

1. Brief lecture based on the three levels of ethics (From Bernard Rollin's *Putting Descartes before the Horse*. Instructor need to prepare lecture based on the three points below:
 - a. Personal ethics – my belief in what is right and wrong/good and bad – I can make choices on what to read, what charities to support, what to eat, etc.
 - b. Social ethics – reflected in the legal system – look at changed laws – Blue laws, hands free cell phones, prohibition
 - c. Professional ethics – self regulation of skilled individuals in discipline such as law, medicine, veterinary medicine, accounting, etc.
2. Question: What are our ethical responsibilities – personal, social, professional – to animals?
 - a. Have participants give a few examples – list on flipchart
3. Transition into next topic: If I know my ethical responsibilities, then I can determine what is humane treatment and what is cruel treatment.

What is animal cruelty? (15 minutes)

1. Ask participants to respond to the following question: Do we know it when we see it?
2. Lecture: According to Rollin, blatant, wanton cruelty is really not that frequent but it is the institutionalized and “accepted” daily cruelty – factory farming, laboratories, circuses, etc., – that we don't see as cruelty so we don't punish or

even think anyone is doing anything wrong. (Below is information from Rollin's book to use for the foundation of the lecture)

- a. According to Rollin in his book *Animal Rights and Human Morality*: Most researchers are not cruel, most animal agriculturalists are not cruel, most rodeo people are not cruel, and even most trappers are not cruel. They are not trying to hurt animals and are not deriving pleasure from animal suffering; they are trying to advance knowledge, cure diseases, make a profit, keep food prices down, supply fur coats, and so on. Nonetheless, their activities produce immeasurably more suffering to animals than the actions of the (thankfully) very small number of sadists who do fit the cruelty rubric.
 - b. *Animal Rights and Human Morality* (p. 160) – “We now know that the majority of violent offenders in Leavenworth Federal Prison have early histories of animal abuse, as do many serial killers and many of the children who in recent years have shot up their schools and classmates. This, together with growing societal concern about animal treatment in all areas of animal use, has resulted by 2006 in forty-two states elevation animal cruelty from a misdemeanor to a felony offense [in 2012 forty-eight states have felony animal cruelty statutes], twenty-eight of the states in the last decade. In some well-publicized cases, perpetrators of cruelty have been sentenced to prison terms of over a year. Some state statutes allow prison terms of five years or more and fines up to \$150,000, but, in reality, these harsher punishments are rarely applied, given that police forces are often understaffed and courts and prisons are hugely overcrowded. But the fact that people care enough to try to strengthen the laws attests to the social strength of animal concern. Nonetheless, the cruelty laws apply almost exclusively to deviant and sadistic behavior, not “normal, accepted animal use.”
3. Thought questions for participants to ponder:
- a. If we see a dog being set on fire, is that cruelty?
 - b. If we see a cow being branded, is that cruelty?
 - c. If we see a cat being declawed, is that cruelty?
 - d. If we see a chicken being debeaked, is that cruel?
 - e. Even when people say they love their animals, does kindness always insure ethical treatment of these animals?
 - f. Can love cause as much suffering as hate?

Close out – summary: (15 minutes)

1. Question: What is our moral and ethical relationship/responsibility to the nonhuman animal world?
2. Go back to the first exercise, add the other three categories – pests, wildlife, and hunted – can't most species fit into all four categories?
3. What then is our moral and ethical responsibility to the nonhuman animal world?

4. In small groups, have participants list on flipchart paper and tack around the room what actions each is willing to take to change his/her relationship with animals. Some responses may be:
 - a. Become vegan or at least eat fewer meat/dairy/egg based meals
 - b. Not support circuses, zoos, and other animal entertainment venues
 - c. Write letters to the editors of newspapers on appropriate animal topics to audience
 - d. Switch to animal-friendly cosmetics and hygiene products
 - e. Encourage animal-friendly legislation
5. If working in a companion animal shelter or rescue group, what changes can you make to educate the population seeking a companion? Examples:
 - a. Instead of refusing the adopt to someone who will declaw, spend time not educating so much as reminding the person what it might feel like if the first joints of his/her toes/fingers were removed. How would that alter their lives and how would that alter the life of a cat.
 - b. If they don't see any reason to spay/neuter—instead of giving them the statistics of all the animals killed in shelters, what about reminding them that animals who are meant to breed but are stifled in their ability will display behaviors that make them less attractive as companion animals.
 - c. Consider the use of language—dog days of summer, sly as a fox, she's a dog, he's a pig, ferret out the truth, etc. Maybe come up with a list and decide how these clichés can be changed.
6. Last word: Once you know, you can't not know.