

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Crowded Crustaceans: Respecting Animals Used for Food

Liam had never taken much notice of the small tank in the back of the grocery store, but today was different. His sister, Katie, was graduating from high school that Saturday, and he and his dad were responsible for organizing the food for the party to follow on Sunday.

The tank was filled with three layers of bluish-brown lobsters submerged in a bath of murky water. Liam had never had any water-dwelling pets, but he could tell that the circumstances for these crustaceans were not suitable. Grime was beginning to collect on the glass, and Liam could see bubbles streaming out of the still lobsters every so often, indicating that they were still hanging onto life.

Suddenly, Liam felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Come on, son,” his father said. “Let’s go get the plates and napkins. We’ll come back for the lobsters right before the party.” Liam looked back at the lobsters in the tank. He could feel their pain—the pain of living in such a small, unhealthy enclosure. And, he knew it would only get worse for them when they reached the inevitable—a pot of boiling water and a party guest’s plate.

How can Liam express his disapproval of buying the lobsters to his dad without ruining Katie’s special party?



Liam’s dad has his heart set on a special meal for Katie’s graduation, so this is going to be a difficult situation. Luckily, Liam has some time to try to convince his dad to making a change in Sunday’s menu.

The MSPCA believes that live animals used for food must be kept humanely, with the most natural possible conditions and the basic necessities of food and a safe, comfortable environment.

Sometimes, people don’t think of all living creatures as equals; they tend to relate to and empathize with cute and furry animals as opposed to the creepy crawly ones. But, all living things have basic needs. And just because we see the same scenarios week after week, it doesn’t mean that we can’t have an awakening and do something to facilitate change! Liam hardly noticed the lobster tanks until today, but all of a sudden, he recognizes that keeping animals confined and restrained in such small quarters isn’t how he wants to get his supper. Many retailers are either discontinuing lobster tanks or trying newfangled ones that allow for more mobility and less crowding. These old tanks that Liam has noticed don’t even allow for proper feeding of the animals, so many are starving before they get to that boiling pot.

Liam can ask his dad if he might reconsider not having lobsters for Katie’s party, and perhaps suggest some humane alternatives like pasta salads and humanely raised meats or fish. He can point out that

lobsters are living and feeling creatures, too, and that seeing them in the crowded tank makes him feel very uncomfortable. Liam might even politely mention or write a letter to the store owner expressing his unhappiness with seeing the live lobsters living under such adverse conditions. If he can't convince his dad, then he might suggest going to another fish market that has better holding conditions for the lobsters. At the very least, Liam can explain to his parents that what he has seen is making him rethink eating lobsters.