

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



Floppy Ears & Wagging Tails: Questioning Unnatural Breed Standards

Claire heard barking and scratching as she approached her best friend, Rose’s, front door. As the door swung open a small, brown and white Boxer lunged at her, sniffing and licking her hands. Rose’s brother, Bryan, pulled the dog back into the house, apologizing for the puppy’s behavior.

“We’re still working on training Samson,” he explained as he showed his sister’s friend to the living room. “How old is he now?” Claire asked.

“We got him last week from my cousin’s dog that just had a litter,” Bryan said. “He’s only 9 weeks old, so we still have time to train him and everything.”

The puppy followed Claire to the couch, where she sat down. Samson rested his head in her lap, and Claire proceeded to stroke his glossy, brown ears. His tail thumped on the ground in pleasure.

“I love his ears,” she commented. “They may look too big for him now, but he’ll grow into them.”

“Well, we’re bringing him to get them cropped soon and his tail docked, too. We need to do it before the cartilage sets, which usually happens by 12 weeks.

That’s how everyone does their Boxers’ ears and tails,” Bryan replied.

“Oh...,” Claire said disappointedly.

“Rose will be down in a minute. She’s just changing. See you later,” her friend’s brother said as he left the room.

Claire looked down to the ears in her hands and into Samson’s eyes. She didn’t know why anyone would want to take them away from the puppy. If her mom wasn’t so allergic, Claire would want a bloodhound, with those big, floppy ears that she could pet all day. Suddenly, Rose came into the room.

“I see you’ve met the newest member of our family! So what do you think?” she asked with a grin.

Claire opened her mouth but didn’t know what to say. How can she avoid offending Rose while still convincing her that cropping ears and docking tails isn’t the way to go?



Claire understands that dogs need and want their ears and tails intact! She needs to take a deep breath and calmly gather her thoughts if she has any chance at politely conveying her point to Rose and her family.

The MSPCA believes that surgeries including ear cropping in dogs, tail docking in dogs and horses, and other surgeries done solely for cosmetic reasons (meaning for appearance rather than health purposes) are wrong.

Claire can explain to Rose how much she loves her new puppy and feels obligated to share what she knows about ear cropping and tail docking. The needless cosmetic surgery will be uncomfortable, risky, and unbeneficial to Samson. It is also unnecessary since Rose's family isn't going to show Samson in competitions--the puppy is simply going to be a beloved family pet. Dog organizations have set breed standards that, in their opinion, improve the appearance and performance of the dogs. If the organizations embraced the breed's natural appearance instead, then most—if not all—ear cropping and tail docking would be eliminated.

Claire should also alert Rose that there are unskilled individuals who perform illegal docking and cropping, which can cause inhumane maiming and mutilation of animals. Finally, Claire can offer to share her knowledge with Rose's family—as long as Rose feels comfortable with her doing so—in hopes of convincing them to reconsider.

In the end, Claire can only do what she can do—and that is politely and passionately inform Rose's family of the inhumanities of cosmetic operations. She can always refer Rose's family to the MSPCA for further information and answers to their questions. Either way, Claire should be proud of herself for trying to educate and make a difference for Samson and all animals!