

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



Hungry & Homeless: Feral Cats Living on Their Own in the Wild

The wheels of Julia’s bike bumped along the dirt road, kicking up a cloud of dust around her. As she turned the corner away from her house and began the long ride into town, she suddenly became aware of a faint, high-pitched squealing. Slamming the breaks, Julia pitched forward, dismounted her bike, and began examining it for signs of a broken gear or loose bolt. Just then, out of the corner of her eye, she thought she caught a glimpse of a gray body slowly slinking past her.

Julia turned and stared into the green eyes that were staring back at her. A kitten, who couldn’t have been more than a few months old, froze and let out a shrill meow at the girl. His pink interiors of his gray and white ears were speckled and dirty. As she stood examining the little creature, Julia loosened her grip on the bicycle’s handles, and, before she could stop it, the bike began to tip until it finally collapsed on the ground before her. And, with its fall, the kitten scampered into the woods and out of the girl’s sight.

Julia stood for a moment, making no move to pick up her overturned bicycle. She was curious about the little cat. There were very few houses in the area, and Julia knew none of her neighbors had cats. So where did the kitten sleep at night while she was safe in bed? The cat’s visible ribs told Julia that she was malnourished. Where did she get food?

Julia wants to help the kitten, but she doesn’t know how. Where can she go to find out more information and what can she do to help?



For someone as sensitive as Julia, it is very hard for her to simply get on her bike and ride away, knowing the little kitten is hungry and alone. However, she will need the help of an adult if she is going to pursue a solution.

The MSPCA works hard to solve the serious problem of feral cats. Feral cats are cats who have been domesticated but are now living in the wild. Some are abandoned stray cats who have learned to live in the wild, and others are domestic cats born in the wild. These cats are not used to interacting with people and are not tame. The MSPCA works closely with other humane organizations that humanely trap, neuter, and release feral cats who cannot be re-domesticated, or tamed, with the idea being to decrease the number of feral cats being born into a harsh existence.

Julia needs to make a mental or physical note of where she spotted the kitten. She can even stack several stones together near the site, so she has a point of reference. When she goes home, she can tell her parents what she saw and her concerns about the kitten’s age and state of health. A call to their local animal adoption center can give her family information about trying to humanely trap the kitten, feed him, and provide information about spaying and neutering programs. If the kitten is young enough, the adoption center staff can assist in foster care information for helping the kitten get used to people. But, it is very important that Julia not try to do any of these things on her own. The kitten,

however cute, is considered a wild animal and can bite and scratch. Additionally, he may likely be carrying parasites or other contagious illnesses that need to be addressed. The adoption center will be able to guide the adopting family as to what vaccinations and medications the kitten will need, as well as advice on microchipping and identification.

With patience and determination, Julia will have the opportunity to try and make a difference in the life of a little kitten.