

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



**Safe & Sound: Keeping Cats Happy & Content Indoors**

Every night, Leyla calls outside for her sweet, orange tiger cat, Yoshi, after his long day of exploring the town and the surrounding woods. And, each time, Yoshi gives her the same miserable look as he slinks into the living room and hops up onto the fluffy, brown couch.

But lately, the woods in Leyla’s neighborhood have been known to harbor raccoons and even occasional coyotes. Just last week, the neighbor’s dog received a few nasty scratches from a bold raccoon who was hanging out by the trash cans. The dog required more than a few stitches to the face, but luckily, he was up-to-date on his rabies vaccination.

To add to her concern, Leyla also lives near a busy intersection where there is always a flow of cars passing her house. She is worried that if Yoshi tries to cross the road, he might get hit like her friend Nan’s kitten.

This is why lately, Leyla has been questioning if outdoors is really the best place for her beloved cat. Should Yoshi’s safety be more important than his happiness?



This is really a tough dilemma and one that is becoming more and more common. Often, when we think of cats, we think of curious creatures, hanging around the house or barn, having fun looking for squirrels and mice, or playing with dangling leaves in the cool air. But the reality is that today’s environments aren’t always safe for our little furry friends.

The MSPCA believes that responsible cat owners protect their cats, other animals, the public, and the environment by keeping their cats controlled and properly supervised. Cats that are allowed outdoors unconfined and unsupervised are exposed to a variety of hazards, including rabid wildlife, that endanger their health and safety. Also, cats who are allowed to roam outdoors can adversely impact wildlife by eating birds and by stalking prey that other animals need for food. The MSPCA has growing concerns about the outdoor cats due to an increasing evidence of rabies in wild species and the fact that only a small percentage of cats are inoculated against rabies. Additionally, these cats are also prone to contracting and spreading other diseases and parasites and will breed if not spayed or neutered, adding to the pet overpopulation problem.

Leyla has cause for concern about Yoshi. Today’s outdoor cats face many more perils that were less common in years past. When our parents and grandparents grew up, there was more open space available for wildlife to live. Now, wildlife like raccoons and coyotes are often crowded out of country spaces and are forced to make their way into more suburban and city existences. The pockets of woods we cultivate in our suburban living spaces are popular areas for wildlife to settle. And, with these animals comes the potential of serious disease such as rabies. Dogs are required to be given rabies vaccines but cats are not, leaving it up to the discretion of the pet guardian. Additionally, there are now other common diseases and illness that can be spread not only from

wildlife but from other cats as well. Plus, hungry wildlife, including large birds of prey, fisher cats, and coyotes, will often eat small mammals, such as cats, if available. And that's not a pretty thought.

Another big problem for cats is that our world can be very busy and dangerous for them. Cars and trucks are big and set high off the road, often putting cats and dogs out of their view. Drivers often don't notice an animal making his way across the road until it is too late. We've all seen little animals like skunks or squirrels hit by cars; cats and dogs, too, have this same problem with traffic.

So, what can Leyla do to make the world safer for Yoshi, without significantly reducing his quality of life? First of all, if Leyla wants Yoshi to be happy and healthy, she needs to make walking him outdoors a priority. This way, Yoshi can still explore the world outside but with the safety of Leyla's watchful eyes. She can teach Yoshi to walk with her using a harness and leash; it can be done! She can microchip him and get him a collar and an id tag that he can wear all the time. A local animal adoption center or pet supply shop can guide her in choosing a collar that will break away if he escapes from her so that he doesn't get it caught on a branch. Identification is extremely important, as less than two percent of all stray cats are found by their guardians because they have no collar, tag, or microchip. We wouldn't want Yoshi to be picked up as a stray when he actually has a loving home! Leyla can keep Yoshi indoors when he is not on a leash, but she should ask her parents to help her establish a nice space for him, perhaps on a window seat or widened ledge. Sunrooms and screened porches are also good alternatives. This way, Yoshi can see outside and have fresh air on his face when he needs to be indoors. Leyla can make sure Yoshi has a scratching post and knows how to use it. This will give Yoshi an outlet for his natural desire to use his paws. Growing some indoor catnip can help, too. And she can make sure he has lots of attention and love, too; something all pets want and need.

Yoshi should visit the veterinarian regularly, as cats do not often do, to keep up to date on all important vaccines, including rabies, in case he gets loose and comes into contact with or fights with a rabid animal. Cats also need a series of vaccines to protect them from other common diseases and contagious viruses such as feline distemper, leukemia, and aids. Luckily, when Leyla adopted Yoshi as a young cat, he was already neutered, but if he wasn't, he would have needed to be. If he got loose, the result would be more kittens and cats looking for homes, with the possibility of adding to the feral (wild cat) population— something this world doesn't need right now. Female cats can have thirty or more kittens per year!

Finally, Yoshi might eventually enjoy the company of another cat in the house. When he gets settled into his indoor routine, perhaps a foster care visit (when people can foster, or temporarily take care of, a pet from the animal adoption center) might enlighten everyone as to Yoshi's preferences for a companion.

Leyla can also help cats everywhere by spreading the wisdom she has acquired about keeping cats safe indoors or on a leash or confined pen. And, maybe she could help sponsor legislation in her community requiring all cat guardians to have them inoculated against dangerous diseases.