

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



Welcome Caring and Compassionate Young People!

Animals are “sentient” creatures. This is a fancy way of saying that our animal friends are living beings who experience feelings, just like you and I. They are capable of love and pain, hunger and loneliness, happiness and sadness. Because you are interested in the well-being of animals, you are very likely a sensitive person who seeks to make the world a better place for animals and people.

Some concerns about animals are right in our own backyards, such as pet-overpopulation, finding homes for homeless pets, and anti-fur campaigns. Other issues take us a bit farther away, such as saving wildlife habitats, keeping our oceans clean, and factory farming. This book will introduce you to a variety of key animal welfare dilemmas facing us today. As you read through the stories, try to formulate your opinion and think about what you would do if you were in the situation. The response following each dilemma will present possible solutions to guide your thoughts, though there are almost always more solutions you could think of which could resolve the problem.

Sometimes it is hard to imagine how you can help animals; after all, how can one young person make a difference? Well, let me tell you, that is how change happens: one person at a time. Animal advocates are people who concentrate on animal welfare causes—animal issues that will make this world a better place in which to live. I’ve been working as an animal advocate since I was in fifth grade, when I first volunteered at a local animal welfare group. During school vacations, I helped with mailings, answering phone calls—anything I could do to help. Today, as a humane educator, it is my passion and job to teach children and adults how to make the world a better place for animals and people. From my experience, I have found the most powerful and effective advocates are:

- ❖ Well-informed. You have to read as much as possible about the issues! Go to the library, read on-line about the work being done by the variety of animal welfare groups, visit your local animal adoption center, and look for lectures in your community. And, most importantly, ask questions. Talk with others who care about animals and share ideas with each other.
- ❖ Polite. Anger, disrespect, and violence...they all will hurt your cause in the long-run. If you want to change minds, then you need to be courteous, as shouting and screaming won’t get you too far and will only label you as “one of those crazy animal people.” Polite people give animal advocates a good name.
- ❖ Good listeners. Tune into what others are saying, as this is a good way to learn all sides of an issue. Try to understand all perspectives, even the ones with which you might disagree. There are always differing opinions and good listeners can help present more balanced arguments for animals.
- ❖ Good educators. Being able to help spread good, reliable information about animal welfare issues is part of being a good teacher. And remember, most people want to do the right thing and just need information to help get them there. Good educators help to change the world by enlightening others.

- ❖ People who take good care of themselves. This means taking care of your physical and emotional well-being; your mind can get overloaded from the seriousness of working hard for animal causes, so you need to make sure you leave plenty of time for fun. People who are too stressed aren't doing their best for themselves or animals! This also involves staying safe around animals; just because we love animals doesn't always mean they are safe for us to handle.
- ❖ Compassionate. We care deeply for animals, people, and the planet!
- ❖ Kind. Quite simply, if you want others to be kind, you need to show kindness to others!

So, just what can kids do to help animals?

- ❖ Read, read, read!
- ❖ Look for learning opportunities about animals at school and in your community and talk with experts!
- ❖ Educate others about animals and animal issues!
- ❖ Speak up when you see or read something about animals that concerns you!
- ❖ Write letters to newspapers, TV and radio stations, magazines, politicians, businesses, and individuals!
- ❖ Fundraise for your local animal shelter or animal welfare organization through penny drives, yard sales, bake sales, read-a-thons, and other creative ideas!
- ❖ When you are old enough, consider volunteering or working with animals!

A Word about Staying Safe and Smart

Always keep in mind that **the only solution for observing animal cruelty is to notify a trusted adult--** your parents, teachers, law enforcement officers, or other responsible adults who will listen to you and respond. **Never put yourself in harm's way to help an animal.**

And finally, young advocates remember: Sometimes, no matter how hard we try or how much we want something or someone to change, things just don't work out. Keep your chin up and try not to feel too frustrated. Sometimes change has to be measured not in miles but in baby steps. Know you've done your part to help, and give yourself a pat on the back!

A note to parents and educators: *This book can serve as an introduction to animal-related ethics for middle and high school students, or be incorporated into current curricula to enhance existing educational strands. With presentations of various animal welfare related scenarios, students will hopefully gain a better understanding of current key issues and will practice and refine critical thinking skills. Additionally, they will recognize their power as individuals to create positive change. Good citizens facilitate this change by utilizing their skills in a polite and educated manner. The goals of these exercises are to help kids recognize and refine their personal beliefs regarding animal welfare, empower them to stand up for their beliefs, and to help animals and our planet.*

~Marla Andrews~