

Taking Care of Your Pet: An Everyday Occupation to Support Learning, Development and Life Skills

Brought to you by the NCSE Occupational Therapy Team

The focus of this occupational therapy series is on everyday home occupations that support children's learning, development and wellbeing. By encouraging your child to participate with you in these activities, opportunities for learning can occur as there is great learning potential to be found in everyday occupations.

Supporting your child to participate in caring for family pets can promote the development of important life skills. If you do not have a pet, encourage your child's imaginative play through pretending a toy/teddy is a pet. These activities can develop your child's play, motor skills, strength, balance, sensory processing, communication, attention and organisational skills.



- Pets need fresh water, food and a clean living space which needs to be attended to daily. Allocating specific tasks to your child can provide them with **roles** and **responsibilities** and help **develop their independent living skills**.
- **Playing ball games** like fetch, bringing your pet for a walk, opening food containers, pouring water into their bowl, grooming and making their bed can all develop **gross and fine motor skills**, and support **strength and balance** development.
- Most pets provide a great deal of **sensory input**, such as tactile input when grooming and petting them to visual, auditory and olfactory (smell) input. Pets can also be a calming influence by reducing stress and supporting relaxation.
- Pets can support the development of important social skills and personalist traits such as **empathy and compassion**. They can provide comfort, unconditional positive regard and emotional support to a young person.
- Pets need **consistent routines** to ensure they are fed at a set time and have a set bed time and sleeping space. Supporting your child to develop a visual schedule of the set chores and tasks required to care for their pet may act as a prompt and memory tool to support consistency in routine.

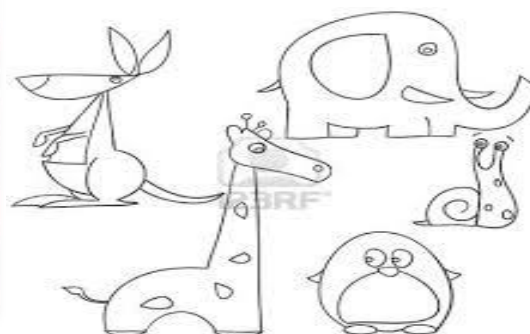
- Encourage your child to actively participate in training your pet, using **reinforcing positive behaviour** and rewards when training them.



✿ Making **healthy treats** for your pet is an activity you can do with your child and this is also a great way to introduce them to cooking. There are many recipes online <https://www.kids-cooking-activities.com/easy-dog-treat-recipes.html>

✿ **Imaginative play** has so many benefits for children and is also great fun! Creating a farm with toy animals can be used to role play farming activities and responsibilities. A teddy bear's picnic involves getting some teddies, a bowl/plates and watching your child become absorbed in a world of teddies and tea. It also provides opportunities for children to develop **social skills, planning and imaginative play**. For young people who struggle with imaginative play, they can pretend to be different animals. Use props to help them get into character for grooming, feeding and even picking up the poo!

✿ You can develop easy and fun **animal arts and crafts** projects for your child. Drawing your pet, other peoples' pets or their favourite animal they have seen in the zoo. Don Conroy has many animal art videos online which demonstrate how to draw animals. <https://donconroy.com/about/don-on-youtube/>



For more information on caring for your pet, visit: [https:// spca.bc.ca/programs-services/for-kids-teens/for-kids/pet-care-for-kids/](https://spca.bc.ca/programs-services/for-kids-teens/for-kids/pet-care-for-kids/)