

ANIMAL GUARDIANS

Promoting positive animal relationships with
children and young people



SCOTTISH SPCA
ANIMAL WISE

scottishspca.org/animal-guardians

03000 999 999

Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Scottish Charity No. SC 006467

As Scotland's animal welfare charity we are proud to offer Animal Guardians as an educational resource.

The programme:

- Works with children and young people to nurture empathy and compassionate behaviour towards animals.
- Provides FREE bespoke one-to-one sessions with one of our youth engagement officers.
- Engages with children and young people for around 10 sessions, with additional family support offered.
- Covers animal emotions, needs and responsibilities.
- Is offered to children and young people aged three to 16.
- Is in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh.
- Offers a visit to one of our animal rescue and rehoming centres, where possible and appropriate.



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a young child's face, looking downwards. The child has dark hair and is wearing a red garment. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brownish-orange.

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What is Animal Guardians?

Animal Guardians is a free education programme offered to children and young people aged three to 16 years by the Scottish SPCA. Animal Guardians is suitable for those who are showing negative behaviours towards animals, including being rough with pets or injuring animals. It is designed for those whose actions towards animals are a cause for concern to adults around them. They can be referred to Animal Guardians to receive additional support to build empathy and compassion and develop positive behaviours towards animals. Animal Guardians is an education programme where a child or young person meets with a Scottish SPCA youth engagement officer during school time.

They will participate in games and activities to help them learn:

- About animal emotions.
- What animals need to keep them healthy and happy.
- How to be responsible when around animals.

Professor Jo Williams and her research team from the University of Edinburgh will be evaluating the Animal Guardians programme. We need your help with this study. By helping us to evaluate Animal Guardians we can make sure it is helping children and young people to develop more positive behaviours towards animals. It can also help us improve the programme so that it becomes even more beneficial in the future.



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



“Upon initial referral the pupil spoke very fondly of animals but was known to be rough with her own pets and often took out her own emotions on them – particularly if she was angry or frustrated that they did not do as she wished. The sessions were excellent. They engaged and informed the pupil about all aspects of animal welfare. She was excited and enthusiastic after every session and the delivery was perfect for the age and stage of development.”

Deputy head teacher of child who participated in programme

“Several months on from the end of the sessions, we continue to feel the positive effects of the Animal Guardianship sessions.”

Parent of child who participated in programme

“Thank you so much for the time and effort you have put into working with the young person in our care. We are so very happy with how he is doing. He hasn't done anything unkind to the dogs or any other animal for well over six months. He now loves coming on our dog walks, enjoys seeing the sheep, lambs and cows and talks about them with empathy.”

Foster carer of child who participated in the programme



The RS Macdonald Charitable Trust

We would like to thank the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust for funding and supporting the development, implementation, and evaluation of Animal Guardians.

“We recognise the importance of this programme in its ability to educate and establish positive child-animal interactions. Vulnerable children and young people are supported to promote animal welfare and reduce animal cruelty.”

Rachel Campbell, trust director



We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the organisations who have supported the Animal Guardians programme in the form of an advisory group over the past few years, including: The City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Women’s Aid, Police Scotland, Barnardo’s, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Links Group, Paws for Progress, The University of Edinburgh Centre for Applied Developmental Psychology, CAAR and Seamab.



Research on child-animal interactions

Animals are an important part of many children's lives, and around 70% of children in the UK live with pets¹. Research shows that children can form strong emotional attachment to their animals², often think of pets as important members of their family, and positive relationships with pets can have a range of benefits³.

However, children can also harm animals and we are working to prevent this. Research on childhood animal harm suggests it is linked with a range of risk factors, can start as young as four⁴, and includes both accidental and intentional harm. Research has also shown links between intentional animal cruelty and human violence in which both are predicted by low levels of empathy and conduct disorder⁵. Fortunately, early intervention can help, and the earlier the intervention the greater the positive impacts⁶.



Why do children/young people harm animals?

There are a wide range of reasons a child might harm an animal, ranging from an accident where the child does not know what they are doing is harmful, to lashing out or intentional cruelty⁷. Collaborative research between the Scottish SPCA and the University of Edinburgh show there are a range of psychological risk factors associated with childhood animal harm, including⁸:

- Insecure patterns of attachment.
- Difficulties regulating behaviours and/or emotions.
- Lower levels of empathy and compassion to animals.
- Being more accepting of cruelty to animals.
- Being less likely to believe animals have thoughts and feelings.

There are also a variety of environmental risk factors associated with childhood animal harm. These include Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, and bullying, because children who have experienced or witnessed cruelty and violence are more likely to harm animals themselves^{9,10}. Other environmental risk factors include not being appropriately supervised around animals and interacting with animals who are likely to show aggressive behaviours.

While a child who has harmed animals may not necessarily have any of these risk factors, it is important to be aware of increased risks so that appropriate levels of support can be provided. Education programmes for vulnerable children that teach them appropriate behaviour towards animals can change their behaviour and reduce the risk that they will engage in animal harm in the future. Furthermore, nurturing positive child-animal relationships can be a powerful tool in increasing empathy and compassion¹¹.



Does Animal Guardians work?

Animal Guardians has been developed based on current child developmental theories and expertise in animal welfare education to promote empathy and compassion and in turn encourage positive behaviour towards animals. Learning to handle animals appropriately and responding to their emotional and physical needs can help a child to act safely around animals and avoid situations where a child or an animal could become frightened or injured.

Animal Guardians has already received an initial evaluation through the collaboration with the University of Edinburgh¹². Children who completed Animal Guardians had significant improvements in:

- Their knowledge of animal welfare needs.
- Their belief that animals have thoughts and feelings.
- Recognition and understanding of human and animal emotions.
- Empathetic responses to animals.

Children also had a significant reduction in self-reported animal harm behaviours towards animals. This suggests that the programme is working well to reduce many of the psychological risk factors for animal harm. We continue to strive to improve and expand the programme. By doing this we hope to be able to improve additional risk factors including increasing attachment to pets, helping children learn strategies for self-regulation, and practice taking care of animals.

Marsa-Sambola, F., Williams, J., Muldoon, J., Lawrence, A., Connor, M., Roberts, C., & Currie, C. (2016). Sociodemographics of pet ownership among adolescents in Great Britain: findings from the HBSC study in England, Scotland, and Wales. *Anthrozoös*, 29(4), 559-580.

Hawkins, R. D., Williams, J. M., & Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA). (2017). Childhood attachment to pets: Associations between pet attachment, attitudes to animals, compassion, and humane behaviour. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(5), 490.

Wanser, S. H., Vitale, K. R., Thielke, L. E., Brubaker, L., & Udell, M. A. (2019). Spotlight on the psychological basis of childhood pet attachment and its implications. *Psychology research and behavior management*, 12, 469.

Hawkins, R. D., Hawkins, E. L., & Williams, J. M. (2017). Psychological risk factors for childhood nonhuman animal cruelty: A systematic review. *Society & Animals*, 25(3), 280-312.

McPhedran, S. (2009). A review of the evidence for associations between empathy, violence, and animal cruelty. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 14(1), 1-4.

Tardif-Williams, C. Y., & Bosacki, S. L. (2015). Evaluating the impact of a humane education summer-camp program on school-aged children's relationships with companion animals. *Anthrozoös*, 28(4), 587-600.

Wauthier, L. M., & Williams, J. M. (2022). Understanding and Conceptualizing Childhood Animal Harm: A Meta-Narrative Systematic Review. *Anthrozoös*, 35(2), 165-202.

Wauthier, L. M., Farnfield, S., Scottish SPCA, & Williams, J. M. (2022). A Preliminary Exploration of the Psychological Risk Factors for Childhood Animal Cruelty: The Roles of Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Empathy. *Anthrozoös*, 1-23.

Wauthier, L., Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA), & Williams, J. M. (2022). A qualitative study of children's accounts of cruelty to animals: Uncovering the roles of trauma, exposure to violence, and attachment. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(9-10).

Bright, M. A., Huq, M. S., Spencer, T., Applebaum, J. W., & Hardt, N. (2018). Animal cruelty as an indicator of family trauma: Using adverse childhood experiences to look beyond child abuse and domestic violence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 76, 287-296.

Thompson, K. L., & Gullone, E. (2003). Promotion of empathy and prosocial behaviour in children through humane education. *Australian Psychologist*, 38(3), 175-182.

Wauthier, L. M. (2022). The Psychology of Childhood Animal Harm: Risk Factors, Pet Relationships, and Novel Intervention Evaluation. [Doctoral thesis, The University of Edinburgh].



About our study

It is important the Animal Guardians programme continues to be evaluated, to ensure it remains effective and that any new activities improve intended outcomes. The University of Edinburgh is carrying out the ongoing evaluation, aiming to answer the following questions:

- Does Animal Guardians continue to be effective and improving children's knowledge of needs, understanding of animal emotions, and empathy towards animals?
- Does Animal Guardians continue to reduce animal harm behaviours as reported both by the child AND a parent or referring adult?
- Can Animal Guardians also improve self-regulation and increase care-giving behaviours towards animals?

What does the study entail?

The study for Animal Guardians is integrated within the programme. For the study, routinely collected information will be used by the University of Edinburgh team for full evaluation. This routinely collected information is made up of information collected during the referral process and an activity pack completed during the first and last sessions.

The youth engagement officer will complete the activity pack with your child by asking a set of standardised child-friendly questions on their relationship to animals, their understanding of animal emotions and needs, their empathy, and their self-regulation. This will also allow the youth engagement officer to tailor the programme to your child's needs and level of understanding.

The referral information and children's answers to the activity pack can be used for our study if both parent/guardian and child consent is given. All information will be anonymised and stored separately from the rest of the Animal Guardians programme. Answers will be stored on secure university servers and accessed by the University of Edinburgh research team for evaluation. If consent is not given, the referring adult and child will still carry out the same questions, but the answers will not be passed on to the research team at the University of Edinburgh or used for the study.

How can my child participate in the study?

When a child has been referred to Animal Guardians, parents/carers can decide if they consent for their child's answers to the activity pack, in the first and last session, to be used for study. A parent/carer **MUST** complete the form on page 26 indicating whether they are happy for their child to participate. If parent/guardians' consent is given, the child will also be asked to give their consent at the beginning of the first session. Please note that children can still be part of Animal Guardians without participating in the study.



Will the information collected be confidential?

Yes. All information collected will be anonymous and kept in a secure location and treated confidentially.

- The project has been given ethical approval by the University of Edinburgh.
- All data will be anonymised, and data collected will be stored securely according to ethical and GDPR guidance.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about the study, including the questions asked in the activity pack, please do not hesitate to contact:

Prof. Jo Williams | Email: Jo.Williams@ed.ac.uk | Phone: 0131 650 996
Clinical and Health Psychology Department
Doorway 6, Teviot Place, Medical School, The University of Edinburgh

Advice

If you would like independent advice about your participation in this research, including your rights as a participant, please contact the following independent member of staff:

Dr. Emily Newman | Email: Emily.Newman@ed.ac.uk | Phone: 0131 651 3945

Complaints

If you have complaints at any point regarding this research, please fill out the form below and send it to the head of school: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/WEB%20Complaint%20Form.pdf>.

Prof. Matthias Schwannauer

Email: headofschool.health@ed.ac.uk | Phone: 0131 651 3954

Who is Animal Guardians for?

Animal Guardians is an educational programme for children or young people who require additional support to build empathy and compassion towards animals.

Children can be referred to Animal Guardians for a range of reasons including:

- Repeatedly teasing or frightening an animal.
- Rough handling of an animal, including squeezing or picking up pets inappropriately, stroking too hard, pushing and shoving an animal.
- Not respecting an animal's boundaries (e.g. waking up a sleeping animal or touching it when it is eating or needs space).
- Cutting whiskers or hair off an animal.
- Neglecting an animal if this is meant to be the child's responsibility (e.g. forgetting to provide food or water or cleaning out a cage on numerous occasions).
- Struggling to understand how an animal is feeling.
- Removing or disturbing wild animals (including insects/amphibians) from their home.
- Kicking, punching, or harming an animal (including wildlife).
- Killing an animal either by accident or on purpose.
- Witnessing harm to an animal.

If you are not sure whether your child would benefit from the programme or you have any concerns about their behaviour towards animals, please phone **03000 999 999**, option five for further assistance or email **animalguardians@scottishspca.org**.



How do I refer a child/young person?

Who can refer?

A child or young person can be referred by anyone who is in a position of care for that individual. This includes:

- Parents, other relatives or carers.
- Teachers.
- Childcare and health professionals.
- Charitable organisations working with a child or young person.

How do you refer?

Complete and submit the referral form on page 21 and 22 and also ask both the child/young person and the parent/carer to complete the consent forms which can be found in this booklet. One of the Scottish SPCA's youth engagement officers will then be in touch to discuss the referral in more detail.

Referral process

1. Complete and submit the referral form to the Scottish SPCA (see page 31 for contact details).
2. Initial conversation with the Scottish SPCA's youth engagement officer to confirm the Animal Guardians programme is suitable for the child or young person.
3. If Animal Guardians is an appropriate programme for the child, the referring adult must ensure the parent/carer and child consent forms are completed and sent to the youth engagement officer prior to starting the programme.
4. Child starts the Animal Guardians programme.

Please note the following:

Any details received via the referral forms and subsequent information will be stored securely, and in strict compliance with GDPR. Information about our privacy policy can be viewed at www.scottishspca.org/terms-conditions-and-privacy. All youth engagement officers are suitably trained in child protection and are active members of the PVG Scheme. Any discussions during the child's participation in Animal Guardians will be kept private unless the youth engagement officer feels that the child's safety may be at risk. In this case, the information will be passed on to the person who made the initial referral or a relevant child protection professional.



What will Animal Guardians entail?

1. Initial referral (from parent, teacher, child care and health professionals).
2. “Getting to know you” session and completion of pre-programme questionnaire.
3. Animal Guardians workshop commences and encompasses the following:
 - Recognising animal emotions and understanding animals have feelings.
 - Understanding animal welfare needs.
 - Developing compassionate and responsible behaviour towards animals.
 - Visit to one of the Scottish SPCA’s animal rescue and rehoming centres, where possible and appropriate for the child/young person.
4. Final session and completion of post programme questionnaire.
5. Review of child/young person’s progress and achievements (completion certificate awarded and written feedback sent to the referring adult).

Animal Guardians is flexible and will be adapted to the individual needs of each child/young person.

The number and frequency of workshops a child attends will vary but in general most children will attend one workshop each week and usually participate in 10 workshops in total.

Please note for the health and safety of the children and animals we do not bring any animals into our workshops. Children/young people may get to meet the animals in our care if they visit one of our animal rescue and rehoming centres at the end of the programme.



How do I explain Animal Guardians?

Please find information below to help a child or young person understand what Animal Guardians is about.

- You will work with a Scottish SPCA youth engagement officer each week.
- There will be lots of games and activities to play, which will help you learn about:
 - Different types of animals.
 - What animals need.
 - How animals can feel different emotions, just like us.
 - How you can help animals by being a responsible animal citizen.
- Each time you attend an Animal Guardians session it will be just you, the youth engagement officer and maybe a teacher or carer. It will most likely take place in your school or somewhere that you often visit and is familiar to you that is not your home.
- The length of the sessions will be up to you.
- Every time you meet with the youth engagement officer, you will talk about what you did last time and build on what you have already learnt.
- You may even get the chance to attend one of our 'stay connected' events that are held throughout the year.



Animal Guardians referral form

Please read the points below and tick the box if you agree:

I confirm the child/young person lives in
(please name local authority)

I can confirm that all the consent forms have been completed on pages
21, 22, 25, 26, 27 & 29

First name:

Surname:

Organisation:

Job title:

Main contact number:

Email:

Information of referred child/young person

First name:

Surname:

Age:

Gender:

School:

Year/class:

Animals currently in the household:

Please indicate if the child/young person has
any additional support needs?

Are there other organisations involved
(e.g. Social Work, CAMHS, etc.)

Yes

No



Please tick any of the concerning behaviour(s) the child/young person has shown towards any animals:

Teased or frightened an animal

Physically harmed an animal

Rough handling of an animal

Unable to understand an animal's emotions and its behaviour

Unable to respect an animal's space and boundaries

Cut whiskers/fur off an animal

Witnessed harm to an animal

Killed an animal

At risk of harming an animal

Removed wildlife from its home

Other

Please expand and give as much reason as possible for the referral:

I understand that I will now be contacted by a youth engagement officer regarding this referral to discuss any additional requirements or pertinent information.

I understand that the Scottish SPCA will hold my personal data on their systems for as long as is necessary for the Animal Guardians programme.

Date: / /

Signed:





Animal Guardians parent/carer consent form

Please read the points below and tick the box if you agree:

I am happy for my child to participate in the Animal Guardians programme

I am happy for routinely collected information to be used for the purposes of a study

First name:

Surname:

Relationship to child:

Main contact number:

Email:

Information of referred child/young person

First name:

Surname:

Age:

Gender:

School:

Year/class:

Home post code:

Animals currently in the household:

Please indicate if the child/young person has any additional support needs?

Are there other organisations involved
(e.g. Social Work, CAMHS, etc.)

Yes

No



Please tick any of the concerning behaviour(s) the child has shown towards any animals:

Teased or frightened an animal

Physically harmed an animal

Rough handling of an animal

Unable to understand an animal's emotions and its behaviour

Unable to respect an animal's space and boundaries

Cut whiskers/fur off an animal

Witnessed harm to an animal

Killed an animal

At risk of harming an animal

Removed wildlife from its home

Other

Please expand and give as much reason as possible for the referral:

I understand that I will now be contacted by a youth engagement officer regarding this referral to discuss any additional requirements or pertinent information.

I understand that the Scottish SPCA will hold my personal data on their systems for as long as is necessary for the Animal Guardians programme.

Date: / /

Signed:

Parent/carer study consent form

Please tick one:

I **AM** happy for my child to take part in the study

I am **NOT** happy for my child to take part in the study

If you are happy for your child to take part, please read the following statements and tick to show you agree.

I have read and understood the information provided in this booklet.

I understand that the data collection will be undertaken in the form of a pre and post study questionnaire.

I understand that ALL data will be anonymised.

I understand that the data will be fully anonymised in any subsequent research reports.

I agree to keeping a record of this form and results of the data collection until a period where they are no longer required.

Parent/carer's full name:

Child's full name:

Date: / /

Signed:





Child/young person consent form

Please complete this form on your own or with the help of a parent or carer. Read the points below and tick if you agree:

I am happy to take part in the Animal Guardians programme

I understand what the Animal Guardians programme is about

I understand that when I am doing Animal Guardians, what I say will be kept private unless my safety is at risk. If my safety is at risk, the Animal Guardians youth engagement officer has to tell someone else like my teacher or my support worker to make sure I stay safe

How happy are you to take part in Animal Guardians?



First name:

Surname:

Age:

Gender:

Scottish SPCA reference number

(to be completed by Scottish SPCA on receipt of consent form)





Who do I send the referral forms to?

Please send the completed referral forms to
animalguardians@scottishspca.org

or to

Animal Guardians
Youth engagement officer
Scottish SPCA HQ
Kingseat Road
Halbeath
Dunfermline
KY11 8RY

What happens next?

Once the Scottish SPCA has received your referral form, a youth engagement officer will contact you. It will be important to know if there are any other organisations working with the referred child/young person, to make sure that there is no conflict for the child participating in the Animal Guardians programme.

If you have any queries, please contact the education team either through the above email or via **03000 999 999**, option five.



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