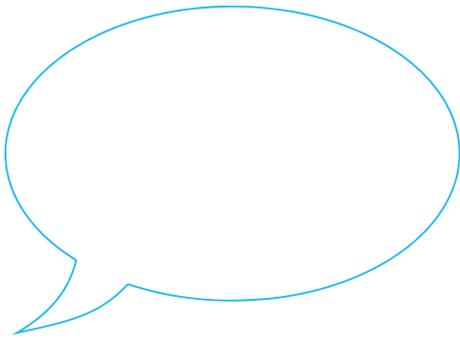
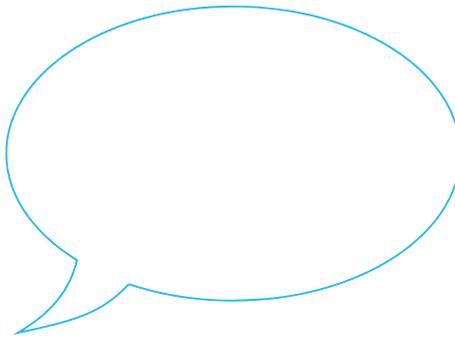


What can you do to show an animal you care and understand how they may be feeling?

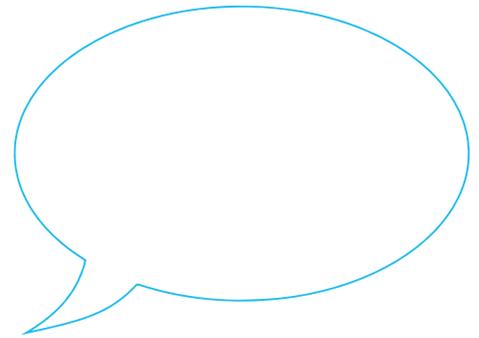
Discuss and either write/draw pictures in the speech bubbles to demonstrate.



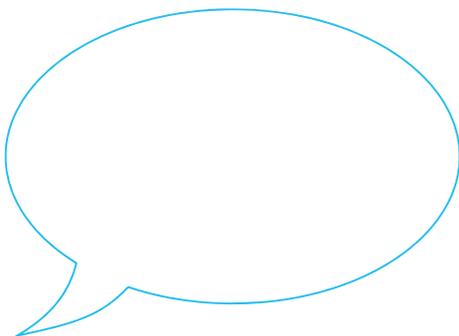
Where does our pet sleep?
- If I wake my pet it may feel



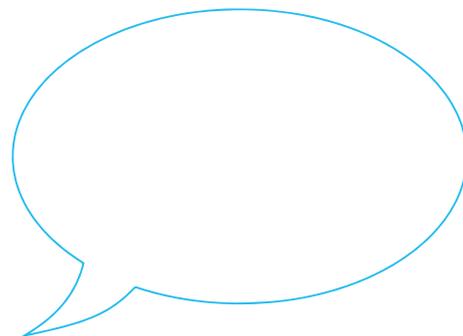
What does our pet like to do?
- If I take away my pet's toys it may feel



How can we keep our pet healthy? - If I don't allow my pet time and space to exercise it may feel



Where would we take our pet if it was poorly? - If my pet is in pain, how will it feel?



Does my pet need a friend?
How would my pet feel if it is lonely?

My pet does not like: _____ It makes him/her feel _____ (fill in the blanks)

Looking after our pet

“Having empathy is the ability to understand how our pets may be feeling by putting ourselves in their shoes”.

We teach children from a young age that we can ask for a cuddle if we feel upset and that sharing toys with others is an act of kindness, so it's no wonder they can get confused when it comes to showing their pet they care. If children show animals they 'care' in a similar way as they would a friend or relative, then misunderstandings can easily happen. And this may cause upset to both the pet and the child. We need to teach children that when it comes to pets, we show we care in quite a different way.

Food and water (diet)

Why not explain the importance of feeding your pet the right type of food in the correct amounts? Then you can explore different feeding methods, such as scatter feeding for a dog and natural foraging for a small pet. This is interesting for children, and great for pets, as it recreates how they would feed in the wild. You could ask them what could happen if we feed our pets the wrong food. How could this make them feel? Also, what could happen if we feed them too much or too little? How would it make our pet feel if we forgot to give them water?

Try to encourage the child to imagine they are the pet and the emotions/feelings they would experience. Discuss how as humans we have the ability to ask for food and drink or go to the kitchen and get it ourselves, whereas animals rely on us and have no voice to tell us exactly what they need or how they are feeling. Another important discussion point is the importance of giving your pet space when they are eating.

Space (environment)

Discuss your current pet or one you're considering bringing into the family in the future. Have a think about how much space they need to be able to move around. Do they have enough space for friends of their own kind (if needed*)? Enough room to display normal behaviours? Do they need hiding or digging areas, and why?

Consider that we also need to give our pets space, so they can choose whether to come over or have some time away from us. How might they feel if they want to rest or feel worried and we don't give them space?

Pain - protection from pain, injury and illness

When our pets are in pain, it can make them scared, defensive, or just less tolerant in some situations. Try asking how we may feel if we have a headache, broken bone or even feel down or tired. Answers may include feeling sad, afraid or where we would take a pet if they were not feeling well.

Behaviour

We all like to have choices in how we spend our time and to do things that feel normal to us – whether we choose to exercise, play, or relax. Our pets like to behave in ways that are normal to them too! For example, a dog's sense of smell is up to 10,000 times more powerful than ours, so it's important to allow them to sniff when on walks. This is how they 'see' the world, and it helps them work out what is going on around them.

Cats love to play and climb, rabbits like to interact with other rabbits and dig. Explore what your pet naturally likes to do and discuss how you are going to allow them to display this behaviour more as a family.

Company

Sometimes we like to be on our own and to have space away from others, while at other times we enjoy company. Take some time to think about your pets and whether they have the company they need and how this may make them feel.

Rabbits need the company of others to feel safe and secure, as they are social animals. However hamsters prefer to live on their own. Why not talk about a pet you have, or choose one you like, and explore whether they need a friend or not and how this may affect how they feel – do you think they're lonely, sad, happy, playful, or relaxed?

Kindness

Talk as a family about how we can be kind to our pets. Being gentle and quiet around them will help them feel at ease with us. If we are screaming and shouting, how might this make them feel?

Understanding your pets' needs and behaving in a way that they like and enjoy, will help you build a lovely relationship with them, and everyone will benefit. Relationships and trust take time and are worth the wait. Being a role model for children will be invaluable, as it helps them learn respect for and kindness to others.

A safe place to sleep

Discuss how we feel when we are woken up suddenly. Use descriptive words such as confused, upset, or frightened. Do you think your pets could feel the same?

Discuss how pets can experience similar feelings and how this means it's important to give pets time and a safe space to rest. We should never interrupt them or climb into their sleeping area. It's important to understand our pets' sleeping habits and patterns so we can keep them happy and keep ourselves safe.

Did you know cats can sleep for up to 20 hours per day, whereas guinea pigs will only sleep for half an hour at a time. Hamsters' sleep patterns are different to ours, as they are nocturnal, so they sleep during the daytime and will be busy in the evenings. This means that hamsters will not want to be woken during the daytime, so if you want to interact with them, the best time is at night.

*Most small animals should always live in pairs or groups, but some, including hamsters prefer to be alone.