



## Humane Education Lesson Plan

# ACOs: Learn to Teach the ABCs of

**K**IDS LEARN A LOT of things at home and in school: how to tie their shoes, how to count change, and what number to call in case of emergency. But many children don't know what to do if they find a stray dog or where to look if their family wants a new pet. If kids aren't able to visit a shelter to find out more about its role in the community—or if your agency isn't quite ready to handle 25 energetic fourth graders—this lesson plan can bring the shelter to them.

Adapted from *An Animal Care and Control Professional's Guide to Classroom Presentations*, “Shelter Builder” was based on an activity developed by humane education specialist Peggy Bender of Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control in Indiana. *Guide to Classroom Presentations*, published by the HSUS's National Association for Humane and Environmental Education, integrates lesson plans for grades K-6 with pointers on answering kids' tough questions and other useful tips.

## SHELTER BUILDER

### Objective:

Students will develop an appreciation of the role of the animal shelter in the community and a better understanding of the pet overpopulation problem.

### Materials:

- chalkboard and chalk
- photo of your shelter (optional)

### Activity:

Lead a discussion about what an animal shelter is and how shelter staff care for animals. Suggest that as a group, you design an animal shelter. Draw students' suggested design on the chalkboard. Revise as needed during your discussion. Children most often want to design large, fancy structures that will accommodate huge numbers of animals. In your discussion, explain why those things are not possible. (See the suggestions in Step 2.)

### Procedure:

**1** Explain that every pet deserves a good home. But there are not enough homes for the millions of puppies and kittens born each year. Many of those animals are taken to animal shelters. But shelters run out of room too! Pets are kept for a certain length of time. If no home is found for them at the end of that time period, room must be made for other animals.

**2** Ask a series of questions that will address and change preconceived notions.

*If you were going to build an animal shelter, what would it look like? First of all, how many floors should it have?*

Students will undoubtedly let their imaginations run wild, suggesting large, multi-floored facilities to accommodate many animals. Draw their suggested design on the board. Then ask if

a multi-floored shelter is really practical. Imagine having to walk up and down all those flights of stairs every day to care for all the animals and bring dogs outdoors for exercise. Suggest the best design for a shelter would be only one floor, and redraw your shelter accordingly.

### *What should the inside be like?*

Initially children will probably suggest such features as pools and playgrounds. Explain to them that the shelter has a small budget. What things are necessary for the animals to be happy and healthy? What things can be eliminated?

### *Should there be large, open rooms, or should there be kennels or cages?*

Explain that cages are not lockups. They are necessary to keep order in the building and keep animals comfortable and safe. Have students imagine what it would be like if animals roamed

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freely. There would be fights, the more aggressive animals would get all the food, animals would be going to the bathroom all over the building, and people who were looking for a pet would have a difficult time choosing one.

## **How many cages should there be?**

Students will often suggest very high numbers at first. Explain that taking care of a cat or a dog takes time and money. Ask students to imagine what it would take to care for hundreds (or thousands) of animals. Explain that shelters have limited funds and limited staff to feed, exercise, and socialize the animals. If there were more animals than staff could care for, the animals would suffer. Explain that the community needs to design the shelter to house only the number of animals that can practically be cared for. Then the community needs to find other ways to reduce the numbers of animals coming through shelter doors.

## **How can we keep down the number of homeless pets?**

We can have pets spayed or neutered and make sure that people are willing to care for a pet for life before making one a part of their family.

**3** Show a picture of the outside of your shelter or describe it to the class. Point out that like the school, the animal shelter has a main office, a counselor's desk,

## **Additional activity:**

Now that students have designed a shelter and learned what shelter staff do, are they ready to answer a few questions? Tell them that you're going to read some statements. Have them indicate if these are things shelter staff and ACOs would or wouldn't handle.

1. A lost dog is brought to the shelter. You notice she is wearing a collar, license, and tags. You notify her caregivers that you have found their dog.
2. A lion comes in to have his mane trimmed. "Wait right here," you say. "I'll get my comb, shampoo, and scissors."
3. The mail arrives. Several of the letters are about a local pet shop. The writers say the animals are not being cared for properly. You decide to investigate.
4. You rescue a swan with a broken wing. You take him to a wildlife rehabilitator.
5. A family is giving away kittens. Their cat has not been spayed. You talk to them about the importance of spaying and neutering pets.
6. A herd of Pacific walrus arrives at the shelter. You take them on a field trip to a public swimming pool.
7. "I'd like to adopt a dog who needs a good home," says a visitor to your shelter. You interview the visitor and show him the many wonderful pets waiting for a home.
8. You comfort a frightened stray dog. You give him the first warm bath he has ever had.

a place for food preparation, play and exercise areas, and a medical office. The shelter, however, also has kennels for holding animals, a grooming area, etc. As you describe your shelter, briefly describe how the staff uses the facilities and what jobs they do in the day-to-day care of animals.

**4** Review students' understanding of what is most practical and beneficial for animal sheltering facilities and what a shelter's needs, functions, and limitations may be. Ask them to make a comparison:

**Look at the design you have come up with. How is it different from our shelter? How is it similar? What have you learned from the activity?** ■

## **Resources:**

Two children's books that may be helpful in your discussion are *The Humane Societies: A Voice for the Animals*, by Shelley Swanson Sateren (Parsippany, New Jersey: Dillon Press, 1997) and the colorful collage-style book *One Day at Wood Green Animal Shelter*, by Patricia Casey (Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2001).

*An Animal Care and Control Professional's Guide to Classroom Presentations* can be ordered online at [www.nahee.org](http://www.nahee.org) or by calling NAHEE at 860-434-8666. \$8.00 plus shipping.