



Charlie's Acres Farm Animal Sanctuary Virtual Class Pet Program

Why should your classroom “adopt” a rescued animal resident from Charlie's Acres as their class pet?

While spending time with animals undoubtedly a valuable learning experience for all ages and has benefits such as learning care and responsibility, relieving stress, and developing empathy, it is important to consider the animal's experience. A bright and busy classroom is a good environment for children, but it is overwhelming to most animals. Despite the best of intentions, class pets may become neglected and ultimately unwanted as the school year ends.

By symbolically adopting a rescued animal resident of Charlie's Acres as your class pet, you create a safe opportunity for kids to learn about animals that is inclusive regardless of the school's budget and location, or any allergies of students. While students are enrolled in virtual learning, a virtual class pet is still accessible and can be a fun bonding experience.

What exactly is the virtual class pet program?

When you “adopt” a class pet from Charlie's Acres, you will receive:

- A digital certificate of adoption.
- Information about your class pet's background, how they came to Charlie's Acres, and what their life is like now.
- Photos of your class pet.
- Four 30-minute video calls with one of our humane education team members and your class pet. These can be scheduled throughout the year, semester, or shorter unit, depending on your class's needs. These calls will focus on lessons that help students put themselves in an animal's “shoes” and consider their feelings.

Why Humane Education?

Did you know that many states have curriculum requirements for humane and character education? This education involves teaching children to understand, care about, and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, and responsibility for self and others. Teaching kindness to animals is a natural component of these efforts. Developing empathy towards animals can be a key step in developing empathy for and rejecting violence against all beings, including humans. With bullying and youth violence rampant in schools today, it is essential to teach compassion and encourage kindness in your students.

Virtual Class Pet Program Curriculum

Meeting 1:

In this call, you'll learn all about your new class pet as both a species and an individual. You'll learn where they came from, why they needed to be rescued, and what their life is like now. We'll share fun facts about their species and the amazing abilities that they have. We'll also leave plenty of time for Q&A during this meeting.

Discussion Questions:

Q: If you could have any animal's superpowers, what would you pick and why?

Q: What is important to both humans and animals?

Takeaway messages:

- *Animals are amazing!* Some people have the tendency to deem nonhuman animals as unintelligent and lesser than us. We often look at them through our own lens of knowledge and base their intelligence on how well they perform at human-specific tasks. However, we encourage children to look at animals from a nuanced perspective. Animals are also able to do and understand certain things that humans can't. *We all understand the world in our own way and each have our own strengths.* This applies to different humans as well; e.g., someone who has more trouble with math but excels in other areas.
- *Although we may be different from animals in many ways, we also have many things in common.* Many of the same things that are important to us are important to animals, including fulfilling our basic needs, companionship, freedom, safety, comfort, hygiene, medical care, stability, space, exercise, entertainment, alone time, and much more. As a sanctuary, we not only rescue animals, but we also want to ensure they have rich and happy lives with us, so we keep all of these needs and desires in mind and make sure they have all of these things.

Meeting 2:

In this call, we'll show you firsthand how we keep our animal residents not only healthy, but happy! After reviewing what's important to animals, we'll begin with an enrichment activity and discuss why

enrichment is so essential in animal care. After watching the animal play with their toy, we'll also discuss animals' feelings and the ways they express love.

Discussion Questions:

Q: What are some feelings you have that animals share?

Q: What are some ways animals show that they love and care about their families?

Takeaway messages:

- *Animals have feelings like us!* They can feel happy, sad, tired, hot, cold, playful, angry, bored, pain, fear, joy, love, and so much more. Just like us, animals want to live happy lives free of fear and pain, so it's important for us to keep their feelings in mind when we spend time with and care for them.
- *Animals have many ways of showing that they care about the ones they love.* They show affection, help each other, show happiness and excitement when they see a loved one, show that they miss each other, protect each other, and so much more. Even if they don't use the words, "I love you," their behaviors and actions are very telling.

Meeting 3:

In this call, we'll talk about interacting respectfully with animals. We'll discuss how to approach an animal, how to read their body language, how to know when it's time to give them their space, and how to be responsible for their happiness and considerate of their feelings. We'll focus on putting yourself in an animal's shoes and considering what they want.

Discussion Questions:

Q: How would it make you feel if you wanted your alone time, and someone came into your space to spend time with you without asking? Why would it make you feel that way?

Q: How should we approach animals when we're not sure how they're feeling?

Q: How do animals show us when they want attention?

Q: How do animals show us when they want their space?

Q: What are some reasons an animal may bite or scratch us?

Potential supplementary questions (depending on time):

Q: What would you do if you saw your friend pick up their cat to show them affection, and they continued to hold the cat even after the cat started to struggle and tried to escape?

Q: What would you do if, while walking home, your friend found a toad in the wild and said they wanted to take them home? How do you think the toad would feel if they did?

Q: Is there any time that you saw someone was not treating an animal how they would want to be treated? What did you do? What would you do next time?

Takeaway messages:

- *Everyone, including animals who are usually friendly and social, may sometimes want their alone time!* Even if we really want to spend time with that animal, it's important to respect their wishes to have peace and quiet because that's how we would want others to treat us, too. By approaching an animal slowly, crouching, and inviting them to come to us, we can let them choose whether or not to receive attention from us.
- *It can be difficult for animals to communicate with us about their feelings since they don't speak our language, but they do have many other signs that they give us.* If they bite or scratch us, it's not to be cruel, but because of other reasons such as feeling frustrated, scared, protective, or even playful. By learning the signs and listening to animals, we can respect their wishes and also help protect ourselves. In a way, we're learning to speak their language!

Meeting 4:

We'll give a special treat to your class pet, update you on how they're doing, and introduce you to a few of our other animal residents. We'll also discuss how, although this world may not always be a kind place to animals, there are, fortunately, countless choices we have the power to make to help them.

Discussion questions:

Q: What are some things that you do to be a good friend to the animal(s) in your life?

Q: What are some choices we can make to make this world a kinder place for animals?

Depending on students' ages and whether they need prompting, here are examples of ideas we'll highlight:

-Animals are a big responsibility! If you're thinking of bringing a new animal friend into your home, always *do your research* first to make sure you can give them everything they need for a long, happy life.

-*Adopt, don't shop!* By visiting an animal shelter or looking on Petfinder for animals in need of adoption (rather than buying one from a pet store or breeder), you can save lives!

-*Picking up litter* around your town helps make it a safer and healthier place for animals to live.

-When you see a wild animal that looks like they need help, *calling your local wildlife rescue* can give you the best advice on what to do.

-While we may not always have the option, if you ever get the chance to *try a plant-based food or meal*, it's worth giving it a try! Every time we choose plants over meat, dairy, and eggs, we save lives and protect our planet.

-If you're looking for a new toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, or other bathroom supplies, a great way to help animals is by checking that they are *cruelty free* (no animal testing) and *vegan* (no ingredients taken from animals)!

-Even acts of kindness that may seem small to us, like gently moving a spider to a safe place, can make a world of difference to the individual we're helping.

-*Speak up for animals and be a hero!* Remind the people in your life that animals have feelings, needs, and desires and want to be treated with kindness just like us.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do we schedule meetings?

After you've registered for the Virtual Class Pet Program at www.charliesacres.org, you'll receive a confirmation email with a Calendly link you can use to see our available times and schedule your meetings. All four meetings can be scheduled with this link. *This link is only available to teachers who have registered for the program and is not posted publicly on our website.* If you have trouble finding the link before scheduling one of your meetings, don't hesitate to reach out to jenny@charliesacres.org so we can resend it to you!

Bear in mind that we are in California, USA and run on Pacific Time. If you do not see an available time that overlaps with the time you meet your class, please email jenny@charliesacres.org to explore options.

Q: When will I receive my class's adoption certificate?

Expect to receive an email from jenny@charliesacres.org within 3 business days with your class's certificate, photos of your "class pet," and a letter with their rescue story! Be sure to use an email address that is capable of receiving emails from outside organizations. Contact jenny@charliesacres.org if you don't receive your confirmation email or your materials.

Q: What platform do you use for virtual meetings?

By default, when you schedule each meeting, a Zoom link will be automatically created that you can join at the time of our meeting. If you meet with your class virtually, this link can be shared with your students so that they can join the meeting from home.

If you would prefer to be the host of the meeting on Zoom or another platform, we are happy to join your meeting instead. There is a space on the form you'll complete when scheduling each meeting where you can include your meeting link and pertinent joining information. If we see you've included your own link, we'll plan on joining your meeting instead of hosting from the automatically generated Zoom link. We have successfully joined classes on Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Webex Meetings and are flexible to use any free platform. If you are required to use a paid platform through your school district to meet with your students, we have made it work through teachers screensharing in the past and are happy to work with you to see what's possible!

Q: Will my students have time to ask questions during our meetings?

We will leave time dedicated for students to ask questions during all of our meetings. Whether we have students ask their questions directly, have the teachers repeat questions for us, or have students leave their questions in the chat depends on what works best for each class!

Q: Will we see other animals during our meetings other than our class pet?

All of our animal residents live in groups, so you will be certainly be seeing lots of your class pet and all of their friends during our meetings! If we have time at the end of each meeting, we are happy to take your class to visit another group as well. This typically happens during the second, third, and fourth meetings.

Additional questions? Reach out to jenny@charliesacres.org.

