Children’s relationships with different types of companion animal

Reflective workshop
April 2019
Workshop outline

Part 1: Children’s relationships with different pets
Janine Muldoon, University of Edinburgh

Part 2: Bereavement & loss
Lesley Winton, Fostering Compassion

Short break @ 3.15pm

Part 3: Sourcing pets & the implications of the illegal puppy trade
Gilly Mendes Ferreira, Scottish SPCA

Questions & feedback, finish @ 4.30pm
Key areas of work:

• Understanding child/adolescent relationships with animals

• Child development
  ➢ Conceptual understanding
  ➢ Attitudes
  ➢ Emotional attachment
  ➢ Empathy

• Child/adolescent health
  ➢ Physical health
  ➢ Mental wellbeing

• Childhood cruelty
  ➢ Understanding/intentional/unintentional
  ➢ Associated risks
  ➢ Prevention

• Developing educational interventions/evaluations

• Animal-assisted interventions/evaluations
Current projects

Child-animal interactions

• Children’s recognition of animal emotions/belief in animal mind
• The impact of nature on child/adolescent mental health/wellbeing
• Psychological risk factors for adolescent cruelty
• Longitudinal study into children’s socio-emotional wellbeing, exposure to violence, pet ownership & animal cruelty
• Vets’ experiences of treating non-accidental injury: the role of families & children

Animal welfare education

• Robotics & mechanical animal welfare interventions
• Evaluation of ‘Animal Guardians’

Animal-assisted interventions

• Animal-assisted activities for children in kin & foster care
• Equine-assisted interventions for children & adolescents
• Animal-assisted therapy for mental illness
• Campus dogs
• Canine-assisted intervention for older adults
Three funded projects:

- Duty of care towards animals among children (2008-12)
- Duty of care towards animals among adolescents (2012-17)
- Evaluation of the Scottish SPCA ‘Prevention Through Education’ programme (2014-17)

- Qualitative research with children
- Development of Short Attachment to Pets Scale (SAPS)
- Incorporation of SAPS into the Scottish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study & the SSPCA evaluation
What do children say?

**Significant focus on dogs!**

“When I come home from school my friend Ned always jumps up and licks me on the face” (Jamie, age 7)

“My dog hugs me. It’s like people actually hugging because he tries to come up behind your shoulder” (Ruby, age 7)

“...because they’re soft. I like them when they’re calm because then they come up and lie down next to you on the sofa” (Cameron, age 9)

“My dog, it’s like family if you know what I mean?... a cat’s kind of like a dog but you can’t play with it because they get grumpy” (Amy, age 11)
“A dog is more of an animal who senses when you’re upset or you’re feeling down. It’ll come and comfort you”

“My dog does that, every time he sees me with my head down he comes over and licks me”

“They understand you”

(Emily & Siobhan, age 11)

“My favourite average top one [animal] would be dogs probably because most people like dogs... I think because they’re friendly and a laugh”

“Yeah because it’s like man’s best friend”

(Callum & Finn, age 13)
The Short Attachment to Pets Scale (SAPS)

15. Please tell us how you feel about your favourite pet animal

*Please tick ONE box for each line*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>I don't really like animals</td>
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<td>B.</td>
<td>I spend time every day playing with my pet (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>I have sometimes talked to my pet and understood what it was trying to tell me (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>D.</td>
<td>I love pets</td>
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<td>E.</td>
<td>I talk to my pet quite a lot (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>F.</td>
<td>My pet makes me feel happy (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>G.</td>
<td>I consider my pet to be a friend (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>H.</td>
<td>My pet knows when I am upset and tries to comfort me (or would if I had one)</td>
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<td>I.</td>
<td>There are times I’d be lonely without my pet (or would if I had one)</td>
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Muldoon & Williams (2009); Marsa-Sambola et al. (2016)
The extent of attachment to different pets

Boys’ attachment to pets

Girls’ attachment to pets

The effects of ‘strong’ vs ‘weak’ attachment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Dog/s</th>
<th>Small mammal/s</th>
<th>Cat/s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kidscreen mental health index</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>General Health Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness (frequency)</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness (extent)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived health</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling left out</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling lonely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of communication (father)</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Ease of communication (mother)</td>
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*Muldoon, Williams, Lawrence & Currie (2019)*
Examining different aspects of attachment

Based on your own experience/observations, do you feel children develop different kinds of relationship with different types of animal?

• If so, what makes those relationships distinctive?
• Do attachments to animals differ from attachments to human members of the family?
Discussion Point 2

Is the experience of losing an animal too great for children?

• How might we intervene to support children (or others) when loss is experienced?

• Can we prepare children so that they cope when loss is experienced?

• Should people get another pet after losing one?
Discussion Point 3

Do you know of anyone who has bought a pet online?

• What was the process like?
• Did they have any difficulties with the pet?
• What contributed to/caused the difficulties?
• Who should intervene to prevent negative experiences with pets bought online?

If you do not know anyone who has bought a pet online, think about any families you know who have struggled with a pet animal
Next workshop

New advances in animal cruelty prevention
A reflective workshop

Friday 31st May
University of Edinburgh
2 - 4.30pm

Thank you for coming!