

## MAINTAINING ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM

**Background:** Use of animals in classrooms can assist students to learn appropriate care of animals, enhance investigative and observational skills and reinforce curriculum objectives. These guidelines provide direction to staff in the healthy and safe management of animals maintained in classrooms.

### **General Practices:**

1. Only domesticated (not from the wild) animals are allowed in the classroom unless brought by a qualified individual such as a conservation officer or zoo curator. Animals trained, or being trained, to assist persons who are physically impaired shall have access to district property and district provided transportation when being used for that purpose.
  
2. Prior to procuring or bringing animals into classrooms, teachers will:
  - a. carefully consider the purpose for maintaining the animal in the classroom
  - b. review these guidelines and sign the Acknowledgement Form (Appendix A)
  - c. notify the Building Principal of the intent to maintain the animal in the classroom. Provide the Principal with the Acknowledgement Form.
  - d. If approved, prepare a parent letter stating the intention of keeping the animal in the classroom. The letter should state the purpose and request the parent notify the teacher if his/her child is allergic to the type of animal to be maintained (example, Appendix B).
    - **If any parent responds in the affirmative, the animal cannot be maintained in the classroom.**
  
3. The teacher will be responsible to ensure that the animal is appropriately cared for at all times.
  - a. All cages must be able to be secured, especially on the weekends
  - b. Accommodations must be made for extreme room temperature fluctuations, especially during the winter months.
  - c. Food and water must be provided if the animal is left in the building over the weekend.
  - d. Cages will be cleaned on a regular basis utilizing universal precautions and blood borne pathogen guidelines for bagging and disposing of urine, feces and blood contaminated materials. Teachers will be responsible for cleaning cages/dens (this cannot be delegated to students).
  - e. If the animal cannot be properly cared for at all times, it should not be kept in the classroom.
  - f. Animals are to be located in approved containers away from water fountains, sinks where students and staff wash hands, areas where food is prepared, stored or served or areas where first aid materials are stored or first aid is rendered. Animals are not to be allowed to roam loose in the classrooms.
  
4. Management of Animal Bites/Scratches
  - a. Any animal bite/scratch should be washed with soap and water and the student examined by the nurse. Current tetanus status will be reviewed.
  - b. Mammal bites/scratches must be reported to Waterloo Animal Control by calling 319-833-0797 or Cedar Bend Humane Society at 319-232-6887.

- Reptile bites do not need to be reported.
- c. Animal Control will determine the need for and the method to quarantine the animal following a bite or scratch.
  - d. With respect to injuries and liability issues, Iowa Code 673 relates to domesticated animal activities. The Code requires that a domesticated animal professional (designated under the Code to include teachers) post and maintain a sign on the property where domesticated animal activities occur, (see text of sign in Appendix C). The sign must be clearly visible to a participant. The statute requires that such signs have black letters of a minimum of one inch.
5. Inappropriate care of the animal will be grounds to have the animal removed from the classroom.
  6. Background tutorial information about animals maintained in classrooms can be obtained from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

Acknowledgement Statement

\_\_\_\_\_ is interested in maintaining an animal in my classroom.

I have reviewed the guidelines for maintaining animals in the classroom and agree to follow the guidelines.

I understand that failure to comply with the guidelines will lead to the removal of the animal from my classroom.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Sample Letter to Parents

We are considering keeping and caring for a \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ in your son or daughter's classroom. The purpose of  
keeping this animal is \_\_\_\_\_.

Please let me know if you have concerns about this or if your son or daughter is  
allergic to this type of animal. If we determine that anyone has an allergy, we will not  
proceed as we do not want to create any difficulties for anyone in our classroom.

The District has guidelines for appropriate care and management of animals in the  
classroom and these will be followed.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this with me, please call \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number

Classroom Sign Text

WARNING: UNDER IOWA LAW, A DOMESTICATED ANIMAL PROFESSIONAL IS NOT LIABLE FOR DAMAGES SUFFERED BY, AN INJURY TO, OR THE DEATH OF A PARTICIPANT RESULTING FROM THE INHERENT RISKS OF DOMESTICATED ANIMAL ACTIVITIES, PURSUANT TO IOWA CODE CHAPTER 673. YOU ARE ASSUMING INHERENT RISKS PARTICIPATING IN THIS DOMESTICATED ANIMAL ACTIVITY.

## REPTILES

### Iguanas

Needs UV light and high humidity in their habitat. They are usually full of parasites and require a variety of foods.

### Turtles

1. A permit is required to keep Iowa turtles.
2. The best water turtles to maintain are spotted turtles, western pond turtle and the mud turtle. The diamond back terrapin may be kept like a water turtle if a small pinch of salt is added to the water.
3. Aquatic turtles are not recommended as they are very messy and defecate immediately upon feeding.
4. The best type of land turtles to maintain are the eastern and western box turtle and the wood turtle. These are still not very satisfactory.
5. Salmonella poisoning is a possibility with all turtles, especially small ones.
6. All turtles need 7-8 hours of sun or artificial light daily. Lack of sun causes lethargy and may result in death.
7. Avoid extremes in temperature.
8. All turtles require sufficient water for submersion and drinking, land for walking and work, or rocks for basking in the light.
9. Condition of the water. An adult water turtle of 8-12 centimeters should have a 30-liter aquarium.
10. Water turtles feed in the water; land turtles on land.
11. Adult land turtles need a tub or large wood box (60-100 centimeters).
12. Turtles may bite if not accustomed to handling by children.
13. Feed three or more times per week. They will grasp food from a pointed stick. Remove uneaten food after 15 minutes. Check the pet store for appropriate food for your turtle.

### Snakes

1. Three small snakes are easy to keep. Types are garter, ribbon, and green grass. They are difficult to handle.
2. The corn snake is the best.
3. They eat small worms, insects and mice.
4. They are very sensitive to vibrations and have sharp eyes.
5. They must have tight quarters.
6. Large jars or aquariums with small mesh wire tops work well.
7. A screen cage 25-cm x 25 cm and 30 cm high is suitable for most snakes.
8. Add a few sturdy plants, upright sticks or large twigs.
9. Add a container of water on the floor and an elevated shelf area.
10. Rough bark or a rock is helpful when the snake is shedding.
11. Boa and python cannot survive well- they both need high humidity.
12. Non-poisonous snakebites can be treated with a germicide.

## MAMMALS

## General Guidelines

1. Gloves should be worn when picking up the animal the first few times, until they are accustomed to handling.
2. Rats and mice are not as tame as other animals when first acquired.
3. Most rats and mice eventually like to be picked up and petted. All gnaw with their very sharp teeth.

## Specific Guidelines for Mammals

### Hamsters

A 10-gallon aquarium will house 2-3 hamsters. They do very well on commercial hamster food. A water bottle should be used and fresh water should be offered daily along with fresh food. Pine shavings make ideal bedding. Cedar shavings should be avoided. Provision for exercise is essential. A screen top that fits securely will prevent escape. It is not recommended to house both a female and male hamster together because if the female is bred, she may have a tendency to attack and kill the male. Salt licks are not recommended for hamsters.

### Guinea Pigs

A wire cage with minimum dimensions of 12"x 24" is recommended. This cage must have a secured lid. Pine shavings should be used as bedding. Although Guinea pigs love fresh vegetables and fruit, they must only be offered as treats. A commercial guinea pig food provides the entire essential vitamins and minerals. A water bottle is recommended in the cage rather than a water dish with fresh water being offered daily. A salt lick should also be provided. Guinea pigs are generally very affectionate, but have been known to severely bite.

### Pot Belly Pig

A 5x5-foot pen is recommended as minimum dimensions. Pine shavings should cover the bottom of the pen and be used as bedding. Commercial potbelly pig food may be purchased at Des Moines Feed Company. A water bowl should be used and checked twice daily and replenished. Potbelly pigs are litter trainable so a litter pan may be placed in the cage. A cat box with commercial cat litter can be used. Before bringing the animal to school, it should be pseudo-rabies tested and have a current health certificate from a veterinarian.

### Rabbits

The greatest concerns with rabbits are student allergies, smell, inability to thoroughly litter train some rabbits and clawing with the hind legs when frightened. They are not a serious health threat. Rabbits should be picked up by grasping the scruff of the neck with one hand and immediately supporting the body by shoving the other hand and forearm under the rabbit. Ears should never be used for this purpose. If rabbits are small and very tame, they can be picked up with both hands as one might a kitten or puppy. When frightened, rabbits thump their hind feet; when threatened, they can claw and bite.

A safe hutch can be constructed of one-centimeter mesh wire; (Chicken wire is not strong enough). The bottom should also be mesh wire and, if indoors; a metal tray of shavings, sawdust or cat litter should be placed underneath to catch the droppings. For

a medium to large rabbit, the hutch should be 120 by 180 centimeters to permit space for general exercise and stretching long hind legs. If the rabbit is given the freedom of exercising around the room, it can have a smaller hutch. The wire can be nailed tightly around two by two-inch by three-inch uprights connected to a strong frame. Although rabbits may gnaw on the wood, trying to gnaw metal can damage their teeth. One end of the hutch should be enclosed with solid material but with an entrance hole so the rabbit can retire to rest or avoid temperature changes. If the hutch is indoors and on legs, a top is not necessary. If it is low, however, it should have a wire mesh top to prevent students from dropping things in. Rabbits tend to soil one corner regularly so it is frequently unnecessary to clean the whole cage daily. A little pine oil gives the hutch a fresh smell.

## **BIRDS**

### General Guidelines

1. Carefully consider the purpose for maintaining the bird(s) in the classroom. Some students are allergic to feathers and an asthmatic reaction can occur. Birds should best be kept for short periods.
2. If a bird is to be kept for an extended time, prepare a parent letter; (see appendix B). If any parent indicates that their son or daughter is allergic to feathers, no birds should be kept in the classroom.

### Specific Guidelines for Birds

#### **Parrots**

Parrots, or members of the parrot family such as cockatoos and parakeets, should not be brought into the classroom unless a veterinarian has recently checked them. They may carry the virus that causes psittacosis, or parrot fever. Human beings can contract this disease by handling sick birds or infectious articles. Although the relative risk is minimal, it still exists.

#### **Pigeons**

Pigeons can also carry the virus that causes psittacosis. Pigeons or their droppings can also transmit other diseases. **Do not permit** pigeons to be brought into your classrooms.

#### **Chickens**

Adult chickens should be brought into the classroom for no more than one day. If baby chickens are to be hatched in the classroom the teacher must arrange for a place to take them after hatching occurs. Careful instructions must be given to students about care and handling of baby chicks. Some teachers have arranged for the Living History Farms to take newly hatched chickens.

#### **Nests and wild bird eggs**

Birds nests and wild bird eggs are protected in Iowa and may not be brought into the classroom without a permit.

#### **Feathers**

Feathers are protected in Iowa except for the sparrow, European starling and hunted species such as the pheasant, quail, and turtle dove. Feathers from hunted species can

be collected only during hunting season. Pigeon and crow feathers are protected.

## **SPIDERS**

The bite of all spiders is poisonous to some degree so it is not a good idea to keep spiders where contact is possible.

### **Tarantulas**

The bite of some species of tarantulas is more poisonous than others. Students should not handle tarantulas.

## **FISH**

### General Guidelines

1. A rectangular aquarium with straight sides is best because it provides greater air surface.
2. A cover over the aquarium prevents dust and objects held by children from falling in, fish from jumping out and are protection from sudden temperature changes.
3. Water must be conditioned by an appropriate commercial product or left standing for at least 24 hours before being placed **in** the tank.
4. Minnows are excellent to keep. They can be purchased at a bait house. A license is necessary if you are going to collect them yourself. They seem to create as much classroom interest as expensive tropical fish.
5. Tropical fish need a light, which, although helpful, is not necessary for goldfish.
6. A pump and filter with charcoal are recommended, along with white gravel or white pearl chips. At least 2 centimeters of sterilized sand should cover the bottom.
7. The aquarium should be placed away from where there may be temperature extremes.
8. Feed fish only what can be consumed in 5 to 10 minutes.
9. Consult a pet storeowner if white fungus spots develop on the fish.

### Specific Guidelines for Maintaining Fish

#### **Goldfish**

These are the easiest and the hardest fish to keep. They require about 2 quarts of water to a centimeter of fish. Water should be about 23 degrees Celsius (room temperature). The most frequent causes of death are overfeeding and overcrowding. Some light is necessary and Cabomba plants or artificial plants can provide shade. Radical temperature changes are not recommended. Eggs are laid ten to twenty at a time and hatch in 3-7 days. Baby goldfish rarely hatch indoors.

#### **Guppies**

Guppies have a life span of about three years. Keep the water between 21-26 degrees Celsius. They bear live young and are the easiest tropicals to culture. A female may produce up to fifty young every 4 - 6 weeks. The babies are rolled up when ejected from the mother, but unroll and swim to cover immediately. Cabomba or artificial plants provide a good hiding place so that the young aren't eaten. It is best to separate the young from the adults as soon as possible. Give extra food to the adults when the young are born to reduce cannibalism. The babies should be fed a fine dry food, or finely ground adult food.

## **AMPHIBIANS**

### General Guidelines

- Small amphibians such as newts, green frogs and toads are easily kept.
- Keep species separate and do not house more than five or six of the species together
- Animals in a group should be about the same size to prevent cannibalism.
- As they grow larger, the skin of newts, frogs and toads splits down the back and is eaten
- Amphibians need a habitat with both water and land.

### Specific Care of Amphibians

#### **Newts**

The golden fire newt is most recommended as they have a longer life. The eastern newt and western newt are also recommended. Feed section of worms with tweezers or on a needle. Baby newts eat daphnia, infusoria and other microscopic life. Newts hatched from eggs and the larvae have gills for several months. Eggs are laid singularly, usually on a submerged plant. Provide enough conditioned water for swimming and submersion and enough land for walking about and an occasional sunbathe. A tightly fitted mesh wire cover for the aquarium is recommended. The formation of this animal's feet permits them to walk up and out of a glass tank without a tight cover. Newts live well in a covered aquarium with the following arrangements: either 7 centimeters of water in the bottom, 2 centimeters of plain gravel, and several mossy rocks or soil and gravel covering the entire bottom and a water dish sunk so that the top is level with the soil. Water should cover at least a quarter of the area and moist moss bark or leaves added to provide shelter. Do not place the aquarium in direct sun.

An 8-liter tank is large enough for three or four eastern newts. The larger western newts should have more spacious quarters.

#### **Frogs and Toads**

The small green toad is the easiest to maintain, although the pickerel frog, leopard or meadow, western chorus frog can also be housed satisfactorily. Keep only one kind of frog and those of about the same size together. Green frog: the male small green frog croaks, the female utters a soft squeaking sound. The two sexes may be readily distinguished because the ear (the round spot behind each eye) of the male is larger than its eye. Throats of the male are often yellow. Western or chorus frogs usually are a dusky gray-green or brown and have a light under surface and a light line along its upper lip. Marine toads are recommended. Recommended aquatic frogs such as the African bullfrog and Argentina horn frog. Provide a large tank with water and land enough for hopping. Feed worms, crickets from cricket farms, and gold fish. Toads can be easily distinguished from frogs. Their skin is dry to the touch and rougher than that of frogs, and contains a substance which predatory animals dislike. For protection, the toad may puff up, or go limp and play dead. The toad is not as good a jumper as the frog and tends to be slower. Its tongue is long and sticky and darts out for food. During cold winter months, it hibernates a foot or so under the surface of the ground. The eggs or spawn of toads are laid in long chains of jelly-like materials, while the eggs of frogs are laid in masses of a similar jelly-like material. Males fertilize the eggs as soon as the

spawn is laid. Place the spawn in a receptacle separate from the adults and filled with water of the same temperature, as the spawn will emerge from the eggs in a few days. Change some of the water daily and do not overcrowd the tadpoles. Condition the water and keep it the same temperature of the water in the container. Any toad is quite good, as a classroom animal is easy to care for. Firebelly toads are good. They are not aquatic and like wax worms rather than earthworms. Mealworms are okay as an occasional food only. **Keeping a native frog or toad in the classroom is illegal.** One can be brought in for show and then let go.

Legal Ref.: Iowa Code § 279.8, 673 (2013).

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