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|  | Animals in Early Childhood Settings |

## Involving animals as part of the early childhood program can provide many valuable learning opportunities. However the decision to have animals should be taken after careful thought and planning. The following information and resources are provided to assist early childhood services who choose to include animals as part of their program.

Animals should be treated with respect and consideration, with the welfare of the animals being a primary concern. The [Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)](http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/aaws/australian-animal-welfare-strategy-aaws-and-national-implementation-plan-2010-14#t5) believes that an animal’s sentience is the reason that welfare matters; and the RSPCA believes that an animal’s welfare should be considered in terms of five freedoms – see:
[Five freedoms for animals](http://kb.rspca.org.au/Five-freedoms-for-animals_318.html).

It is important that animals are well cared for at all times, including on weekends and holidays, and that veterinary care is provided when needed. Animals must not be kept if an appropriate level of care cannot be provided.

Care should be taken to prevent the spread of disease with appropriate hygiene and minimal handling of animals. For information on zoonoses (animal diseases that may affect humans) and preventative measures – see Department of Environment and Primary Industries: [Zoonoses – Animal Diseases that may also Affect Humans](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/agriculture-and-food/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/zoonoses/zoonoses-animal-diseases-that-may-also-affect-humans).

The Victorian Schools Animal Ethics Committee (VSAEC) oversees the use of animals used for explicit teaching purposes in Victorian primary and secondary schools. Early childhood services are not overseen by VSAEC, however the committee provides animal species notes outlining basic information and guidance about the care and handling of different animal species. This would be of assistance for providers of early childhood programs – see: [Species Notes](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/curriculum/Pages/animalsspecies.aspx).

RSPCA Victoria also provides animal care notes – see RSPCA’s: [Health and behaviour](http://rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour).

Although approval from an ethics committee is not required for the use of animals in early childhood settings, animals are still protected by the Victorian Prevention of Cruelty to Animals legislation, in which the person in charge of the animal would have legal responsibility under the Act.

Adoption of animals to families may in many cases not be in the best interests of the animal. The relevant code of practice that applies to primary and secondary schools states that students are not allowed to take animals home unless there is a clear, written undertaking from a parent/guardian that the animals will be cared for adequately and responsibly. VSAEC provides a chicken adoption form for schools that would be of assistance to early childhood services if adoption is being considered. For more information, see: [Additional Resources](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/curriculum/Pages/animalsresources.aspx).

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries has a Responsible Pet Ownership program aimed at age 4 and above, supporting primary schools and early childhood settings (4-5 year old children) to educate children in the knowledge and understanding needed for responsible pet ownership and animal care. For more information, see the State Government’s: [Responsible Pet Ownership Program](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets/community-and-education/responsible-pet-ownership-for-children).

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries also has a ‘We are Family’ guide aimed at nurturing the child/pet relationship. The guide is aimed at educating expectant and new parents on the many advantages of allowing their child to experience the joys of having a pet in the family. It also has information on the potential risks, and provides the knowledge, skills and strategies to ensure that the experience is not only a physically and emotionally enriching one, but a safe one as well. For more information, see Department of Environment and Primary Industries’: [A Guide to Nurturing the Child and Pet Relationship from Pregnancy to Pre-school](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets/community-and-education/responsible-pet-ownership-for-children).