



Animals & Mental Health

A big animal education and wellbeing workbook.

AGES 7-16 • ADAPTABLE UP AND DOWN

PAWSTEPS

12 chapters

33 activities

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Animals & Mental Health

A BIG ANIMAL EDUCATION & WELLBEING WORKBOOK

Ages 7–16 • Adaptable up and down

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This is a workbook, not a reading book. It's meant to be written in, drawn on, folded back and carried around. If it ends up a bit battered, it's working.

You don't have to do it in order. Start wherever you like. Skip what doesn't fit today and come back to it another time — or never. That's allowed.

You don't have to write. Every activity in here can be done another way: draw it, point to it, say it out loud to someone, record a voice note, or just think it. A blank page isn't a failed page.

There are no right answers in the wellbeing sections. The animal facts have right answers — a bearded dragon is a reptile whether you like it or not. But how you feel around animals is yours, and nobody can mark it wrong.

THE FOUR SYMBOLS

SYMBOL	WHAT IT MEANS
 Look Closer	Extra detail if you want to go deeper. Skip it if you don't.
 Your Turn	An activity to do.
 Think About It	A question with no single right answer.
 Try It For Real	Something to do with an actual animal, if you have one nearby.

A NOTE FOR THE ADULT

A few things worth knowing before a young person starts this book.

This is education, not treatment. The wellbeing sections teach children to notice what's happening in their body and mind. That's a useful skill and a normal part of PSHE. It isn't therapy, and it isn't a substitute for support from a GP, a school's pastoral team, or a mental health service.

Some of it may open a conversation. Chapters on stress, loss and worry can bring things to the surface — which is often the point, but it helps to be nearby rather than handing the book over and walking off. If something comes up that's bigger than the page, follow it up properly rather than letting the workbook carry it.

Writing is optional throughout. For children who are non-speaking, selectively mute, dysgraphic, or simply having a bad day, every task has an alternative response listed. Use them freely.

Animal contact needs supervision. The 🦋 tasks assume an adult is present, that hands are washed before and after, and that the animal has the option to move away. An animal that doesn't want to be part of the lesson has given a perfectly good answer.

PART 1

Meet The Animal World

What Is an Animal?

The big idea: Every animal on Earth — from a blue whale to a woodlouse to you — belongs to one huge family. Scientists sort that family into groups so we can understand it. Once you know the groups, you can look at almost any creature and make a good guess at where it fits.

What makes something an animal?

Here's a question that sounds easy and isn't: what actually *is* an animal?

Most people answer with something like “it moves” or “it’s got a face”. Both of those fall apart quickly. A sea sponge doesn’t move and hasn’t got a face — it’s an animal. A Venus flytrap moves fast enough to catch a fly — it’s a plant.

So scientists use a proper checklist instead. To be an animal, a living thing has to tick **all** of these:

- 1. It’s made of many cells.** Every animal is built from millions or billions of tiny building blocks. Nothing that’s a single cell counts.
- 2. It eats other living things.** This is the big one. Plants make their own food out of sunlight. Animals can’t. Every animal — every single one — gets its energy by eating something else that was once alive. Grass, insects, fish, leaves, other animals. If it makes its own food from light, it isn’t an animal.
- 3. Its cells have no walls.** Plant cells have a stiff box around them, which is why a celery stick snaps. Animal cells don’t. That’s why you’re squishy.
- 4. It moves by itself at some point in its life.** Even the sponge does — as a baby, it drifts and swims before it settles down for good.

LOOK CLOSER

The word “animal” comes from the Latin *anima*, meaning breath or life. The Romans were pointing at the same thing you can see in any living creature: something in there is going.

The big split: backbone or no backbone

Before we get to mammals and birds and all the rest, there’s one bigger division that comes first. It splits the entire animal kingdom into two piles.

Does it have a backbone?

Run your fingers down the middle of your back. Those bumps are your vertebrae — a chain of small bones running from your skull down to your hips, with your spinal cord threaded through the middle like wire through a pipe.

If an animal has that, it's a **vertebrate**. If it hasn't, it's an **invertebrate**.

That's it. That's the whole test.

Here's the surprising part: almost every animal you can name off the top of your head is a vertebrate — and almost every animal *on Earth* is an invertebrate. The vertebrates are the famous minority. Lions, eagles, sharks, frogs, you. The invertebrates are everything else, and there are vastly more of them: insects, spiders, crabs, snails, worms, jellyfish, octopuses, corals.

We notice the vertebrates because they're big and they have faces. The planet, quietly, belongs to the ones without backbones.

The five vertebrate groups are:

- **Mammals**
- **Birds**
- **Reptiles**
- **Amphibians**
- **Fish**

Let's take them one at a time.

Mammals

The rule that never breaks: mammals feed their babies on milk made by the mother's own body. Nothing else on Earth does this. If it makes milk, it's a mammal — no exceptions, no arguments.

Usually also true:

- Fur or hair somewhere on the body, even if it's just a few whiskers
- Warm-blooded — the body holds its own temperature steady, whatever the weather is doing
- Breathes air with lungs
- Most give birth to live young rather than laying eggs
- Most have teeth of different shapes for different jobs

Examples: hedgehog · sugar glider · rabbit · guinea pig · dog · bat · whale · human

LOOK CLOSER — THE TWO THAT BREAK THE RULES

The platypus and the echidna are mammals that lay eggs. They still produce milk, so they're still mammals — the milk rule holds. The egg rule was never the rule in the first place. This is worth remembering: in biology, there's nearly always an animal somewhere that didn't read the textbook.

The one people get wrong: whales and dolphins are mammals, not fish. They breathe air, they're warm-blooded, and they feed their calves on milk underwater. They just happen to live in the sea.

Birds

The rule that never breaks: birds have feathers. They are the only living animals that do. Feathers are the whole giveaway.

Usually also true:

- A beak, with no teeth in it
- Lays hard-shelled eggs
- Warm-blooded
- Hollow bones, which keep the body light
- Two legs and two wings

Examples: galah · chicken · robin · penguin · ostrich · eagle

LOOK CLOSER — FLYING ISN'T THE TEST

Plenty of birds can't fly: ostriches, emus, penguins, kiwis. And plenty of things that fly aren't birds — bats are mammals, and most flying animals on Earth are insects. So "it flies" tells you almost nothing. "It has feathers" tells you everything.

LOOK CLOSER — MEET ROSIE

Rosie is a lutino galah. Two things worth unpacking in that description.

A **galah** is a kind of cockatoo — Australian, pink and grey in its normal colouring, and a serious chewer. So "galah cockatoo" isn't two animals; it's a cockatoo whose particular species is galah, the same way a labrador is a kind of dog.

Lutino isn't a species at all. It's a colour mutation — a change in a single gene that stops the bird producing melanin, the dark pigment. No melanin means no grey. What's left is the pink underneath, plus cream and pale yellow where the grey should be, and red or pink eyes instead of dark ones.

The same mutation turns up across many bird species, and in other animals too. An albino animal is the extreme version of the same idea. So a lutino galah isn't a rare species — it's an ordinary species with the paint left off.

THINK ABOUT IT

Birds are the closest living relatives of dinosaurs — which means, in a real scientific sense, dinosaurs never entirely died out. What do you think when you look at a chicken's foot?

Reptiles

The usual rule: dry, scaly skin, and a body temperature that depends on the surroundings.

A reptile can't warm itself up from the inside the way you can. It has to *move* to change its temperature — out into the sun to warm up, into the shade or underground to cool down. This is why Betty, a bearded dragon, spends so much time sitting under a lamp. It isn't sunbathing for fun. It's doing what your body does automatically, except it has to do it on purpose.

Usually also true:

- Breathes air with lungs, even the ones that live in water
- Most lay eggs with leathery shells
- Scales made of keratin — the same stuff as your fingernails
- Sheds its skin as it grows

Examples: bearded dragon · leopard gecko · royal python · chameleon · tortoise · terrapin · monitor lizard · crocodile

LOOK CLOSER — TURTLES, TERRAPINS AND TORTOISES

All three are reptiles, and the difference is mostly about where they live. Tortoises live on land. Terrapins live in fresh water and come out onto banks. Sea turtles live in the ocean. All of them breathe air — a terrapin swimming underwater is holding its breath, exactly like you would.

The one people get wrong: an animal that lives in water is not automatically a fish. Terrapins have lungs and scales. They're reptiles that happen to swim.

Amphibians

The usual rule: amphibians live a double life. Most start in water breathing through gills, then change body shape completely and move onto land.

You've probably watched this happen. A frog begins as a tadpole with a tail and no legs, living entirely underwater. Over weeks, it grows legs, absorbs its own tail, swaps gills for lungs and climbs out. That total rebuild is called **metamorphosis**, and it's one of the strangest things in the animal world.

Usually also true:

- Moist, thin skin with no scales — and many amphibians can absorb water and even oxygen straight through it
- Body temperature depends on the surroundings, like reptiles
- Lays soft, jelly-like eggs, usually in water
- Needs damp conditions to survive

Examples: frog · toad · newt · salamander · White's tree frog

LOOK CLOSER — WHY CLEAN HANDS MATTER SO MUCH

Because an amphibian's skin absorbs whatever it touches, hand cream, soap residue and hand sanitiser can pass straight into its body. This is why anyone handling a frog is asked to rinse with plain water first. The skin that lets it breathe also lets everything else in.

Fish

The usual rule: fish live in water and breathe using gills, which pull oxygen out of the water itself.

Usually also true:

- Fins instead of limbs
- Most are covered in overlapping scales
- Body temperature usually matches the water around them
- Most lay eggs, often in very large numbers
- A line of sensors along each side, called the lateral line, that detects movement and pressure in the water

Examples: goldfish · salmon · shark · seahorse · clownfish

LOOK CLOSER

Sharks and rays have skeletons made of cartilage — the bendy stuff in your ears and the end of your nose — rather than bone. They're still fish. Biology's groups have soft edges more often than people expect.

Invertebrates

The rule: no backbone. That's the only thing they all share.

Which means this is less a group than a leftover pile — and it's by far the biggest pile. Invertebrates include animals so different from each other that comparing them is nearly pointless. A jellyfish and a beetle are both invertebrates. So are a snail and an octopus.

Some of the main sorts:

Insects — six legs, three body sections, usually wings. Beetles, ants, bees, butterflies, locusts.

Arachnids — eight legs, two body sections, no wings, no antennae. Spiders, scorpions, mites.

Crustaceans — hard outer shell, many legs, usually aquatic. Crabs, lobsters, prawns, woodlice.

Molluscs — soft bodies, often with a shell. Snails, slugs, octopuses, squid.

Worms — long, soft, no legs. Earthworms, leeches.

Cnidarians — simple bodies, stinging cells. Jellyfish, corals, sea anemones.

LOOK CLOSER — THE OCTOPUS PROBLEM

An octopus has no bones at all, and it's one of the cleverest animals ever tested. Octopuses open jars, escape tanks, use tools and appear to recognise individual people. So “no backbone” tells you about a body, and nothing whatsoever about a mind. Hold onto that — it matters a lot in Chapter 2.

THINK ABOUT IT

Spiders are not insects. Now that you know the rule, work out why. (Count the legs.)

ACTIVITY 1

Animal Classification

Sort each animal into its group. Write the group name in the box, or draw a line to it, or point to it and say it out loud — whichever works for you.

The groups: Mammal • Bird • Reptile • Amphibian • Fish • Invertebrate

ANIMAL	CLUE	GROUP
Hedgehog	Spines, milk, snuffles	
Rosie the galah	Pink and cream feathers, strong curved beak	
Betty the bearded dragon	Scales, sits under a heat lamp	
White's tree frog	Damp skin, sticky toes	
Vampire crab	Ten legs, hard shell, purple claws	
Sugar glider	Furry, glides, carries young in a pouch	
Royal python	Long, scaly, no legs	
Goldfish	Gills, fins	
Locust	Six legs, wings	
Tortoise	Shell, walks on land, breathes air	
Bat	Furry, flies, feeds young on milk	
Penguin	Feathers, swims, cannot fly	

Scoring is not the point. If you got one wrong, the interesting question is *why* you thought it was something else. Usually it's because a rule you were using — "it flies, so it's a bird" — nearly works, but not quite.

ACTIVITY 2

Which Group Does It Belong To?

Now work backwards. You get the clues; you name the animal group.

1 It's covered in scales, lays leathery eggs, and has to move into the sun to warm up. Group:

2 It has thin damp skin, started life in a pond, and grew legs later. Group:

3 It has feathers and hollow bones, but it cannot fly. Group:

4 It has eight legs, no wings, and no backbone. Group:

5 It lives in the sea, holds its breath, and feeds its baby on milk. Group:

6 It has no backbone, no bones at all, and can solve puzzles. Group:

 EXTENSION — FOR OLDER READERS

Questions 3, 5 and 6 are each designed to break a shortcut most people use without noticing. Write down, for each one, what the shortcut was.

 ACTIVITY 3

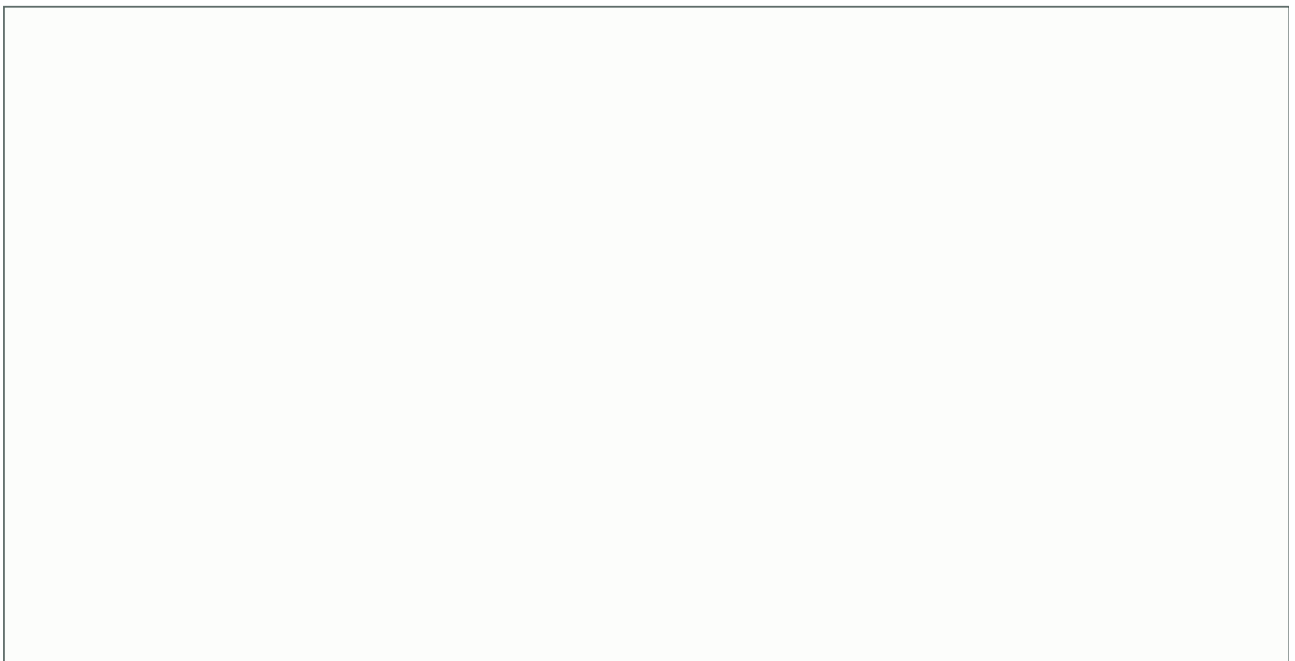
Draw Your Own Animal

Invent an animal that has never existed. It has to be scientifically possible — you have to be able to defend it.

Step 1. Choose your group. Circle one:

Mammal • Bird • Reptile • Amphibian • Fish • Invertebrate

Step 2. Draw it in the box.



Step 3. Fill in its file.

Name of species: _____

Where it lives: _____

What it eats: _____

How it stays warm (or cools down): _____

How it has its young: _____

One thing it can do that no other animal can: _____

Step 4. The hard question.

Name **one feature** your animal has that proves which group it's in — something another group couldn't have.

TRY IT FOR REAL

Show your animal to someone else without telling them the group. Can they work it out from your drawing alone? If they can't, what's missing?

ACTIVITY 4

Animal Detective

You're going to identify a real animal using only evidence. No guessing from memory.

Pick any animal you can actually see — a pet, a bird out of the window, a woodlouse under a plant pot, an insect on a wall. Then work through the evidence in order.

The animal I am observing is: _____

Evidence 1 — Skin. What is it covered in? Fur / Feathers / Scales / Damp bare skin / Hard shell / Something else:

Evidence 2 — Legs. How many? 0 · 2 · 4 · 6 · 8 · More than 8 · Can't tell

Evidence 3 — Backbone. Can you see or work out whether it has one? Yes · No · Not sure — and here's why:

Evidence 4 — Breathing. Air or water? _____

Evidence 5 — Anything unusual you noticed: _____

My conclusion. This animal is a _____

because _____

THE DETECTIVE'S RULE

A real scientist writes down what they can see, then works out what it means — in that order. It's very tempting to decide the answer first and then find reasons for it. That's how mistakes get made, in science and in most other things.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

Tick, colour in, or just decide in your head.

I can explain what makes something an animal. Not yet • Getting there • Yes

I can name the five vertebrate groups. Not yet • Getting there • Yes

I can explain the difference between a vertebrate and an invertebrate. Not yet • Getting there • Yes

One thing from this chapter I didn't know before:

One thing I still want to find out:

Coming up in Chapter 2: Animals have feelings too — and the difference between what an animal is actually experiencing and what we *assume* it's feeling. It's a bigger difference than most people realise.

Animals Have Feelings Too

The big idea: Animals have real inner experiences — fear, comfort, curiosity, pain. But we can't read their minds. All we can do is watch their bodies and make careful guesses. The gap between *what an animal is actually experiencing* and *what a human decides it must be feeling* is where nearly every mistake in animal care begins.

The smiling lizard

Here's something that happens in almost every animal session, every week.

Betty, a bearded dragon, is sitting on someone's hand. Her mouth is slightly open. Someone in the room says: "Aww, she's smiling."

She isn't smiling. Bearded dragons can't smile — the muscles aren't there. An open mouth in a bearded dragon usually means it's too warm and is trying to cool down. Sometimes it means it feels threatened.

So the human sees *happy*. Betty is saying *I'm hot or back off*.

Nobody in that room is being unkind. They're doing something humans do automatically: putting a human face on a non-human animal. There's a word for it — **anthropomorphism** — and it's one of the most important ideas in this whole book.

Why we do it

Human brains are built to read faces. You can spot a friend's mood across a playground before you've heard them speak. That skill is so strong that it fires whether or not there's an actual human in front of you. You see faces in car headlights, in plug sockets, in clouds.

Point that machinery at an animal and it doesn't switch off. It just carries on, guessing.

Sometimes the guess is close. A dog with a loose wiggly body really is relaxed. Sometimes the guess is badly wrong, and the animal pays for it.

LOOK CLOSER — THE TWO MISTAKES

There are two opposite errors, and both cause harm.

Mistake one: assuming too much. Deciding an animal is jealous, guilty, spiteful or "doing it on purpose". These are complicated human ideas that need a sense of self and of other people's opinions. Most animals show no evidence of them.

Mistake two: assuming too little. Deciding an animal feels nothing at all, so it doesn't matter what happens to it. There's strong evidence that many animals experience pain, fear and distress — and treating them as unfeeling objects is how bad care starts.

The honest position sits between the two: *this animal has real experiences, and I can't see inside it, so I'll watch closely and act carefully.*

Nine things animals experience

These are states we can look for evidence of. Notice that each one has **signs you can actually see** — that's what makes it useful.

FEAR

The animal believes something dangerous is happening now. *Look for:* freezing completely still · trying to get away · hiding · flattened body · puffing up to look bigger · hissing, growling or gaping.

RELAXATION

Nothing is demanding anything of it. *Look for:* slow steady breathing · loose body · normal colour · eating or grooming · lying down with limbs stretched out · eyes half closed.

EXCITEMENT

Something good is expected — usually food, or a favourite person. *Look for:* fast movement toward you · alert posture · calling or vocalising · pacing at the front of an enclosure.

STRESS

Something is wrong and it has been wrong for a while. *Look for:* repeating the same movement over and over · refusing food · hiding much more than usual · scratching or over-grooming · changes in droppings · restlessness.

CURIOSITY

Something new is here and it isn't obviously dangerous. *Look for:* head tilting · slow approach · sniffing, tasting the air, tongue-flicking · investigating with feet, beak or nose.

PAIN

Something hurts. *Look for:* limping or holding a limb up · not wanting to be touched in one spot · going very quiet and still · hunched posture · sudden change in behaviour.

COMFORT

It feels safe where it is. *Look for:* settling in one place · returning to the same person or spot · falling asleep · continuing to eat while you're nearby.

FRUSTRATION

It wants to do something and can't. *Look for:* pushing at barriers · pawing or scrabbling · biting at bars or glass · repeated failed attempts at the same thing.

SECURITY

It knows what's going to happen next. *Look for:* calm at routine times • confident movement around its space • going to the right place at feeding time without being led.

THINK ABOUT IT

Look back at that list. Notice that **pain** and **comfort** look weirdly similar from the outside — both involve going quiet and still. So how would you tell them apart?

(Clue: it isn't about the moment. It's about what changed.)

The rule that makes you good at this

Here it is, and it's the most useful sentence in the chapter:

Don't ask "what is it feeling?" Ask "what has changed?"

You can't know what a hedgehog feels. But you absolutely can know that this hedgehog ate every night for six weeks and has now not eaten for two. That's evidence. That's something you can act on.

Good animal keepers aren't mind readers. They're people who noticed a small change early.

ACTIVITY 5

What Do You Think?

Four situations. For each one, work through all four questions before deciding anything.

SITUATION A A rabbit that normally comes to the front of its hutch stays pressed into the back corner. Its ears are flat against its back. It hasn't touched its food.

What might the animal be experiencing? _____

What evidence can you see? _____

What else could be happening? _____

What should a responsible person do? _____

SITUATION B A parrot is bobbing its head up and down and making a lot of noise as someone walks in carrying a bowl.

What might the animal be experiencing? _____

What evidence can you see? _____

What else could be happening? _____

What should a responsible person do? _____

SITUATION C A snake that has been handled calmly many times is suddenly pulling its head back into an S-shape and won't settle. Its skin looks dull and its eyes look cloudy blue.

What might the animal be experiencing? _____

What evidence can you see? _____

What else could be happening? _____

What should a responsible person do? _____

LOOK CLOSER

If you're stuck on C: cloudy eyes and dull skin mean a snake is about to shed. It can barely see. Would you want to be picked up by someone you couldn't see coming?

SITUATION D A guinea pig that has always squeaked at feeding time has gone silent this week. It's still eating. Everything else looks normal.

What might the animal be experiencing? _____

What evidence can you see? _____

What else could be happening? _____

What should a responsible person do? _____

ACTIVITY 6

Catch the Assumption

Each sentence below contains a human assumption dressed up as a fact. Underline it, then rewrite the sentence using only what someone could actually see.

1 "The dog knows he's been naughty — look at his guilty face."

Rewritten: _____

2 "She's ignoring me on purpose because I was away."

Rewritten: _____

3 "He loves being cuddled, he just goes completely still."

Rewritten: _____

4 “The lizard is smiling.”

Rewritten: _____

LOOK CLOSER

Number 3 is the dangerous one. Going completely still is on the fear list *and* the comfort list. An animal that has frozen because it's terrified looks almost identical to one that has settled because it's content. This mix-up causes more accidental harm than any other in animal handling.

The way to tell: a comfortable animal keeps doing normal things — breathing steadily, blinking, shifting position. A frozen animal stops everything.

TRY IT FOR REAL

The Change Log

Pick one animal you can see regularly. Over five days, write down one thing you noticed. Not what you think it felt — just what it did.

DAY	WHAT I ACTUALLY SAW	SAME AS USUAL?
1		Yes / No
2		Yes / No
3		Yes / No
4		Yes / No
5		Yes / No

Did anything change across the week? _____

This is what professional animal care actually looks like. Not dramatic rescues. Just someone writing down small things until a pattern shows up.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can explain what anthropomorphism means. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I can name three things to look for that suggest an animal is stressed. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I understand why “it’s smiling” might be the wrong answer. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

One assumption I’ve made about an animal before:

PART 2

Animals And Our Emotions

Why Do People Like Animals?

The big idea: People say animals make them feel better. That's worth taking seriously — and worth thinking about carefully, rather than just accepting. What is it about being near an animal that does something to us? And is it the same thing for everybody?

Start with what you know

Before any explanations, answer this honestly. There's no correct response.

When you're around an animal, what actually happens to you?

Hold onto whatever you wrote. The rest of this chapter offers some possible reasons — but yours came first, and yours is about you.

Nine reasons people give

These come up again and again when people are asked why animals matter to them. Some will fit you. Some won't. Tick the ones that ring true.

COMPANIONSHIP

Being with someone. Not alone in the room. It's a simple thing and it isn't a small thing.

CONNECTION

The feeling that something has noticed you're there — that it came over, or looked up, or moved toward you rather than away.

FEELING ACCEPTED

An animal doesn't know what you got in your test, whether you said the wrong thing at lunch, or what you look like today. There's no version of you it's comparing you to.

RESPONSIBILITY

Something depends on you. It needs feeding whether or not you feel like it. For a lot of people that's the point — being needed gives the day a reason.

ROUTINE

Animals run on time. Feeding, cleaning, checking. That rhythm can hold a day together when nothing else is holding it.

TOUCH

Fur, feathers, the weight of something warm in your hands. Some people find this the whole point. Some people find it unbearable — and that's a real answer too.

OBSERVATION

Just watching. No task, no talking, nothing required of you. Watching an animal is one of very few things people do without needing to be good at it.

COMMUNICATION

Working out what something wants without words. Getting it right. Learning a language nobody taught you.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Doing something *with* an animal rather than *to* it. Walking, training, sitting. Two beings in the same activity.

THINK ABOUT IT

Look at the ones you ticked. Now look at the ones you didn't.

Is there a pattern? A lot of people find their ticks cluster — mostly quiet ones, or mostly active ones, or mostly the ones about being needed. What does yours say about what you're after?

The honest bit about research

You'll hear people say that animals are proven to make you healthier, calmer or happier. Here's a more accurate version.

Researchers have studied animal-assisted work with children in schools and other settings, and a lot of those studies report positive results — in areas like mood, motivation and getting on with other people. But the same reviews that gather up those studies keep pointing out the same problem: the studies themselves vary enormously in how well they were designed. Different animals, different lengths of time, different ways of measuring, often small numbers of participants, and often no proper comparison group. When the people doing the assessing know which children got the animal sessions, that alone can bend the results.

So the fair summary is: **promising, and not proven**. Reviewers repeatedly call for better research rather than declaring the question settled.

Why put that in a children's workbook at all? Because knowing the difference between "***lots of people report this***" and "***this has been demonstrated***" is a genuinely useful skill — and animals are a good place to practise it. You'll meet the same difference in adverts, headlines and arguments for the rest of your life.

(Sources listed at the back of the book.)

THINK ABOUT IT

If the research isn't settled, does that change how you feel about your own experience with animals?

Here's one view: no, it doesn't. Research is about what's true for people in general. You're not people in general. What happens to you is still real, and you're allowed to know it.

ACTIVITY 7

Finish the Sentence

Complete each one. Any length. If writing is hard today, say them out loud to someone instead.

When I spend time around an animal, I sometimes feel

because

The animal I feel most comfortable around is

because

One thing an animal has never done to me that people sometimes do is

If I had to explain to someone why animals matter to me, I'd say

ACTIVITY 8

The Other Side of It

Fair's fair. Animals aren't magic and they aren't easy.

One hard thing about looking after an animal:

One thing an animal can't give you that a person can:

Something an animal has done that annoyed you:

LOOK CLOSER — WHY THIS ACTIVITY IS HERE

Anything that only ever gets described in glowing terms starts to feel fake, and people stop trusting it. Animals bite, escape, wake you at five in the morning, cost money and eventually die. Liking them anyway — with all of that included — is a sturdier kind of liking than pretending the difficult parts don't exist.

Ten Silent Minutes

Sit near an animal for ten minutes. Don't touch it, don't try to get its attention, don't take a photo. Just be in the same space.

What did you notice about the animal?

What did you notice about yourself?

Was ten minutes long, short, or about right?

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can name three reasons people value being around animals. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I can explain the difference between "lots of people say this" and "this is proven". Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I know which reasons on the list apply to me. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Animals and Stress

The big idea: Stress isn't a mood. It's a physical event that happens in a body — and it happens in animal bodies in almost exactly the same way it happens in yours. Learning to spot it in an animal is the easiest possible way to learn to spot it in yourself.

The chain

Everything in this chapter runs on one sequence. Learn it and the rest follows.

STRESS → BODY → THOUGHTS → BEHAVIOUR

Something happens (stress). Your body reacts before you've decided anything (body). Your thinking changes to match (thoughts). Then you do something (behaviour).

The order matters enormously. Most people assume it starts with thoughts — that you think a worried thought and then feel worried. Often it's the other way round. The body goes first and the thoughts arrive afterwards to explain it.

This is why “just calm down” doesn't work. You can't argue with something that's already happened.

What actually happens in the body

When a body detects a threat — real or not — a chemical called **adrenaline** floods the system within seconds. Here's what it does.

HEART RATE

Speeds up. It's pushing blood to your big muscles so they're ready. This is why you can feel your heart thumping in your chest or your ears.

BREATHING

Gets faster and shallower, moving up into the chest. More oxygen, delivered quicker. It's also why stress can make you feel like you can't get a full breath.

MUSCLES

Tighten. Shoulders, jaw, hands, stomach. They're braced. Held long enough, this is what produces stress headaches and aching shoulders.

ADRENALINE

The chemical driving all of it. It's fast, it's powerful, and it takes a while to clear once it's out — which is why you stay shaky for ages after the scary thing has finished.

CONCENTRATION

Narrows hard onto the threat. Everything else gets dropped. This is genuinely useful if there's a bear. It's a disaster if you're trying to sit a maths test, because the test is the threat and you can't think about anything except how badly it's going.

LOOK CLOSER

None of this is a fault. It's a system that kept your ancestors alive, working exactly as designed. The problem is that it can't tell the difference between a predator and a presentation. It fires the same way for both.

The four responses

When the alarm goes off, a body picks a strategy. Nobody chooses it consciously — animals included.

FIGHT

Push back at the threat. Make yourself big and loud. *In animals*: hissing, growling, gaping, lunging, puffing up, raising fur or feathers. *In people*: snapping at someone, anger, arguing, storming out.

FLIGHT

Get away from the threat. *In animals*: bolting for a hide, flying to the back of an aviary, burrowing. *In people*: leaving the room, avoiding a place, not going in.

FREEZE

Go completely still and hope it passes. *In animals*: staying rigid, playing dead, refusing to move at all. *In people*: going blank, unable to speak, unable to move or decide.

FAWN

(This one is mainly for older readers — it's more complicated than the other three.)

Try to make the threat like you. Appease it. Give it what it wants so it stops. *In animals*: this is rarer and harder to identify, and scientists argue about whether it's the same thing at all. *In people*: agreeing with everything, apologising for things that aren't your fault, going along with what someone wants because disagreeing feels dangerous.

Fawn is the hardest one to spot, because from the outside it looks like being nice. It often isn't. It's a fear response wearing a polite face.

THINK ABOUT IT

None of these four is the good one. All four are the body doing its job. A rabbit that freezes isn't a coward — freezing is a rabbit's best survival move, because most predators hunt by spotting movement.

Which one does your body tend to pick?

Does it pick a different one at home than at school?

Reading it in an animal first

Here's the useful trick. Reading your own stress is hard, because you're inside it. Reading someone else's is also hard, because people hide it.

Animals don't hide it. An animal has no reason to pretend it's fine. Which makes an animal the clearest possible place to learn what stress looks like — and once you can see it out there, you get much better at catching it in yourself.

Signs an animal is stressed:

- Repeating the same movement over and over
- Not eating
- Hiding far more than usual
- Over-grooming, scratching, or feather-plucking
- Sudden changes in droppings
- Flattened or pinned-back ears
- Wide eyes with more white showing
- Panting, or open-mouth breathing when it isn't hot
- Trembling
- Refusing to come out even for food it likes

THE ANIMAL OBSERVATION CHALLENGE

Find an animal you can watch safely. Sit still. Don't interact. Give it at least ten minutes.

Animal: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Where it is: _____

RECORD:

1. **Body position.** Where is it, and how is it holding itself?
2. **Breathing.** Can you see it? Fast, slow, steady?
3. **Movement.** Still, pacing, exploring, hiding? Does it repeat anything?

4. **Eyes.** Open, half-closed, wide? Where is it looking?
5. **Ears, fur, feathers or scales.** Flat, raised, smooth, puffed?
6. **Sounds.** Any? What kind, and when?
7. **What was happening around it.** Noise, people, temperature, time of day.

NOW INTERPRET — CAREFULLY

Best guess at what this animal was experiencing:

The evidence I'm basing that on:

One other explanation that would also fit:

How confident am I? Not at all · A bit · Fairly · Very

LOOK CLOSER

That last question is doing real work. A good observer is willing to say "I'm not sure." Being certain when you shouldn't be is worse than knowing nothing, because you stop looking.

ACTIVITY 9

Your Own Chain

Think of a recent time you felt stressed. Not the worst one — pick a medium one.

STRESS. What happened?

BODY. What did you notice physically? Tick any: heart faster · hot face · tight chest · shaky hands · sick feeling · tense shoulders · gone cold · other: _____

THOUGHTS. What went through your head?

BEHAVIOUR. What did you do? Which of the four was it?

Fight · Flight · Freeze · Fawn

Looking back — was the danger as big as your body thought?

If it was, that's fine. Sometimes the alarm is right. The point is to check, not to assume it was wrong.

What Helps an Animal Settle?

A stressed animal is helped by a fairly short list of things. Tick the ones you think work, then check your reasoning.

☐ Somewhere to hide ☐ Being picked up and shown around ☐ Lower noise ☐ Dimmer light ☐ Being told it's fine ☐ Being left alone ☐ Its normal routine happening on time ☐ A new toy immediately ☐ Time ☐ Someone calm nearby, not interacting

Now the real question. Look at the ones that work for an animal. How many of them would work for you?

LOOK CLOSER

“Being told it’s fine” doesn’t work on an animal, because it doesn’t speak English. It often doesn’t work on humans either, and for a related reason — the alarm isn’t in the part of you that processes sentences.

What actually helps is nearly always the same short list for both species: **less input, somewhere safe, a predictable routine, and time.**

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can say the chain in order: stress, body, thoughts, behaviour. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I can name the four responses. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I can list four signs of stress in an animal. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

I know which response my body usually picks. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

One thing that helps me settle:

Coming up in Part 3: How animals communicate — and what that teaches you about reading people.

PART 3

Learning From Animals

How Animals Communicate

The big idea: No animal in this book speaks English, and every single one of them is communicating constantly. Once you can read a body, you have a skill that works on every species — including ours.

Words are the small part

Think about the last time you knew someone was in a bad mood before they said a word. You didn't guess. You *read* it — the way they came through the door, where they put their bag, whether they looked up.

Humans do this all day without noticing. Then we assume that because animals don't talk, they aren't saying anything.

They're saying a great deal. Just not with words.

The five channels

Animals communicate through five main routes. Different species lean on different ones.

1. POSTURE — HOW THE BODY IS HELD

Tall and forward usually means confident or challenging. Low and small usually means frightened or submitting. Puffed up usually means *don't come closer* — a startled bird doubles in size in about half a second.

The most important posture is often the boring one: a loose, unbraced body means nothing is wrong.

2. MOVEMENT — WHAT IT DOES WITH ITS BODY

Fast and direct toward you: excitement, or a threat, depending on species. Slow approach with pauses: cautious interest. Moving away: an answer, and a clear one. An animal walking away has told you something specific, and it deserves the same respect as a person saying "not right now."

3. SOUND — WHAT IT SAYS

Some sounds are unmistakable — a hiss, a growl, an alarm call. Others are much subtler. Rabbits are famously quiet and communicate mostly by posture, which is exactly why rabbit distress gets missed so often.

4. SCENT — WHAT IT LEAVES BEHIND

This is the channel humans are worst at, and it's the main one for a huge number of animals. Rubbing a cheek on furniture, scratching, spraying, leaving droppings in a chosen spot — these are messages. To a dog or a rabbit, the room you think is empty is covered in writing.

5. COLOUR AND PATTERN — WHAT IT DISPLAYS

Chameleons change colour for temperature, mood and social signalling — not, as almost everyone believes, to match the wallpaper. A bearded dragon's beard turns black when it's stressed or displaying. Fish and birds shift colour to signal readiness, threat and health.

LOOK CLOSER — THE CHAMELEON MYTH

Chameleons aren't camouflage machines. Their base colour already suits their habitat; the changes on top of it are signals — warmth, cold, stress, threat, courtship. A dark chameleon is often a cold or unhappy one. It's a good example of a "fact" that everybody knows and that isn't right.

The three-step signal

Almost every animal warns you before it does anything. The warnings escalate in the same order:

1. Quiet signal → 2. Loud signal → 3. Action

A snake pulls its head back into an S. Then it hisses. Then it strikes. A rabbit turns away. Then it thumps. Then it scratches or bites. A parrot leans away. Then it screams. Then it bites.

Almost every bite in animal handling is a step-one signal that a human missed.

The animal did give a warning. It was polite about it. Nobody was reading.

THINK ABOUT IT

Now apply the same three steps to people.

Step 1 — someone goes quiet, gives short answers, stops making eye contact. **Step 2** — they say something sharp.

Step 3 — a full argument.

Have you ever missed a step one in a person? Has anyone ever missed yours?

ACTIVITY 11

Signal Translation

Write what each animal is most likely communicating.

Rabbit thumps a back foot

Betty the bearded dragon waves one front leg slowly

Snake pulls head back into an S-shape

Parrot fluffs up and grinds its beak

Guinea pig freezes completely mid-step

Hedgehog rolls into a tight ball

Cat's tail flicks fast side to side

Dog turns its head away and licks its lips

LOOK CLOSER

Two of those mean roughly "*I'm relaxed*" and the rest are versions of "*I'm not comfortable*." Which two?

ACTIVITY 12

The Silent Conversation

Do this with another person. No talking at all for two minutes.

Round 1. Try to communicate: *I'm happy to be here.* **Round 2.** Try to communicate: *I need a bit of space.* **Round 3.** Try to communicate: *Something's wrong.*

Which round was hardest?

Which signal did the other person read fastest?

What did you use — face, hands, distance, posture, speed?

THINK ABOUT IT

Animals are doing this version all the time. Not because it's a game — because it's the only channel they've got.

Build a Signal Guide

Choose one animal and design a one-page guide for someone meeting it for the first time.

Animal: _____

Three signs it's relaxed: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Three signs it wants to be left alone: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

The one thing you must never do with this animal:

How you should approach it — step by step:

TRY IT FOR REAL

Give your guide to someone who's never met that animal and watch them use it. Anything they got wrong is a gap in your guide, not in them.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can name the five channels animals use to communicate. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can explain the three-step signal.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can spot a "step one" signal in an animal.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can spot a "step one" signal in a person.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Routine, Responsibility and Care

The big idea: Looking after an animal means doing unglamorous things on time, whether or not you feel like it. That sounds like a burden. For a lot of people it turns out to be the opposite — the thing that gives a shapeless day a shape.

What care actually involves

People imagine animal care as cuddling. Here's the real list for most animals, most days:

Every day - Fresh water - Correct food, correct amount, correct time - Check the animal — eyes, movement, breathing, appetite - Remove waste and old food - Check temperature and humidity where it matters - Check the enclosure is secure

Every week - Deep clean - Weigh, or check body condition - Restock food - Check equipment still works

Ongoing - Vet when needed - Adjust as the animal ages - Keep records

Notice how much of it is **checking**. Care is mostly noticing. The dramatic bits are rare and you don't want them.

Why routine does something to people

An animal's day doesn't care what mood you woke up in. It needs feeding at the same time regardless.

That sounds harsh. In practice, a lot of people find it's the useful part. When everything else feels shapeless, there is at least one thing that definitely has to happen, at a definite time, for a definite reason that isn't about you.

Three things seem to be going on:

It's outside you. A task for someone else is easier to start than a task for yourself. "I should tidy my room" is easy to skip. "The rabbit hasn't eaten" isn't.

It's finishable. Feeding an animal takes five minutes and then it is *done*. Not many things in a day give you that.

It repeats. Tomorrow it happens again, which means today's version doesn't have to be perfect. Miss nothing, and you get another go regardless.

THINK ABOUT IT

Is there something in your day that happens at the same time regardless of your mood?

Does having it help, or does it feel like pressure?

Both answers are real. For some people routine is a handrail; for others it's a cage. Knowing which you are is worth more than being told which to be.

The honest warning

Responsibility is genuinely good for a lot of people. It is also genuinely heavy, and this book isn't going to pretend otherwise.

An animal is a living thing that will need you every day for years. Some live a very long time — a tortoise can outlive the child who was given it. Guilt when you can't manage it is real. "The animal will fix things" is a lot to put on a creature that mostly wants a warm spot and food on time.

A good rule: an animal should be one of the things that helps, not the only one.

ACTIVITY 14

Design a Care Routine

Pick an animal — real or invented. Build its week.

Animal: _____

TIME OF DAY

WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN

Morning

Midday

Evening

Before bed

Weekly jobs: _____

Who does it when you're ill? _____

Who does it when you're on holiday? _____

Roughly what does a week cost? £ _____

LOOK CLOSER

Those last three questions are the ones people forget, and they're the ones that decide whether keeping an animal actually works.

 ACTIVITY 15

The Job Nobody Wants

Name the least pleasant job in animal care:

Why does it still have to be done?

What would happen to the animal if you skipped it for a week?

 THINK ABOUT IT

Everything worth doing contains a part that isn't enjoyable. That isn't a sign you've chosen wrong. It's the standard price.

 ACTIVITY 16

Your Own Anchor

You don't need an animal for this bit.

One small thing I could do at the same time every day:

What time: _____

How I'd know I'd done it:

Keep it small. Not "get fit" — something that takes under five minutes and either happened or didn't. The size isn't the point. The *repeating* is.

Try it for one week. Tick each day it happened.

Mon ☐ Tue ☐ Wed ☐ Thu ☐ Fri ☐ Sat ☐ Sun ☐

If you missed days — what got in the way?

Missed days aren't failure. They're information. A plan you couldn't keep needs changing, not more willpower.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can list what daily animal care involves. Not yet · Getting there · Yes I can explain why routine helps some people. Not yet · Getting there · Yes I know that an animal shouldn't be someone's only support. Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Boredom, Enrichment and Motivation

The big idea: An animal with food, water and warmth can still be having a terrible time. What's missing is something to *do*. The science of fixing that is called enrichment — and it turns out to describe humans surprisingly well.

The five needs

In the UK, anyone responsible for an animal has legal duties under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. They're usually described as five welfare needs:

- A suitable **environment**
- A suitable **diet**
- The ability to **behave normally**
- Appropriate company — **with or without other animals**
- **Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease**

Read number three again. *The ability to behave normally.*

That's the one people skip. A parrot in a clean cage with good food and no way to chew, climb, forage or shout is not having its needs met. It's being kept alive, which isn't the same thing.

What boredom looks like

An under-stimulated animal often develops repetitive behaviours — the same movement, over and over, with no purpose. Pacing the same line. Circling. Bar-chewing. Feather-plucking. Over-grooming until the skin shows.

These are signals that something in the environment is wrong. They are not the animal being odd.

LOOK CLOSER

A wild parrot spends a large part of its day finding and processing food. Give the same bird a bowl and it can eat in minutes — and then has the rest of the day with nothing to do and a brain built for solving problems. The food isn't the issue. The *emptiness after the food* is.

The six kinds of enrichment

FOOD ENRICHMENT

Make the food take work. Scatter it, hide it, wrap it, freeze it, put it in a puzzle. The eating isn't the point — the *searching* is.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Change the space. New branches, different levels, moved hides, varied substrate. Not everything at once, and not so often the animal never feels settled.

⦿ COGNITIVE ENRICHMENT

Problems to solve. Puzzle feeders, training, choices. Many animals will work for a reward they could have had for free — the working is the reward.

SENSORY ENRICHMENT

New smells, sounds, textures, safe new things to look at. Cheap and often the most effective.

SOCIAL ENRICHMENT

The right company. For some species that's others of their kind; for some it's a person; for some — many reptiles — it's deliberate solitude, and forcing company on them is the opposite of enrichment.

PHYSICAL ENRICHMENT

Room and reason to move the way that species is built to move. Climbing, digging, swimming, flying, burrowing.

! The rule that keeps enrichment safe: enrichment must always be something the animal can *choose*. An animal that can't get away from the new thing isn't being enriched — it's being subjected to something.

Now turn it on yourself

Here's where this chapter earns its place in a wellbeing book.

Read those six back, replacing "the animal" with "me".

- Do I have interesting things to do, or just things I have to do?
- Does my space ever change?
- Is there anything I'm working out, rather than just getting through?
- Do I get any new input — sounds, places, textures?
- Am I getting the right amount of company for me, not the amount someone else thinks I should want?
- Does my body get to move the way it wants to?

A person can have food, warmth, shelter and school and still be understimulated in exactly the way a parrot in a bare cage is. And the fix is the same: not more comfort. More to *do*.

 THINK ABOUT IT

Which of the six are you lowest on right now?

 ACTIVITY 17

Design an Enrichment Plan

Animal: _____ **What does this species do all day in the wild?**

TYPE

MY IDEA

HOW I'D KNOW IT WORKED

Food

Environmental

Cognitive

Sensory

Social

Physical

Can the animal choose to walk away from every one of these? Yes ☐ No ☐

If any answer is no, redesign it.

 ACTIVITY 18

The Boredom Detective

Watch any animal for fifteen minutes.

How much of the time was it doing something? _____ minutes **How much was it doing nothing?**

_____ minutes **Did it repeat any movement more than three times?** Yes ☐ No ☐ **If yes, describe it:**

One change that might give it more to do:

LOOK CLOSER

Careful — doing nothing isn't automatically bad. A snake that's just eaten should be doing nothing for days. A tortoise is not being neglected because it's slow. Ask what's normal *for that species* before you decide anything.

ACTIVITY 19

Your Own Enrichment Plan

Same exercise, for you.

Food — one thing I'd like to try making or eating: _____

Environment — one small change to a space I'm in a lot: _____

Cognitive — one thing I'd like to get better at: _____

Sensory — one new sound, place or texture to seek out: _____

Social — the right amount of company for me looks like: _____

Physical — one way I actually enjoy moving: _____

Pick ONE. Just one. Which?

When this week? _____

Six changes at once is how plans die. One is how they survive.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can name the five welfare needs. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can name the six kinds of enrichment.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can explain why choice matters in enrichment.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I've picked one enrichment idea for myself.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Coming up in Part 4: The hard things — fear, frustration, and saying goodbye.

PART 4

The Hard Things

A note before this section. These three chapters deal with fear, loss and frustration. They're the most useful chapters in the book and they're also the ones most likely to bring something up. Work through them with someone nearby if you can. If something surfaces that's bigger than a page in a workbook, say so to an adult you trust — that isn't failing the exercise, it's the exercise working.

Fear, Bravery and Trying Again

The big idea: Being brave isn't the absence of fear. Nobody has that. Bravery is what you do while the fear is still switched on — and animal keepers have a well-tested method for helping a frightened creature get there, one step at a time.

Fear is doing its job

A frightened animal isn't malfunctioning. Fear is the single most useful thing evolution has given anything with a nervous system. The animals that weren't afraid of anything didn't get to be anybody's ancestors.

Same for you. Fear of heights, of fast traffic, of a growling dog — that's a working alarm.

The trouble starts when the alarm fires for things that aren't dangerous. Reading aloud in class. A phone ringing. A spider on a wall three metres away. The body doesn't grade threats well. It has one alarm and it's loud.

LOOK CLOSER

Fear and excitement produce almost the same physical state — fast heart, quick breathing, alert focus, energy. The difference is largely in what you've decided is happening. This is why the same rollercoaster produces screaming delight in one person and genuine terror in the next, with near-identical readings on both.

How keepers help a frightened animal

Suppose a rescued rabbit is terrified of hands. Here's what nobody does: grab it, hold it, and prove that hands are fine.

That doesn't teach the rabbit hands are safe. It teaches the rabbit it was right.

Here's what's actually done — small steps, in order, never moving on until the current step is boring.

Step 1. Sit in the room. Don't approach. Let nothing happen. **Step 2.** Sit nearer. Still nothing happens. **Step 3.** Rest a hand flat on the floor. Don't move it. **Step 4.** Put food near the hand. **Step 5.** Put food beside the hand. **Step 6.** Food in the open hand. **Step 7.** Hand touches the rabbit briefly while it eats. **Step 8.** Longer contact.

Each step repeats until it's dull. If a step goes wrong, you go back one — not to the start, just back one — and repeat until it's dull again.

The whole method is three rules: 1. Start well below the level that frightens it. 2. Only move on when the current step has become boring. 3. Going back a step is normal, not a failure.

THINK ABOUT IT

Why does the animal have to be able to leave at any point for this to work?

Because a creature that can't escape isn't learning "this is safe." It's learning "I'm trapped." Those look similar from outside and they're opposites.

The same ladder, pointed at you

That method has an obvious human version, and it's one of the more reliable ideas in the whole book: you get less afraid of something by meeting it in doses small enough to survive, repeatedly, with an exit available.

What doesn't work is the thing people usually recommend: being flung at the scary thing to "get it over with." Sometimes that happens to work out. Often it confirms the fear and makes the next attempt harder.

 **Important.** This works well for everyday fears — speaking up, phone calls, a new place, an animal you're wary of. Some fears are much bigger than that, tied to things that have actually happened, and those deserve proper support from someone trained rather than a ladder drawn in a workbook. Knowing which sort you're dealing with matters. If you're not sure, that's a good thing to say out loud to an adult you trust.

ACTIVITY 20

Build a Fear Ladder

Pick something you'd like to find easier. Choose a medium one — not the biggest thing in your life.

The thing: _____

Now build eight steps, from *barely anything* to *the full thing*. Step 1 should be so small it's almost silly. That's correct.

Step 1 (almost nothing): _____ Step 2: _____ Step 3: _____ Step 4: _____

Step 5: _____ Step 6: _____ Step 7: _____ Step 8 (the full thing): _____

Which step am I on now? _____

What would make step 1 boring? _____

Who could be nearby while I try it? _____

LOOK CLOSER

If you can't think of a step small enough for number 1, the ladder needs more rungs, not more courage.

 ACTIVITY 21

The Fear I Grew Out Of

Something that used to frighten me and doesn't now:

How old was I? _____

What changed?

Did anyone help? What did they do?

 THINK ABOUT IT

Almost everyone can fill this in, and almost nobody thinks about it. You have already done this before, at least once, with something that felt permanent at the time.

 ACTIVITY 22

Bravery Isn't What People Think

Circle the braver one in each pair. Then explain your choice.

A. Someone who isn't scared of dogs and strokes a dog. **B.** Someone who is scared of dogs and stands in the same room as one.

A. Someone who loves speaking and gives a speech. **B.** Someone who dreads it and asks one question in class.

A. Someone who tries something once and gets it. **B.** Someone who tries, fails, and goes back the next day.

What do your answers have in common?

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can explain why fear is useful. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can describe how a keeper helps a frightened animal.**
Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I've built a ladder with a step 1 small enough to actually do.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I know that going back a step isn't failing.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Loss, Grief and Saying Goodbye

The big idea: Every animal you love will one day not be there. That's the deal, and it's built into keeping animals at all. This chapter isn't going to tell you it's fine. It's going to tell you what it's like and what helps.

Before you start

You can skip this chapter. Genuinely. If an animal you loved has died recently, this might not be the day, and coming back to it later isn't cheating.

If you're reading on, it helps to have someone around afterwards.

Different animals, different lengths of time

Part of what makes animal loss confusing is that the timescales are all over the place.

Some animals live a matter of years. Some live decades — a parrot or a tortoise can outlive the person who first took them on. Some very small animals live a couple of years at most, which means a child who takes on a mouse or a hamster is signing up for a goodbye reasonably soon.

None of these is the sad option and none is the safe option. A short life isn't a lesser life. But it's fair to know the shape of what you're taking on before you take it on.

What grief actually does

Grief isn't only sadness. People are often thrown by how much *else* is in it.

It comes in waves. Fine for hours, then flattened by something small — an empty bowl, the wrong noise at feeding time, a bag of food still in the cupboard.

It shows up in the body. Tiredness, no appetite, a heavy chest, disturbed sleep. It's physical, not just a mood.

It includes anger. At a vet, at yourself, at nobody in particular, at the animal for going.

It includes guilt. Almost everyone hunts for the thing they should have spotted sooner. Usually there wasn't one.

It includes relief, if the animal was ill. Relief and love sit together perfectly comfortably, whatever it feels like at the time.

It doesn't run on a timetable. There's no correct length. Anyone who tells you it should be over by now is guessing.

Things people say

You'll hear these. Some help, some don't, and it depends entirely on the person.

"It was just a pet." — Rarely helpful. For a lot of people that animal was the thing that made the day workable.

"You can get another one." — Meant kindly. Misses the point completely: you didn't lose *an animal*, you lost *that* one.

"At least it had a good life." — True, and it can sound like being told to stop.

"I'm sorry. Tell me about them." — This one nearly always helps.

THINK ABOUT IT

What would you want someone to say to you?

What would you want them not to say?

ACTIVITY 23

Remembering One

For an animal you've lost, or one belonging to someone you know, or — if neither applies — leave this page blank and come back if you ever need it.

Name: _____ What kind of animal: _____ How long they were around: _____

Three things they did that were completely theirs: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Something they were bad at: _____

Something they taught you: _____

One memory I want to keep: _____

LOOK CLOSER

The "something they were bad at" question is deliberate. Remembering only the perfect parts turns a real animal into a poster. The chewing, the noise at six in the morning, the escape attempts — that's the actual creature, and remembering the whole of it is a truer kind of remembering.

Something That Lasts

Grief often looks for somewhere to go. Making something gives it a destination.

Tick anything you might do:

☐ Draw or paint them ☐ Write down every memory you can reach ☐ Print a photo and put it somewhere you'll see it ☐ Plant something ☐ Keep one object — a collar, a tag, a shed skin, a feather ☐ Tell someone the whole story of them, start to finish ☐ Mark the day each year ☐ Give their unused food or bedding to a rescue ☐
Something else: _____

The one I'd choose: _____

Helping Someone Else

One day someone will tell you their animal died, and you'll want to get it right.

What I'd say first: _____

What I'd avoid saying: _____

Something practical I could do: _____

How long afterwards I'd check in again: _____

LOOK CLOSER

That last one matters more than the first. Most people get messages on day one and silence by week three, which is often when it's landing hardest.

The bit that has to be said

Losing an animal is one of the first real griefs many people meet, and it's often the first time anyone learns that you can miss someone permanently and still be all right eventually. Both halves of that are true. It doesn't stop mattering, and you do keep going.

If it isn't easing at all, or it's getting heavier rather than lighter, tell an adult you trust. That's not weakness and it's not being dramatic. It's the same instinct as taking an animal to the vet when something isn't right — you don't wait to see how bad it gets first.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I understand grief isn't only sadness. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I know there's no correct length of time.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I know one thing to say to someone who's lost an animal.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Frustration, Patience and Mistakes

The big idea: Animals are slow, inconsistent, and completely uninterested in your timetable. Working with them is basically a training course in tolerating things not going to plan — which happens to be one of the most useful skills a person can own.

Animals don't hurry

You can't rush a tortoise. You can't reason a parrot into being quiet. You can't explain to a snake that you have somewhere to be.

Every plan involving an animal is a plan the animal hasn't agreed to. It'll be slower than you expected, or it'll do the thing perfectly for a week and then not at all on the day someone's watching.

That's not the animal being difficult. That's the animal being an animal.

What frustration is

Frustration is what a body does when it wants something and can't get it. Remember the chain from Chapter 4 — it works the same way.

In animals: pushing at barriers, scrabbling, biting at bars, trying the same failed thing repeatedly, giving up entirely.

In people: heat in the face, tight jaw and hands, snapping, giving up and calling it stupid, throwing the thing down.

Same machinery. Same shape.

LOOK CLOSER — THE MOMENT BEFORE GIVING UP

There's a recognisable point where frustration flips into quitting. Something in you decides *I can't do this* and the effort stops. It's not laziness. It's a body protecting itself from more failure.

Catching that moment — noticing it as it arrives — is a genuinely learnable skill, and it's the whole of this chapter.

The four moves

When frustration hits, there are four things that reliably help. All four are stolen directly from how good keepers handle a session that's going badly.

1. STOP BEFORE IT PEAKS

A keeper ends a training session while it's still going well, not after it's fallen apart. The animal's last memory of it is a good one. Stopping isn't quitting. It's choosing the exit point instead of being thrown out of it.

2. MAKE THE STEP SMALLER

If an animal can't do it, the step was too big. Not the animal's fault, not yours — the step's. Halve it. Then halve it again if you need to.

3. CHANGE SOMETHING IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Too loud, too bright, too many people, wrong time of day. Frustration is often not about the task at all. Same for homework.

4. COME BACK TOMORROW

Animals learn between sessions, not just during them. So do people. The thing you couldn't do at nine at night is regularly straightforward the next morning, and nothing changed except that you stopped.

Mistakes with living things

Here's a harder part. When you make a mistake with an animal, something can actually get hurt. A door left unlatched. The wrong food. A temperature not checked.

Everyone who works with animals has done something like this. The people who are good at it aren't the ones who never got anything wrong — they're the ones who did the following four things when they did:

Say it immediately. Hiding a mistake with a living creature is how a small problem becomes a serious one. Speed matters more than looking competent.

Fix what can be fixed.

Change the system, not just the promise. "I'll be more careful" fails. A checklist on the door works. If a mistake can happen, design so it can't.

Then stop punishing yourself. Guilt that keeps going after the fixing is done isn't responsibility. It's just guilt, and it doesn't help the animal at all.

THINK ABOUT IT

Which of those four do you find hardest?

ACTIVITY 26

The Frustration Map

Think of a recent time you got properly frustrated.

What I was trying to do: _____ What kept going wrong: _____ What my body did: _____
What I said or thought: _____ What I did in the end: _____

Now — which of the four moves would have helped?

☐ Stop before it peaks ☐ Make the step smaller ☐ Change the environment ☐ Come back tomorrow

What would that have looked like exactly?

ACTIVITY 27

Break It Down

Choose something you find hard. Split it into the smallest steps you can manage.

The task: _____

Which single step is the one I get stuck on?

Can that one be split further? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, split it: a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

LOOK CLOSER

Almost every “I can’t do this” is really “there’s one step in here I can’t do.” Finding which one turns a wall into a door.

ACTIVITY 28

The Mistake Protocol

Write your own four-step plan for when you get something wrong. Use your words, not the book’s.

Step 1 — Straight away, I will: _____

Step 2 — To fix it, I will: _____

Step 3 — So it doesn’t happen again, I’ll change: _____

Step 4 — Then I’ll stop, because: _____

TRY IT FOR REAL

Fold this page over or photograph it. It’s much easier to follow a plan you made calmly than to invent one while your face is hot.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can name the four moves for handling frustration. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I can spot the moment before I give up.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I have a plan for when I get something wrong.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Coming up in Part 5: Putting it together — your own toolkit, and where this could go next.

PART 5

Your Toolkit

Your Animal Wellbeing Toolkit

The big idea: Everything in this book has been building one thing — a set of tools that are yours, that you chose, and that work for you rather than for people in general. This chapter is where you assemble it.

Why “toolkit” and not “solution”

Nobody has one thing that fixes everything. What people who cope well actually have is several things that each work a bit, in different situations, and the knowledge of which to reach for.

A keeper doesn't have one tool for every animal. Gloves for one, a hook for another, a towel for a third, and for a fourth the right move is to walk away and come back later. That's not indecision. That's a well-stocked kit.

Tool 1 — Notice before you interpret

From Chapter 2. Don't ask *what am I feeling* — ask *what has changed*.

Changes are checkable. Feelings are a fog. “I'm slept badly three nights and haven't eaten properly” is something you can act on. “I'm fine, just weird” isn't.

My early warning signs — the things that change first:

Tool 2 — Read the body first

From Chapter 4. The chain is stress → body → thoughts → behaviour. The body goes first, so it's the earliest place to catch anything.

Where I feel it first: ☐ chest ☐ stomach ☐ hands ☐ jaw ☐ head ☐ shoulders ☐ throat ☐ elsewhere:

What that usually means is about to happen:

Tool 3 — Fewer inputs, safe place, routine, time

From Chapter 4. The same short list settles almost any animal, and it works about as well on people.

My version:

Fewer inputs looks like: _____ *My safe place is:* _____ *The routine that steadies me is:*

_____ *How long I usually need:* _____

Tool 4 — Read step one

From Chapter 5. Animals warn quietly before they warn loudly. So do people, and so do you.

My step-one signal — what I do before I say anything:

Who's good at spotting it?

What I want them to do when they see it:

LOOK CLOSER

Telling someone your step-one signal in advance is one of the most useful conversations available to anyone. It's much easier than explaining it mid-flood.

Tool 5 — One anchor

From Chapter 6. One small thing that happens at the same time daily, regardless of mood.

Mine is: _____ At: _____

Tool 6 — Something to do, not just something to have

From Chapter 7. Comfort isn't the same as enrichment. When flat, the question isn't *what would feel nice* — it's *what would give me something to do*.

Three things that give me something to do:

Tool 7 — Small steps, with an exit

From Chapter 8. Start below the level that frightens you. Repeat until boring. Going back a step is normal.

The ladder I'm on now: _____ The step I'm working: _____

Tool 8 — The four moves

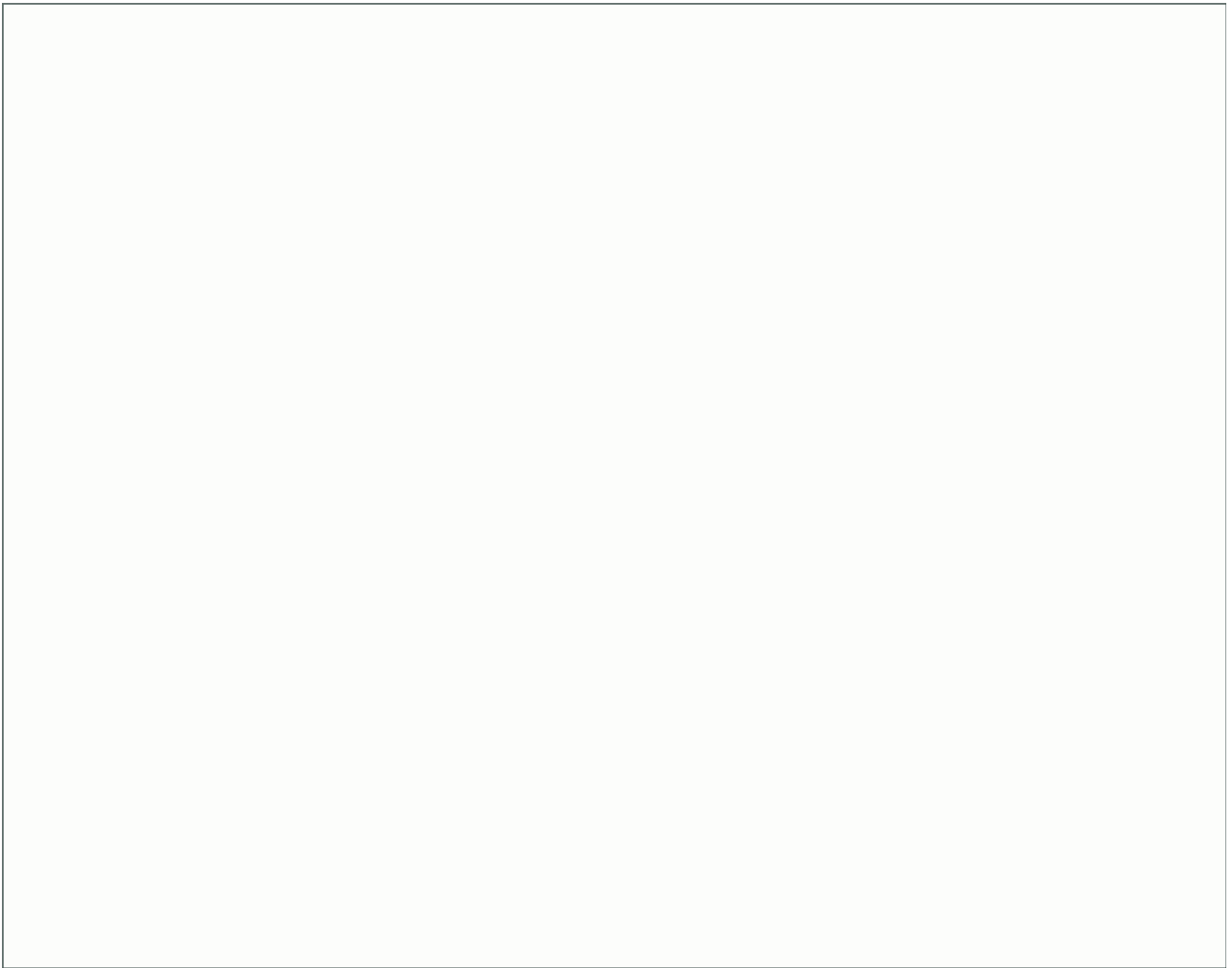
From Chapter 10. Stop before it peaks • make the step smaller • change the environment • come back tomorrow.

The one I forget most: _____

ACTIVITY 29

The One-Page Version

Copy your best answers onto this page. This is the page you'd actually use.



 TRY IT FOR REAL

Photograph it. A toolkit in a book on a shelf isn't a toolkit.

 ACTIVITY 30

What I'd Tell Someone Else

You've now got more of this than most adults do.

If a younger person told you they felt overwhelmed, what would you say?

What would you not say?

Would you take your own advice? Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐

If not — why not?

 THINK ABOUT IT

Nearly everybody is kinder to other people than to themselves, and nearly everybody thinks they're the exception.
Worth noticing.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I've filled in the one-page toolkit. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I know my earliest warning sign.** Not yet · Getting there
· Yes **I've told at least one person my step-one signal.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Becoming an Animal Person

The big idea: If this book has hooked you, there's a whole world downstream of it — hobbies, volunteering, qualifications and actual jobs. This chapter is a map of what's out there and how people get in.

Ways in that cost nothing

You don't need money or a qualification to start.

Watch what's already there. Garden birds, a park pond, insects under a log, foxes at dusk. Serious naturalists are largely people who watched the same ordinary place for years.

Keep records. Date, weather, what you saw, how many. Sounds dull; it's the actual job. Long-running records made by non-professionals underpin a lot of what's known about British wildlife.

Join a survey. Wildlife charities run counts that anybody can take part in — garden birds, butterflies, hedgehogs, ponds. Your data goes into real datasets.

Learn one group properly. Not “animals” — that's too big. Pick British garden birds, or UK reptiles, or bumblebees, and get genuinely good at that one thing. Depth beats breadth every time, and it's far more impressive to an interviewer.

Volunteering

Most animal organisations need help, and most will take committed people from their mid-teens with an adult's agreement. Age rules vary a lot between organisations.

Where people volunteer: rescue centres · sanctuaries · city farms · riding schools and RDA groups · wildlife trusts · conservation work parties · veterinary practices (usually observation only) · community and school animal programmes.

What they actually want: turning up when you said you would, doing the unglamorous jobs without complaining, and following instructions exactly. Not enthusiasm. Everyone has enthusiasm. Reliability is rarer and worth more.

Jobs with animals

Far more than most people know.

JOB	WHAT IT INVOLVES	TYPICAL ROUTE
Veterinary surgeon	Diagnosing and treating animals	Veterinary degree — highly competitive
Veterinary nurse	Nursing, theatre, client care	Degree or level 3 apprenticeship
Zookeeper	Daily care, enrichment, records, public talks	Animal management qualifications plus experience
Animal care assistant	Rescue and boarding care	Level 2/3 animal care
Dog groomer	Grooming and handling	City & Guilds or similar
Animal behaviourist	Diagnosing and changing problem behaviour	Degree plus specialist training
Wildlife or conservation officer	Habitat and species work, surveys	Ecology or conservation degree
Marine biologist	Marine species and ecosystems	Biology or marine science degree
Farrier	Hoof care and shoeing	Registered apprenticeship
Animal physiotherapist	Rehabilitation after injury	Postgraduate qualification
RSPCA / SSPCA inspector	Welfare investigation and enforcement	Own training programme, very competitive
Animal-assisted intervention practitioner	Sessions with people alongside animals	Specialist training plus licensing
Zoologist / researcher	Studying animals scientifically	Degree, usually postgraduate
Animal technician	Care in research settings	Level 2/3 plus specific training
Wildlife photographer or filmmaker	Documenting animals	Portfolio and persistence

LOOK CLOSER — THE ONE NOBODY MENTIONS

Almost every animal job is partly a *people* job. Vets spend their days talking to owners. Keepers do public talks. Rescue staff handle furious phone calls. The person who's good with animals and hopeless with humans has a much harder time than they expect.

Which means every conversation skill in this book — reading signals, staying steady, saying the useful thing — is career training too.

The unglamorous truth

Animal work is physical, often outdoors in bad weather, frequently early, and much of it is cleaning. Pay in the entry-level roles is usually modest. The animals sometimes die.

People do it anyway, for years, because the parts that are good are very good.

Better to know the shape of it now than at twenty-two.

ACTIVITY 31

Your Route Map

A job from that table that interests me: _____

What I'd need to get there: _____

One thing I could do this year: _____

One thing I could do this month: _____

One thing I could do this week: _____

LOOK CLOSER

If the weekly one is blank, the plan isn't real yet. Every route starts with something small enough to do in seven days.

ACTIVITY 32

Become the Expert

Pick one species. Just one. Then fill in everything you can — and find out what you can't.

Species (common name): _____ Scientific name: _____ Group: _____ Where it lives: _____
What it eats: _____ How long it lives: _____ How it raises young: _____
Predators or threats: _____ Conservation status: _____ Three facts most people don't know: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Where I found this out: _____

TRY IT FOR REAL

Teach it to someone. Five minutes, no notes. Teaching something is the fastest way to find the holes in what you know.

ACTIVITY 33

Where This Book Got To

The chapter that stuck with me most: _____

One thing I now do differently around animals: _____

One thing I now do differently with people: _____

Something I still disagree with: _____

LOOK CLOSER

That last one is a real question. A book you agreed with entirely probably didn't tell you anything new.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

I can name five jobs that involve animals. Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I know one way to get experience without money or qualifications.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes **I've written down one thing to do this week.** Not yet · Getting there · Yes

Certificate



CERTIFICATE

ANIMALS & MENTAL HEALTH WORKBOOK

This is to confirm that

has worked through this book — the interesting parts
and the difficult ones — and can now classify animals,
read what a body is saying, spot stress in another
creature and in themselves, and knows what's in their
own toolkit.

SIGNED

DATE

Glossary

Adrenaline — a chemical released fast when a body detects a threat; speeds the heart, quickens breathing and tenses muscles.

Amphibian — a vertebrate with moist, scale-free skin; most begin life in water with gills and change body form to live on land.

Anthropomorphism — giving human feelings, thoughts or motives to something that isn't human.

Arachnid — an invertebrate with eight legs and two body sections, such as a spider or scorpion.

Bird — the only living animal group with feathers.

Cartilage — flexible tissue; sharks and rays have skeletons made of it rather than bone.

Cnidarian — a simple invertebrate with stinging cells, such as a jellyfish or coral.

Crustacean — an invertebrate with a hard outer shell and many legs, such as a crab or woodlouse.

Enrichment — anything added to an animal's life that lets it use its natural behaviours; food, environmental, cognitive, sensory, social and physical.

Fawn response — a stress response involving appeasing a threat rather than fighting, fleeing or freezing.

Fight, flight, freeze — the three main automatic responses a body produces when it detects danger.

Fish — a vertebrate that breathes through gills and has fins.

Insect — an invertebrate with six legs and three body sections.

Invertebrate — an animal without a backbone; most animal species are invertebrates.

Keratin — the material reptile scales, bird beaks, hair and your fingernails are made from.

Lateral line — a row of sensors along a fish's sides that detects movement and pressure in water.

Mammal — a vertebrate whose mothers produce milk; almost all have hair or fur and hold a steady body temperature.

Metamorphosis — a complete change of body form during development, as when a tadpole becomes a frog.

Mollusc — a soft-bodied invertebrate, often shelled, such as a snail or octopus.

Repetitive behaviour — a movement repeated over and over with no clear purpose; often a sign of an unsuitable environment.

Reptile — a vertebrate with dry scaly skin that regulates its temperature by moving between warm and cool places.

Vertebra / vertebrae — the chain of small bones forming a backbone.

Vertebrate — an animal with a backbone: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish.

Welfare needs — under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the five things anyone responsible for an animal must provide.

Answers

For the questions that have right answers. The wellbeing pages don't, and aren't listed here.

Activity 1 — Animal Classification Hedgehog: Mammal · Rosie the galah: Bird · Betty the bearded dragon: Reptile · White's tree frog: Amphibian · Vampire crab: Invertebrate · Sugar glider: Mammal · Royal python: Reptile · Goldfish: Fish · Locust: Invertebrate · Tortoise: Reptile · Bat: Mammal · Penguin: Bird

Activity 2 — Which Group? 1. Reptile · 2. Amphibian · 3. Bird · 4. Invertebrate (an arachnid) · 5. Mammal · 6. Invertebrate (an octopus)

Extension: the shortcuts being broken are “birds fly”, “sea animals are fish”, and “no backbone means simple”.

Chapter 1 — spiders Spiders have eight legs and two body sections. Insects have six legs and three. So a spider is an arachnid, not an insect.

Activity 6 — Catch the Assumption (*model answers*) 1. Assumption: *guilt*. Observable: the dog lowered its body and looked away when its owner raised their voice. 2. Assumption: *on purpose, as punishment*. Observable: the cat has stayed in another room since the person returned. 3. Assumption: *loves it*. Observable: the animal becomes completely still when held. 4. Assumption: *smiling*. Observable: the bearded dragon is holding its mouth open.

Activity 11 — Signal Translation (*guide*) Rabbit thump: alarm or annoyance · Betty's arm-wave: acknowledgement or appeasement toward another animal · Snake S-shape: preparing to strike, back off · Parrot fluffed with beak grinding: settled and content · Guinea pig freezing: alarm, possible threat detected · Hedgehog balled: defensive, frightened · Cat tail flicking fast: irritation, not pleasure · Dog head turn and lip lick: a calming signal meaning discomfort.

The two relaxed ones are the parrot and — sometimes — nothing else on the list. Most of what animals show us is some version of “not comfortable,” which is exactly why learning to read it matters.

Activity 10 — What Helps an Animal Settle Somewhere to hide ● · Lower noise ● · Dimmer light ● · Being left alone ● · Normal routine on time ● · Time ● · Someone calm nearby not interacting ● Not helpful: being picked up and shown around · being told it's fine · a new toy immediately.

Sources

The research summary in Chapter 3 draws on the following systematic reviews. All three report positive findings alongside significant limitations in study design — which is the point being made in that chapter.

- Moe, I., Ho, P.J., Andersson, M., Karlberg, S., Lidfors, L., Sampaio, F. et al. (2025) *Effectiveness of animal-assisted services for school-aged children: a systematic review*. European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00787-025-02740-7>
- Brelsford, V.L., Meints, K., Gee, N.R. & Pfeffer, K. (2017) *Animal-Assisted Interventions in the Classroom — A Systematic Review*. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5551107/>
- *Calm with horses? A systematic review of animal-assisted interventions for improving social functioning in children with autism*. (2022) Autism. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9344573/>

Legislation referenced: Animal Welfare Act 2006 (England and Wales), which sets out the five welfare needs used in Chapter 7.

Facilitator Notes

For teachers, keepers, TAs, parents and session leads.

What this book is and isn't

It's a cross-curricular workbook combining animal science with emotional literacy. It maps comfortably onto primary and secondary science (classification, life processes, adaptation) and onto PSHE (feelings, stress, resilience, loss, responsibility).

It is not a therapeutic programme, and shouldn't be presented as one. It teaches noticing, not treatment.

Running it

One chapter is roughly one session of 45–60 minutes, with the 🦋 tasks running between sessions.

The order is not fixed. Parts 1 and 2 build on each other and are best done in sequence. Parts 3, 4 and 5 can be taken in any order, or individual chapters lifted out entirely.

Chapter 9 needs planning. Don't run the grief chapter cold with a group whose recent history you don't know. Flag it in advance with parents or carers where appropriate, and have somewhere for a child to go if they need to leave the room.

Access and adaptation

Every activity has a non-writing route: verbal, drawn, pointed, scribed, or recorded. A child who has answered out loud has answered.

For younger or less confident readers, the 🔍 Look Closer boxes and 🤔 Think About It questions can be skipped entirely without breaking anything. For older or more able learners, they're the interesting part — several of them are genuine open questions.

The three-response version of Chapter 4 (fight, flight, freeze) is complete on its own. Fawn is flagged for older readers and can be omitted.

If you're using live animals

The 🦋 tasks assume adult supervision. Standard practice applies: risk-assess the activity, wash hands before and after, ensure the animal can withdraw at any point, and stop the interaction if the animal signals discomfort. An animal that opts out has demonstrated Chapter 5 better than any worksheet could.

Things to watch for

A child who fills in the emotional pages with unusual intensity, or who cannot fill them in at all, is telling you something either way. The workbook is a reasonable prompt for a conversation and a poor substitute for one.