



Making the Character Connection with...

Companion Animals

Amphibians & Reptiles

Cats

Dogs

Horses

Veterinary Science

Being a person of good character means you follow the Six Pillars of CharacterSM everyday. Taking care of small animals requires a lot of patience and responsibility.

While you are completing your small animal project think of all the ways you can demonstrate good character. Daily feeding and grooming show you are responsible and that you respect the needs of your animal. You may not see how your project can demonstrate character, but take a moment to think of a way it might relate. You may have the opportunity to exhibit your animal in a competitive show. Following the rules and being willing to learn from the experience rather than focusing on winning shows people you are working on bettering yourself. Anytime you show you have to understand and follow a set of rules (fairness and responsibility) and you need to be willing to show your animal love and care no matter the outcome. All of these are opportunities to demonstrate qualities of good character; it's up to you to make sure you are living and showing your animals by the Six Pillars of CharacterSM.

Projects in this Connection have been grouped because they have related information. There may not be an activity for every project listed however at least one of the activities can be adapted for each project. Be creative; let this be a stepping stone for many ways of teaching character.

This Character Connection contains:

- **Explanation of how the Six Pillars of CharacterSM relate to the Companion Animal projects.**
- **Activities suggesting how to demonstrate good character while enhancing your knowledge of Companion Animals.**
- **Questions to help you think of other ways to demonstrate good character in everyday life.**

CHARACTER COUNTS! and the Six Pillars of Character are service marks of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. www.charactercounts.org

Character Connection: Companion Animals

Trustworthiness	Responsibility	Caring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Only exhibit animals you raised and trained yourself ✓ Show your animal that they can trust you to do what's in their best interest ✓ Be on time to shows so everyone can start on time ✓ Enter in the proper weight class and age category for your animal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do your part in raising your animals ✓ Make sure you have all of your supplies ready to go so you have everything you need to show ✓ Try to pay for your own supplies to prove that you can care for your animal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do your chores to help your animals stay healthy and happy ✓ Reward your animals with praise and treats no matter how they perform in shows ✓ Keep animals' surroundings properly maintained
Respect	Fairness	Citizenship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Take care of other's animals too; remember each animal is a pet to someone ✓ Show appreciation to those who help you complete your projects ✓ Always congratulate the winner of the show, no matter how you place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure you raise your animal with help from mom and dad only when you need it ✓ Follow all rules for entering and showing in competitions ✓ Never punish your animal for a poor showing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Find ways to use your animal for good in your community ✓ Follow the rules, no matter how unfair they may seem ✓ Teach others what you know ✓ Be open to learning from others

Character Connection: Companion Animals

Activity: Know the Rules

DO:

One of the most fun parts of raising a companion animal is having the opportunity to show your animal at local and state competitions. Every show you enter has different rules and regulations and you can help your fellow 4-H members keep track of all the different rules. Make a list of the competitions members of your 4-H club usually enter: your county fair, the state fair, and breed association shows. Once you have your list start finding the rules and regulations for the contests. You can find information about your county fair from your county extension office, state fair regulations in the state fair rule book and rules for associations on their websites. Go through the rules and make note of the rules that are specific to that show. There may be different weight, age, gender, breed qualifications to enter. There may also be different rules about when you can arrive to a show and what you are allowed to bring with you.

For each competition make a list of "Important Facts." Create a book of rules for your club and county members to use. Make sure to include the registration forms for each, contact information so participants can get answers to questions and your list of rules and regulations for each contest. Share your book with club members so everyone will know how they can participate too.

REFLECT:

1. What was the biggest difficulty for you when putting together the rule book?
2. Why do you think each competition has a different set of rules?
3. How do you think you can impact others' experiences by making sure they know all the rules first?
4. How does it make you feel to know your club members will be starting off knowing the rules? How do you feel knowing you may have made it possible for others to participate in shows they didn't know about?

APPLY:

A major part of exhibiting small animals is knowing the rules and being willing to follow them. By putting together a rule book for other participants in your small animal project you ensure that everyone has the same information. A major part of playing fair is making sure everyone starts on the same page. This means that by helping everyone know and understand the rules before entering a competition, you showed that you care about making competitions as fair as possible. Next time you have a new member join your club or project area help them understand how 4-H and other competitions work so they too will know what to expect when entering a show.



Character Connection: Companion Animals

Activity: A Day at the Shelter

DO:

Your small animal is no doubt very special to you. Throughout your small animal unit you have learned about what steps you can take to help keep animals happy and healthy. Unfortunately, there are many animals still looking for a loving home. Spend a day volunteering at a humane society or animal shelter. Contact your local shelter to set up a day to volunteer. Many shelters are run by volunteers who would enjoy having more helping hands. Let them know you want to help bathe the animals and spend time playing with them. Show the animals you care about them by giving them the attention they need to grow.

After your day at the shelter make sure to write a thank you note to the volunteers who help take care of the animals everyday. Let them know that you appreciate them allowing you to come in and help.

REFLECT:

1. What kind of animals did you see at the shelter? What does this tell you about the animals that end up here?
2. How can you help to get more people involved in volunteer work?
3. How did seeing the animals and taking care of them make you feel? Did you think of anything else you could do to help?
4. What would you say to someone wanting to adopt a pet? Would you suggest finding one at the shelter you worked with?

APPLY:

Animals cannot take care of themselves. This is why shelters and adoption organizations are so important. After volunteering you probably have a better understanding of why adopting pets can be so rewarding. At home you give your pet lots of love and care, but don't forget about the animals still waiting for the perfect home. When you think about your experience volunteering at the shelter think about what else you can do to show pets how much you care about them. Take care of animals; remember pets can't take care of their needs themselves.

Expand on this Activity: While at the shelter take pictures of the animals looking for homes. Make a book of information about the animals and their pictures to present at your next club meeting.

Help other members of your club see that adopting an animal is as rewarding as buying one from a breeder or pet store.



Character Connection: Companion Animals

Activity: Pet Smarts

DO:

Getting a pet can be a fun and exciting time for a family. Now that you know more about taking care of animals, you probably know that every pet isn't right for every family. Get together with members of the other companion animal projects (Amphibians, Cats, Dairy Goats, Dogs and Horses) to create a matching game for your 4-H club families. Ask individual project units to come up with ten traits that a family would need in order to best fit that type of animal. These traits could include: no small children, a big backyard, home all the time, or live in a city. Then, at your next 4-H club meeting, have each family write out four traits that describe their family. Create a game to help your 4-H families match with what type of companion animal would make the best pet for their family.

After your matching game, make sure you ask the families if they agree with their matches. If they do not, find out why. Maybe they have other tips on how to take care of certain pets.

REFLECT:

1. What did you learn about the other companion animal projects?
2. Did you find out more about other types of animals your family might want to consider as pets?
3. How does it make you feel to know you are helping match families to the perfect pet?
4. How do you think your presentation/game will influence pets and families?

APPLY:

Matching pets to owners can be a rewarding way to help people pick the right animal for their family. Just like understanding the rules of a contest you enter, it is also important to know how to care for a pet before bringing it into your home. It is your responsibility as a pet owner to make sure you have animals you can care for and meet the needs of. Now that you have taken a companion animals 4-H project you can help other families pick the perfect pet. As responsible pet owners, help these families learn about what they need to keep their pets happy and what pet personality best matches their family. Remember, it's not just matching the type of pet a family wants that's important, it's also their ability to make an informed, responsible decision in choosing an animal.



Character Connection: Companion Animals

Activity: Therapy Animals

DO:

Cats, dogs and horses all make great therapy animals. Use your companion animal for good by training your pet to be a therapy animal. Therapy animals are trained to be relaxed around groups of people and to obey their owners in new situations. Any animal used for therapy can be used in nursing homes, hospitals, schools and retirement homes to brighten the day of the residents. Contact your local therapy animal organization to find out what you need to do to train your animal to work in therapy. As you train your animal, keep in mind that it will be responsible for making others happy and showing them that people in the community care for them.

After you train your pet, find a local nursing home, day care, school, or hospital that will allow you and your pet to visit. As you share your animal with others, talk to them about why you chose to train your animal for use in therapy. Listen to their stories about why they appreciate your gesture and what your visits mean to them. Set up a schedule with the organization when you can bring your animal back and share more time with the residents and students.

REFLECT:

1. How does sharing your animals with others, particularly those who are sick and elderly, make you feel?
2. What did you notice about your pet while you were volunteering?
3. Can you think of other ways you and your pet can make a difference in your community?

APPLY:

Therapy animals have been proven to help people who are sick feel better and recover faster. Almost everyone enjoys having animals around and being around new environments and people is good for your pet. Now that your pet is a therapy animal, what are some other ways you and your pet can help in your community? Pets are also used for search and rescue and to catch people breaking the law. Next time you have the opportunity to try something new with your animal, remember that sharing your animal with others shows them you care about both them and your pet.

