

Acquiring Animal Care Materials

A trainer or coach approaches you about some staff members' requests to collect materials related to a new interest in their classroom—animal care. Brainstorm how you would work with the trainer or coach to help staff acquire play materials for this interest.

Below we offer some suggestions, however, the exact materials will vary based upon the age group exhibiting this interest and the policies within your program.

Ask staff, trainer, or coach to make sure they have looked through materials already in your program (e.g., in shared storage or that they could borrow from another classroom). Materials such as these may already exist in your program and could be appropriate:

- Age-appropriate books about animals and animal care
- A scale for weighing toy animals
- Plastic or stuffed animals
- Clipboards to write down information about the animals
- Doctor office props—such as play stethoscopes, thermometers, bandages, etc.
- Real-life pictures of animals or animal care (perhaps downloaded and printed from the computer)
- Blocks, art or recycled materials to make cages, beds, or barns for the animals
- Poster board or large paper to help with math or graphing ideas related to this interest (e.g. animals that have fur, or favorite animals in the class)

Ask for donations (or delegate this task to a trainer, coach, or staff member)

- Call local veterinary clinics or pet supply stores and see if there are materials they could donate, such as nonlatex gloves, blank copies of record forms they use for animal care, cleaned, empty containers of food or medicine they give to animals, animal toys, brushes, leashes or collars. If you do not have a scale, you could ask around to see if a local business could donate one for a day.
- Ask families to donate animal-related items—cleaned, empty containers of animal food or medicine, old collars, leashes or brushes they no longer use for their own pets, old dog or cat bowls, new or used stuffed animal toys, old doctor-related toys.
- Call local zoo to see if they would be willing to bring some real animals by to demonstrate animal care, or arrange a field trip.
- Don't forget the library! You can check out age-appropriate books about animals and animal care. Many libraries offer special accounts for teaching and childcare staff, so check with your local library.

Remember, as with all donations, it will be important to carefully inspect items before they have contact with children. For plush toys, you will want to appropriately wash them to make sure they are sanitary and safe for children's use.

Possible purchases

Once you have exhausted other avenues, you could consider making some purchases or letting staff, trainers, or coaches, make some small purchases (especially if you offer small classroom budgets):

- Durable plastic animals
- Additional doctor-related dramatic play items
- A class pet and relevant care materials
- Pet bowls, brushes, leashes or other supplies (these can normally be found for fairly cheap at “dollar” stores or pet supply stores)
- A scale
- Additional age-appropriate books on animals or animal care