



Roanoke Valley SPCA

OverPOMpulation Lesson and Activity

Focus: Show students how quickly populations of animals can grow and lead to discussion on solutions to the pet overpopulation crisis.

Instructional Objectives: Students will be able to define overpopulation, spaying, neutering, and euthanasia age-appropriately. Students will learn how pet overpopulation occurs and understand spaying and neutering is one of the best ways to help prevent animal overpopulation and to also reduce the number of animals euthanized each year.

Environmental Objectives: Students should work cooperatively together, use materials respectfully, and be engaged in the discussion.

Introduction:

- Have students define “overpopulation”. (There are more animals that need homes than there are homes for.)

Overpopulation, in our example, means “too many animals”. (Over = too much/too many, Population = a group of people or animals).

Overpopulation = too many of a type of animal/people for the place they live in and the resources available (ie: housing, food, etc).

- How can there be too many animals when everyone loves kittens and puppies? Take guesses from the children

Examples: breeding, buying not adopting, not spaying/neutering our pets, etc.

- What happens to the animals when there are too many? Take guesses again.

Examples: They become homeless. They are sent to shelters. They might be euthanized.

- What are some other reasons animals might end up in shelters or homeless? (The aim of this question is to get the campers thinking about reasons that have nothing to do with anything the animal has done – life happened to them.)

Examples: Someone lost a job. A family can’t bring their pet with them to their new home. New baby in the home. Not knowing how to deal with behavior issues (that training classes could help with). Etc.



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- What are some things we can do to prevent overpopulation? Take guesses.

Examples: Adopt, don't buy (from a breeder or pet store), Spay and neuter.

Additional information on spaying and neutering:

- Surgeries prevent animals from having babies.
- Which operation do the females have (spay)? The males (neuter)? Spaying prevents cancers that kill 90% of cats and 50% of dogs that are not altered.
- Surgery is quick! Between 2 minutes (for small males) and 30 minutes (for large females).
- Animals spayed or neutered at our shelter get two green lines tattooed onto their bellies. Why do you think our hospital does that?

If that animal ever ends up lost/homeless again, a hospital can tell just by looking at the tummy whether s/he was altered without having to perform the operation again.

Activity:

1. Assign the campers into pairs.
2. Give one partner a brown bag filled with poms. (The other partner will cup their hands to receive the poms.)
3. Explain that each pom represents a pet, and the campers' cupped hands represent a typical home in Roanoke.
 - a. The campers with the bag of poms will pass them into their partners' hands as you tell the story.
 - b. The campers holding the poms are trying to hold all the poms in their hands without allowing them to overflow and spill to the floor.
 - c. They don't want to smash the poms either, though! Remember that they are pets!
 - d. Campers with cupped hands can hold their hands over the table so they don't spill the poms onto the floor.
4. Tell students that an unaltered (non-spayed) female cat can begin having kittens at 6 months old, and can give birth to an average of 6 kittens per litter every 2.5 months! That adds up to a lot of cats if no one is being spayed or neutered.



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5. Tell this story and have the kids follow along with their Pom-pets:

A family adopts a cat and they name her Lulu. Put 1 pom-pet into your partner's hands.

The family loves Lulu very much, but – oh no! – they didn't spay her! Lulu has her first litter of 6 kittens. Add 6 pom-pets.

After three months pass, Lulu still isn't spayed, and she has 4 more kittens. Add 4 pom-pets.

A few more months pass and it is now springtime. This is also known as "kitten season", when most cats have their babies. Lulu has 4 more kittens... and her first litter of 6 kittens is ready to have kittens. They have 5 kittens each!

How many kittens is that? ($6 \times 5 = 30 + \text{Lulu's } 4 = 34$). Add 34 pom-pets.

Several more months pass, none of the cats or kittens have been spayed, so...

- *Lulu has 6 more kittens (pause to add 6 pom-pets).*
- *5 of the cats from her first litter of kittens have 5 kittens each ($5 \times 5 = 25$) (pause to add 25 pom-pets)*
- *And her second litter of 4 kittens has 6 kittens each ($4 \times 6 = 24$) (pause to add 24 pom-pets).*

It's been one year since Lulu was adopted. How many cats are living in her home now? (100 cats!)

6. Discussion:

Can this many cats live in one home? (No!)

Is this the number of cats the family wanted to have? (No.)

Explain that unaltered cats are driven by their hormones and tend to sneak outdoors primarily in search of a mate. Mating just once can start a domino effect that can result, as they just witnessed, in dozens or even thousands of animals.



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7. All pairs place their poms onto center of their table. We need to find homes for all these cats and kittens, since the family only wanted their one cat, Lulu.

Where can the rest cats and kittens go? Take ideas. As campers give ideas, have them place some of their pom-pets in the designated bucket.

- **Animal Shelters:** they can take 20 pom-pets (80 remaining)
- **Private rescues or Foster homes:** they can take about a dozen pom-pets (68 remaining)
- **Have friends, family or neighbors adopt:** 8 pom-pets are adopted (60 remaining) Lulu's neighbors already have the number of pets they want... in fact, a couple of them adopted 2 of the kittens you just sent to the shelter (move 2 pom-pets over)

8. Where else can the pom-pets go?

Animal Care Adventures:

There is just nowhere else for them to go. These animals will not be able to find a home. We want every cat and dog to have a home. This is why spaying and neutering is so important. If a camper does bring up "putting to sleep", you can agree that unfortunately sometimes that does happen, and move on.

Veterinary Science:

Explain (if not already mentioned) "putting to sleep" or euthanasia. Ask campers if they know what "euthanasia" means. It means a "good death". It's ending an animal's life as kindly as possible, so they don't feel scared or pain.

Unfortunately, 4 million cats and dogs are euthanized each year in the U.S. because there are more animals than there are homes for and there is nowhere for these animals to live.

Debrief:

What can we do to help solve the problem of overpopulation?

- Spay and neuter our pets!
- Adopt, don't buy
- Share your knowledge with others so they can make informed choices



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