



## Wild Things - Droitwich

### **Pets in the setting policy**

#### **Rationale**

It is becoming increasingly recognised that animals can provide a wealth of calming, stress-reducing benefits to those who come into contact with them. There is now a range of recognised support provided by animals, ranging from physical support such as the widely recognised guide dog, to emotional support provided by a range of animals that can be stroked, petted, and give physical and emotional comfort.

Children who have experience of animals from a young age can demonstrate increased empathy towards people, animals and the natural environment. They improve their gross and fine motor skills and learn to modulate their touch and the volume of their voice.

Children who are upset or anxious can find looking at or interacting with animals to be calming and regulating. This can be effective both over the long term, and in short-term moments of higher emotions.

#### **Procedure**

Here at Wild Things – Droitwich we are passionate about providing excellent animal experiences and interactions for the children. We have a range of pets and therapy animals at our setting which the children can interact with regularly under full supervision.

We have a large number of animals available for daily interaction with the children here at our setting, and also visit other settings, farms, wildlife areas etc where the children may come in contact with different animals.

#### ***How we choose our animals***

Our animals at our setting have been carefully chosen, both in term of their species and the specific animals themselves, to make sure they are suitable for joining a busy childminding setting and that they can be interacted with safely by the children.

Our list of animals is constantly growing but at present we have:

- Chickens
- Quail
- Rabbits
- Guinea pigs
- Rats
- Tropical fish
- Stick insects
- Worms

### ***How the children interact with the animals***

Each species has its own characteristics. These are taken into account when planning interactions with the children. Interactions may include observation only, supervised stroking, holding and cuddling. School aged children may be able to interact differently with the animals than Early Years children.

The animals form a large part of our normal setting day. All need to be checked daily, and many need to be fed daily and have other routine maintenance carried out such as refreshing substrate, bedding, litter etc.

The children are able to observe many aspects of animal husbandry, and can join in where it has been risk assessed that it is safe for them to do so.

### ***What benefits do the children gain from the animals***

The children learn to use quiet voices and gentle hands with the animals, and are taught that animals can feel scared, sad, happy, playful and other emotions. The children are taught to look for different body language signs with the animals – for example a scared rat might cuddle up into a small ball whilst a scared chicken stands tall and may flap its wings.

Having animals in each area of the childminding setting means that during times of dysregulation, a child will always be able to choose to spend time watching them as part of the regulation process. Watching animals performing their natural behaviours has a known beneficial calming and regulating effect.

We talk a lot about what different animals need, which helps the children to understand about diversity, same and different, and respect.

### ***The language we use***

We love to introduce rich language in the setting, and the children will hear words such as rodent, mammal, bird. Children as young as 2 can master words such as 'corydoras', 'gourami', 'fossorial', and 'burrowing'. We use our animals to consolidate learning around colour and numbers, and for food recognition when we feed different vegetables to them. This in turn leads to us observing and identifying different plants growing in the garden as some of our animals are rather partial to particular wild leaves.

### ***Animal welfare***

The welfare of all of our animals is of the utmost importance to us. All of our animals are registered with a local vet, vaccinated and wormed in accordance with best practice and are housed in above-minimum gold standard housing. Our animals are given the space, room and freedom they need to exhibit their natural behaviours, and to join us or withdraw as they wish.

Each of our animals is checked at least once a day for illness and injury. All our animals have appropriate access to food – the needs differ between species – and all have free access to fresh water. They receive human interaction every day, and handling where it is appropriate to do so.

### **Summary**

We want to encourage our Wild Things to grow up with an interest in, understanding of and affinity for nature and to be respectful of all living things. Our animals provide a calming, relaxing environment in which the children can explore and interact with different animals, learn about and from them, discover ways to become calm during periods of dysregulation and demonstrate control over themselves as they interact with other animals and people. We provide endless opportunities to learn facts and information about animals and encourage the use of rich and varied language. We link with other areas of the curriculum such as maths, art and personal, social and emotional development.

Signature: Meg Hearne

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