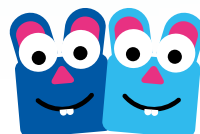




Pet Education Partnership



Children & Pets Survey 2025



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Welcome

Welcome to the Pet Education Partnership's first **Children and Pets Survey** – the UK's pioneering nationally representative study on child and pet interactions, commissioned by the Pet Education Partnership and carried out by YouGov. The survey gathered insights from 1,024 young people aged 7 to 11.

The Pet Education Partnership identified the need to conduct this research due to a major gap in literature around children's behaviours, knowledge and attitudes towards their pets. The Children and Pets Survey will allow us to learn more about our key audiences and shape our education programmes and future resources.

Gathering evidence was critical, as currently education programmes are largely reliant on assumptions about what children need to know and understand in order to safeguard both themselves and the animals they share their lives with.

By leveraging evidence-based insights from the Children and Pets Survey, we have gained a deeper understanding of young learners' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards pets. This will enable us to more effectively address the educational needs of children and target key animal welfare issues within this demographic.

Our aim is to repeat the Children and Pets Survey biennially to allow us to track changes in understanding, attitudes and behaviours and to refine and perfect our education programmes to maximise their effectiveness.

Who are we?

Pet Education Partnership

The Pet Education Partnership (PEP) is a collaboration between eight of the leading animal welfare charities in the UK: Blue Cross, Cats Protection, Dogs Trust, PDSA, RSPCA, SSPCA, USPCA and Woodgreen.

Our shared goal is to inspire and shape lifelong, compassionate, and informed attitudes toward animals by providing accessible animal welfare education to every child in the UK aged 5 to 11.

We envision a future where every animal is respected, understood, and cared for, allowing them to live their best possible lives.

Together, we are united, adaptable, committed, and focused on meeting the needs of those we serve. By pooling our knowledge, expertise, and resources, we ensure consistency and alignment in our efforts.

We believe that by working together, we can achieve the changes we seek – changes that would be out of reach if we acted alone. All of our partners are dedicated to PEP's long-term vision, which will help us reach our mutual goals.

As a collaboration we place the needs of children and educators at the heart of everything we do.

YouGov

YouGov is an international online research data and analytics technology group.

Their mission is to offer unparalleled insight into what the world thinks.

Methodology

In conjunction with YouGov, our research surveyed a representative group of 1,024 children living in the UK, to better understand children’s experience of and attitude towards pets.

All children took part between the 7th and 29th of November 2024 through their parents’ involvement in YouGov panelling. Respondents were approximately representative of UK demographics in relation to age, gender, and region. Accordingly, the most children lived in England (85%), with respondents also from Scotland (7%), Wales (4%), and Northern Ireland (3%). Many children (81%) lived in urban neighbourhoods, with the remaining in town/fringe (7%) or rural (12%) areas*.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) was used to identify the degree of deprivation of locations in which children lived. Deprivation is presented across:

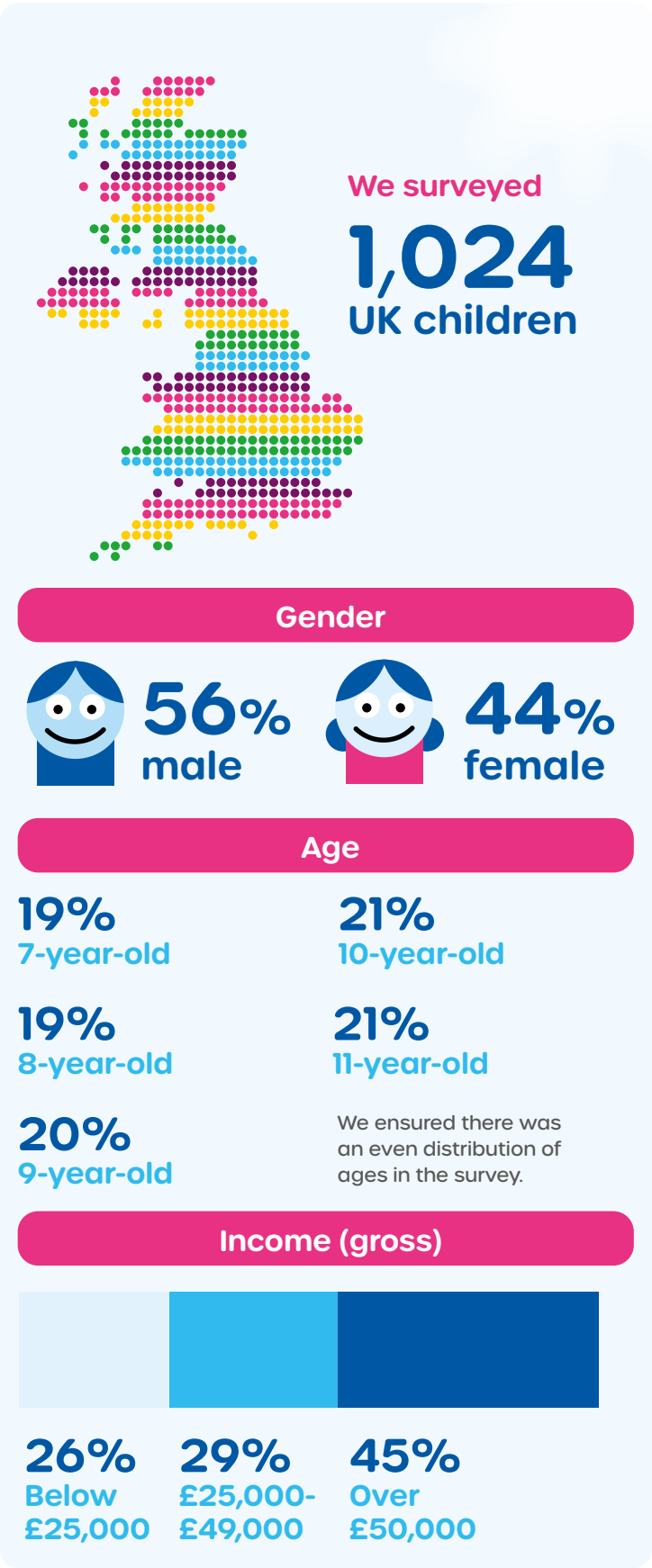
IMD 1-3	most deprived areas	30% sample
IMD 4-7	medium deprived areas	42% sample
IMD 8-10	least deprived areas	28% sample

Data was also collected on gross household income. Approximately 45% of the parents of the children surveyed reported a gross income of £50,000 or more a year, 29% reported a gross income of between £25,000 and £49,000 a year, and 26% reported a gross income of less than £25,000**.

Percentages throughout the report are rounded to the nearest whole number. Only statistically significant differences are reported in the text.

Where shown, ‘n’ indicates the number of children who answered that particular question.

*Area type defined by Office of National Statistics (ONS) based on population density
**Note that all demographic information was not collected for all respondents. This includes household income (n = 224 missing responses), location type (n = 82 missing responses) and child gender (n = 67 missing responses)



Pet ownership

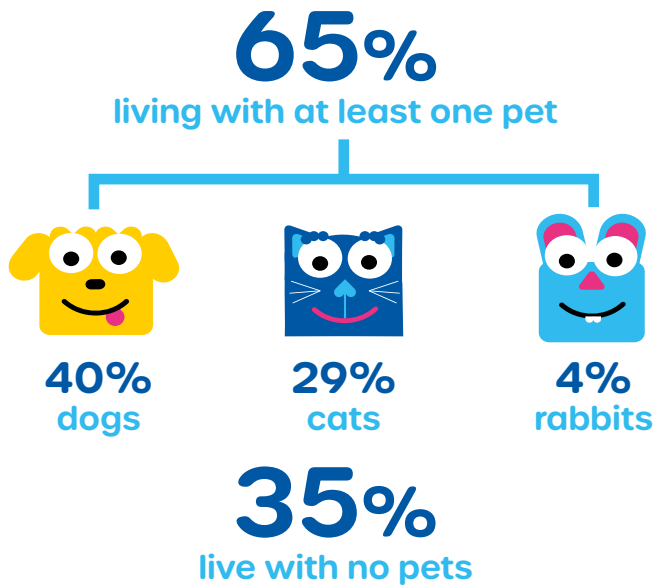
According to the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2024, an estimated 51% of UK adults own a pet. This includes approximately 10.6 million dogs, 10.8 million cats and 800,000 rabbits.

Of the children surveyed, 65% (n = 671) reported living with at least one pet in the household, and the remaining 35% (n = 353) reported living with no household pets.

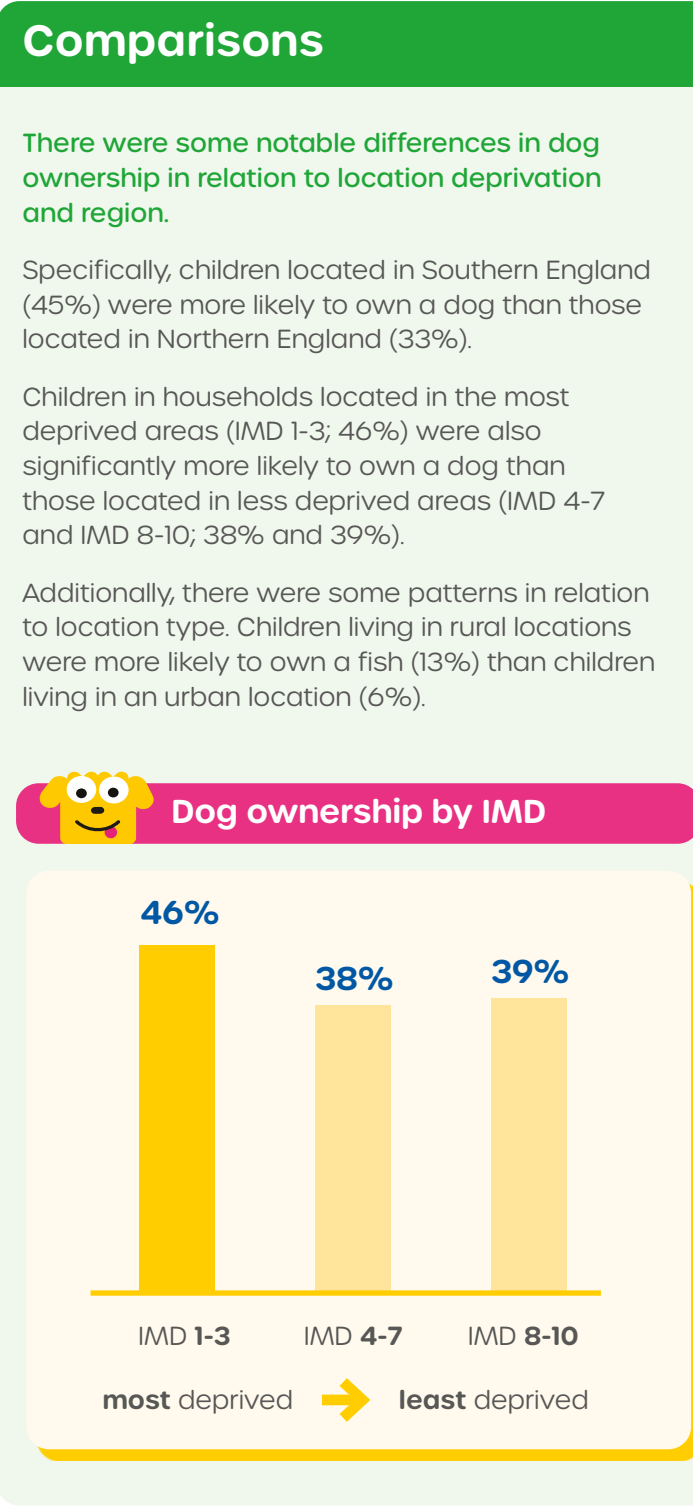
The most commonly reported pets were dogs (40% of children), followed by cats (29% of children). Other reported pets included fish (7%), rabbits (4%), hamsters (3%), guinea pigs (3%), indoor birds (2%), tortoise or turtles (2%), snakes (2%), outdoor birds (2%), lizards (1%), and horses or donkeys (<1%). Children who selected ‘other’ types of pets shared a variety of animals including snails, rats, frogs, and insects.

Of the 415 dog owners, a majority (81%) lived with one dog, 16% lived with two dogs, and 3% lived with three or more. Of the 296 cat owners, a majority (67%) lived with one cat, 26% lived with two cats, and 7% lived with three or more.

More than 1 in 10 children (n = 116; 11.3%) reported living in a household with both a dog(s) and a cat(s).



17% of children live with pets other than dogs, cats or rabbits



Pet welfare needs

Why it matters for children

Whether you're considering getting a pet, visiting animals or teaching children about kindness and responsibility, understanding these frameworks:

- ✓ Helps young learners to develop empathy skills
- ✓ Encourages responsible care and respect for living things
- ✓ Connects to broader lessons about health, rights and wellbeing

The **5 Welfare Needs** are set out in the Animal Welfare Acts 2006.

These are basic legal and moral responsibilities when caring for any animal. They help ensure an animal can live a healthy, happy life:



Need for a suitable environment

Animals need a safe, comfortable, and suitable place to live. This includes proper shelter, enough space, appropriate temperature, and a place to rest or hide.



Need for a suitable diet

Animals need the right amount of healthy and suitable food, and access to fresh, clean water at all times..



Need to exhibit normal behaviour

Animals need the opportunity to behave in ways that are natural to them, such as digging, playing, climbing and scratching, and to have choices about when and where to do that.



Need to be housed with or apart from other animals

Some animals are social and need companions, while others prefer being alone and to be given space. It is important to understand what's right for each species and individual.



Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury, and disease

Animals need protection from pain, harm and suffering, with the right help from people when needed.



The **Five Domains Model** expands on the 5 Needs and is often used by professionals to assess not just an animal's physical state but also their emotional well-being (**mental state**).

Based on the above, is the animal likely to feel happy, relaxed, curious, or secure? Or are they showing signs of fear, frustration, boredom, or distress?

Research findings

Children were presented with 9 statements that represented the welfare needs, and were asked to consider how important it was for pets to receive them.

Very important Somewhat important Not very important Not at all important

These included:

A safe and comfortable place to live with enough space



The right type of food and fresh, clean water



The choice to have human company and friendship when they want it



The chance to do things that are enjoyable and important to them



To be kept healthy by their owner



To feel happy and relaxed most of the time



Regular exercise



To be regularly seen by a vet



The choice to have animal company and friendship when they want it



A large majority of children (85-95%) felt that all the stated welfare needs relating to pets were at least somewhat important.

Children were most likely to feel that it was important pets received 'A safe and comfortable place to live with enough space' (95% felt important, 4% felt not important, and 2% didn't know) and 'The right type of food and fresh, clean water' (93% felt important, 5% felt not important, 2% didn't know).

Children were least likely to feel that it was important pets received 'The choice to have animal company and friendship when they want it' (85% felt important, 10% felt not important, 5% didn't know) and 'To be seen regularly by a vet' (87% felt important, 10% felt not important, and 3% didn't know).



Rabbits are companion animals and require the company of other rabbits for their wellbeing.

Comparisons

Children who lived with a pet at home were significantly more likely to view almost all welfare needs as more important than those who did not.

The survey results are illustrated to the right.

Pet owner Non-pet owner

Female respondents were also significantly more likely to rate many of the welfare needs as important, in comparison to male respondents.

There were also some differences in relation to household income, but only for specific welfare needs. For example, children from households with a gross income of less than £25k were slightly less likely to rate 'Regular exercise' and 'To feel happy and relaxed most of the time' as at least somewhat important, compared to children from households with a gross income of £50k or over (exercise as important: 83%, less than £25k; 92%, more than £50k / happy and relaxed as important: 87% less than £25k; 95%, more than £50k).

The right type of food and fresh, clean water



A safe and comfortable place to live with enough space



The chance to do things that are enjoyable and important to them



The choice to have animal company and friendship when they want it



The choice to have human company and friendship when they want it



To be kept healthy by their owner



To be regularly seen by a vet



To feel happy and relaxed most of the time



Regular exercise



Attitude to welfare needs by gender

The choice to have animal company and friendship when they want it



To feel happy and relaxed most of the time



To be kept healthy by their owner





Prior learning

1 Sourcing of pet knowledge

Children were asked about where they went to get their information about keeping pets happy and healthy. Respondents were provided with the following list of sources, and asked to select any source they use:

Parents and carers	44%
A vet/animal doctor	43%
Internet	36%
YouTube	33%
Friends	28%
Other adults in the family	25%
TV programmes	24%
Books	23%
Teacher	21%
Leaflets/magazines	11%
I don't get any information	6%
I don't know	2%
Somewhere else	1%

The most common sources of information that children reported using to learn about how to 'keep pets healthy and happy' was 'Parents and Carers' (44%) followed by a 'Vet or animal doctor' (43%). Other common sources included the 'Internet' (36%) and 'YouTube' (33%).

About 1 in 5 children (21%) reported sourcing information from 'teachers'.

Children were least likely to source information from 'Leaflets/magazines' (11%).

Only 6% of children reported that they didn't get any information about pets, and 2% shared that they didn't know.

Educators can use this insight to recognise the important role they play in teaching children about animal welfare, with approximately 1 in 5 children already turning to school for pet care information.

By embedding engaging and accurate animal welfare lessons into their planning and drawing on the curriculum-aligned materials offered by the Pet Education Partnership, teachers can further support children's understanding of how to keep pets happy and healthy.

Comparisons

Children who lived with a pet at home were significantly more likely to gather information from almost all listed sources.

The only exception were friends, other adults, teachers, and books. Although **children who lived with pets** were relatively more likely to use some of these sources more than non-pet owners, these differences were not significant.

Comparing pet owners and non-pet owners

50% pet owners asked parents and carers

34% non-pet owners asked parents and carers

50% pet owners asked a vet / animal doctor

29% non-pet owners asked a vet / animal doctor

There were also notable differences in relation to **household income**; children from households with a gross income of more than £25k were significantly more likely to source information from their parents (£25-49k, 52%; over £50k, 46%) compared to those from households with a gross income of less than £25k (37%).

Conversely, children from households with a gross income of less than £25k were more likely to source information from YouTube (43%) compared to those from a household with a gross income of more than £50k (31%). This was also reflected in relation to social deprivation; those living in the most deprived locations (IMD 1-3) were significantly more likely to report sourcing information from YouTube (43%) compared to those living in less deprived locations (IMD 4-7, 31%; IMD 8-10, 27%).

Comparing YouTube as a source for pet information by income

31% Over £50,000

39% £25,000-£49,000

43% Below £25,000

2 Trust of pet information sources

Children who reported sourcing information about pets (n = 967) were also asked which sources they believed the most. Children were allowed to pick up to three sources.

Of the listed sources, 'Vet' was rated as by far the most trustworthy source – with 53% of children making this selection. This was followed by 'Parents and Carers' (40%), and then 'Teachers' (16%) and the 'Internet' (16%).

Vet	53%
Parents and carers	40%
Teacher	16%
Internet	16%
YouTube	15%
Other adults in the family	13%
Friends	11%
Books	11%
TV programmes	10%
Leaflets/magazines	8%
Someone else	1%
I don't know	3%



Comparisons

Children's trust in various sources of knowledge about pets varied across most demographic variables.

Most notably, **children who lived with pets** were significantly more likely to select the 'Vet' (56% pet owners; 46% non-pet owners) and 'Parents and Carers' (42% pet owners; 34% non-pet owners) as trustworthy sources, compared to children who did not live with pets. Conversely, children who did not live with pets were significantly more likely to select 'I don't know' (1% pet owners, 8% non-pet owners).

Child age and gender was also associated with trust in some sources; female children were relatively more likely to select 'Books' (14% female, 9% male).

Household income also appeared related to trust in sources. Those living in a household with an income of under £25k were less likely to select 'Parents and Carers' than those living in a household with a gross income of more than £25k (£25k, 28%; £25-39k, 48%, more than £50k; 40%). Conversely, those living in a household with an income of less than £25k were more likely to select 'YouTube' than those in a household of more than £50k (less than £25k, 22%, £25-49k and more than £50k; 13%).

Finally, **location** type was associated with trust in sources. Children living in urban locations were less likely to trust 'Parents and Carers' than those living in rural locations (urban, 38%; rural, 51%). Conversely, these respondents were more likely to trust 'TV programmes' (urban, 11%; rural, 5%).

Children living in town locations were more likely to trust a 'Vet' than those living in urban locations (69% town or fringe, 51% urban).

Children living in town locations were less likely to trust 'Teachers' (town, 3%; 22% rural; urban, 16%).

Trusting a vet as the main source



56%
pet
owners

46%
non-pet
owners

Trusting parent / carer as the main source



42%
pet
owners

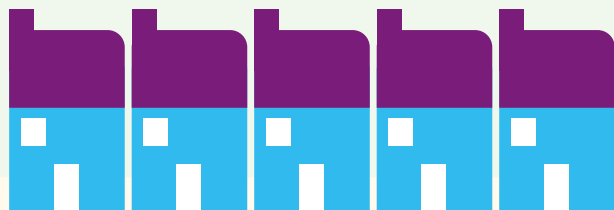
34%
non-pet
owners

Trusting teachers as the main source



19%
children under 9 yrs old
would select the teacher
compared to 14% of children
aged over 9 yrs old

Trust by location



38%
children living in urban areas
would trust parents and carers
compared to 51% of children
living in rural locations

3

Preference of pet information sources

All children were also asked how they would most like to learn about pets in the future, with the option to select up to three sources from the following list:

Watching videos	43%
Pet expert visiting school	42%
Watching TV programmes	38%
Teacher giving lessons on pets	31%
Playing a game on the internet/phone/iPad	18%
Acting out stories about pets	12%
Being given leaflets, posters, or magazines	12%
Creating leaflets, posters, or magazines	9%
Digital leaflets, posters and magazines	8%
I'm not interested in learning more about pets	5%
I don't know	4%
In another way	1%

The most popular learning methods across all children was 'Watching videos' (43%), closely followed by 'Having a pet expert come to my school assembly or classroom' (42%) and 'Watching TV programmes' (38%).

Approximately 3 in 10 children (31%) selected 'Having my teacher give lessons about pets'.

Less popular options included 'Digital leaflets' (8%) and 'Creating leaflets/posters/magazines myself' (9%).

Only 5% of children respondent that they were 'Not interested in learning more about pets'.

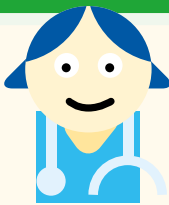
Comparisons

Children with pets at home were more likely to be interested in learning more about pets (99% pet owners; 89% non-pet owners).

These children were also significantly more likely to select 'Watching videos' (47% pet owners; 36% non-pet owners), 'Watching TV programmes' (40% pet owners, 34% non-pet owners), 'Having a pet expert come to my school assembly or classroom' (46% pet owners; 33% non-pet owners), and 'Having a teacher give lessons about pets' (33% pet owners, 27% non-pet owners).

Additionally, there were some differences in **gender**, but only for a specific source; female respondents were more likely to prefer a pet expert coming to the school than male respondents (47% female, 38% male).

Pet expert visiting school



46%
pet
owners

33%
non-pet
owners

Teacher give lessons on pets



33%
pet
owners

27%
non-pet
owners

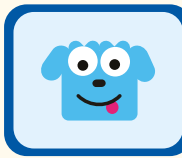
Watching videos



47%
pet
owners

36%
non-pet
owners

Watching TV programmes



40%
pet
owners

34%
non-pet
owners

Understanding of pets' ability to feel and communicate

Animals are sentient beings, which means they're capable of feeling a wide range of emotions, just like we are.

The way we act around them and the choices we make, can have a huge impact on their wellbeing. By showing them compassion, helping when they need it and giving them space when they want to be left alone, we help create a world where animals can live more comfortably, stay healthier and feel safer.

Children were asked to consider if they felt each of the following species of pets

Have feelings

For example, feel happy, excited, or sad

Can communicate with us

For example, how they make sounds (bark/meow/squeak), or how they move their body or face.

1 in 13 children didn't select any species of animal as 'having feelings' or 'able to communicate'. This includes those who shared they 'didn't know'.

Dogs



Cats



Horses or Donkeys



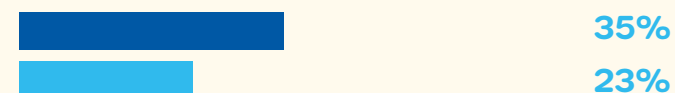
Indoor birds (parrot, budgie)



Rabbits



Guinea pigs

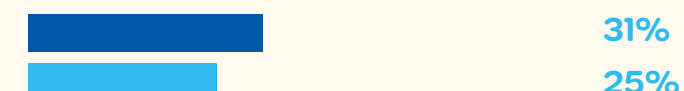


5% responded 'I don't know' for both having feelings and the ability to communicate.

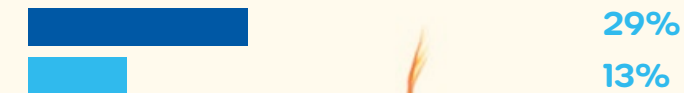
Hamsters



Outdoor birds (chicken, duck)



Tortoises and turtles



Lizards



Snakes



Fish (indoor or outdoor)



3% selected 'None of these'.

Children with pets

Pet owners were also specifically asked to consider whether their own pet (a) had feelings and (b) were able to communicate. This was in addition to considering whether their species of pet, more generally, had feelings.

Dogs



92% of children reflecting on their dogs felt that their own pet had feelings.

However, only 74% of these children felt that dogs in general had feelings.

Cats



87% of children reflecting on their cats felt that their own pet had feelings.

However, only 76% of these children felt that cats in general had feelings.

Respondents were most likely to perceive dogs (72% of children) and cats (64% of children) as having feelings. This was followed by horses or donkeys (46%) and rabbits (43%). Snakes (22%), fish (23%), and lizards (23%) were least likely to be perceived as having feelings.

Respondents were also most likely to perceive dogs (70% of children) and cats (61% of children) as being able to communicate.

This was followed by horses or donkeys (39%) and indoor birds (39%). Fish (9%) and lizards (11%) were least likely to be perceived as being able to communicate.

Overall, there was no significant difference in the proportion of children who believed the following animals both (a) have feelings and (b) can communicate: dogs, cats, indoor birds.

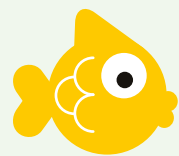
On the other hand, significantly more children perceived the following animals as having feelings than as being able to communicate: rabbits, horses or donkeys, outdoor birds, guinea pigs, hamsters, turtles, snakes, lizards, fish. The largest discrepancy was rabbits, which 43% of children perceived as having feelings, but only 25% perceived as being able to communicate.

Comparisons

Children who lived with a pet at home were more likely to perceive animals as having feelings but this was only the case for some species.

Notably, there was no difference in perception of more common or larger animals (dogs, cats, horses, etc.) as sentient between children who lived or didn't live with pets, but there were differences for smaller species (lizards, snakes, hamsters, etc.).

A significantly higher proportion of pet owners felt that snakes had feelings (pet owners, 25%; non-pet owners 17%). This same pattern was evident for lizards, with pet owners more likely to perceive them as having feelings (pet-owners, 26%; non-pet owners, 19%).



Additionally, pet owners were more likely to perceive turtles/tortoises and fish as having feelings

One of the possible drivers for these effects is that children who own these specific pets are more likely to perceive them as sentient.

Therefore, we also looked at perception of sentience by species owned.

We further broke children down into categories by what pets they reported living with. This included: **Dog owners** (n = 419); **Cat owners** (n = 296); **Reptile, bird, or fish owners** (n = 125); **Small mammal owners** (n = 91); **non-pet owners** (n = 352).

Some patterns in ownership are noted below:



Dog owners

Children living with dogs were no more likely to perceive any animals (including dogs) as having feelings or being able to communicate than other owner categories. Notably, dog owners were the least likely group to perceive cats as being able to communicate.



Cat owners

Children living with cats were significantly more likely to perceive cats as having feelings and being able to communicate, compared to all other owner categories. Cat owners were also significantly more likely to perceive horses or donkeys, snakes, lizards, and fish as having feelings.

72% of cat owners believe cats can communicate compared to 58% of dog owners



Bird, reptile and snake owners

Owners of birds, reptiles, or snakes were significantly more likely to perceive these animals as having feelings than all owner categories.

Notably, they were more likely to perceive rabbits and guinea pigs as being able to communicate. However, they were less likely than small mammal owners to say that rabbits, hamsters, or guinea pigs are able to communicate.

They were equally as likely as small mammal owners to say that horses or donkeys are able to communicate.



Small mammal owners

Owners of small mammals were significantly more likely to perceive these animals as having feelings and being able to communicate than almost all owner categories.

Notably, they were also least likely to perceive dogs as having feelings.

37% of small mammal owners believe rabbits can communicate compared to 25% of dog owners

Perception of dogs having feelings



75% female children



69% male children

Perception of rabbits having feelings



49% female children



39% male children

Belief that dogs can communicate



75% female children



67% male children

Belief that rabbits can communicate



29% female children



21% male children

Comparing pet and non-pet owners



26% of pet owners perceive lizards to have feelings compared to 19% of children who didn't own a pet



13% of pet owners perceive snakes to be able to communicate compared to 8% of children who didn't own a pet



Gender and age were also associated with the perception of pets as able to feel and communicate. Female children were significantly more likely than male children to believe that dogs, cats, horses or donkeys, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, snakes, and lizards had feelings. Children 9 years or older were significantly more likely than children under 9 years old to believe that horses or donkeys, indoor birds, guinea pigs, and hamsters had feelings.

Additionally, belief in animal sentience differed by household location. Children living in most deprived locations (IMD 1-3) were significantly less likely to believe that all species had feelings than children living in least deprived areas (IMD 8-10).

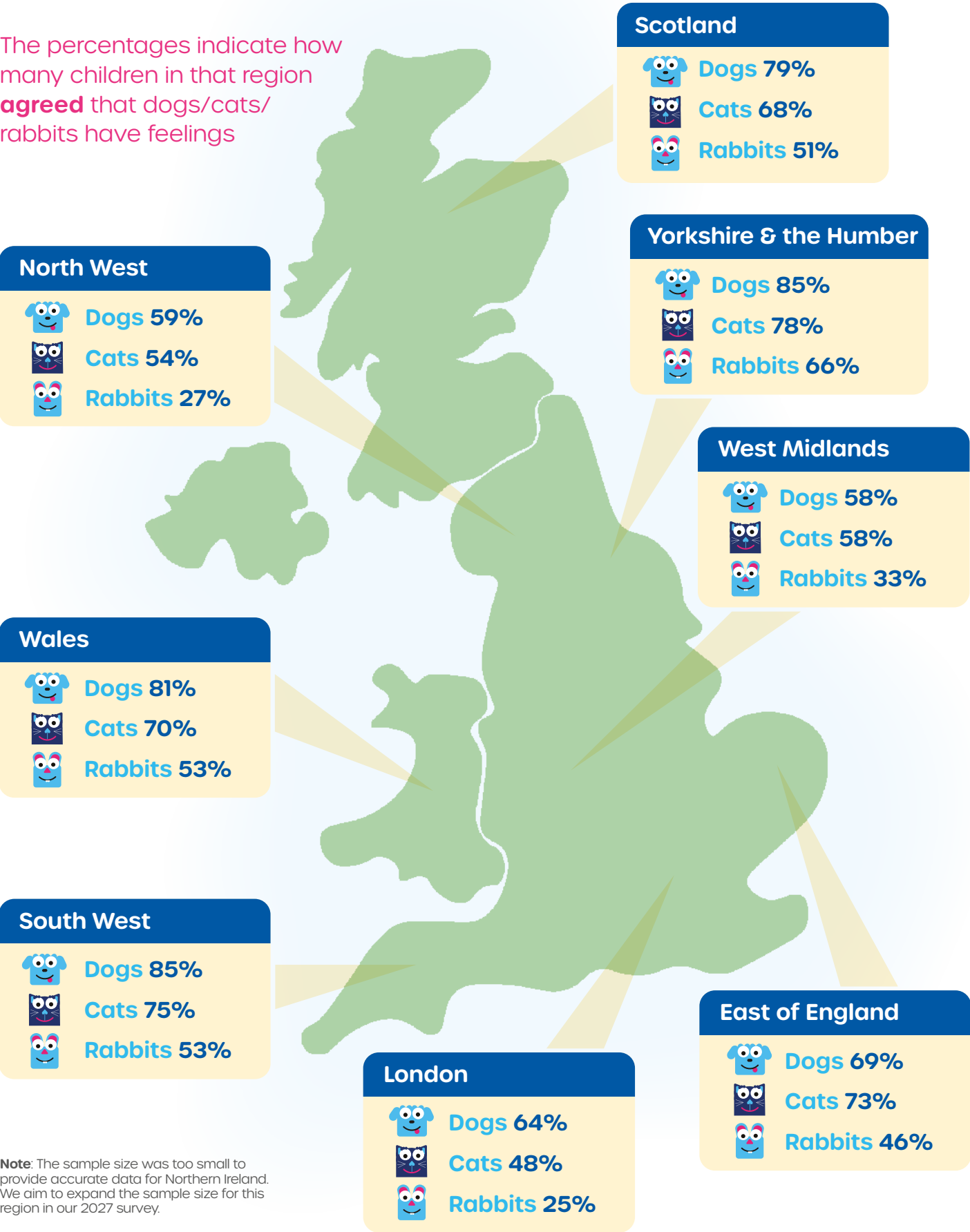
This was also reflected in (1) location type: children living in urban locations were significantly less likely to believe that many species (hamsters, rabbits, horses or donkeys, cats, and dogs) had feelings than those living in rural locations and (2) geographic region: children living in London and North West England were significantly less likely to believe that many species (cats, dogs, fish, rabbits, hamsters, snakes, outdoor birds, lizards and guinea pigs) had feelings than those living in other regions.

Markedly, children living in Yorkshire and Humber and South West England were most likely to believe that many species had feelings.



Children’s understanding of pets’ ability to have feelings by region

The percentages indicate how many children in that region **agreed** that dogs/cats/rabbits have feelings



Note: The sample size was too small to provide accurate data for Northern Ireland. We aim to expand the sample size for this region in our 2027 survey.

Willingness to help a pet in need



Children were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

I would want to help a pet if they looked unhappy

I would want to help a pet if they looked unwell or injured

Most children strongly agreed (58%) or agreed (30%) that they would want to help a pet who looked unwell or injured. Only 3% (n = 31) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would want to help, with the remaining neutral or unsure. Likewise, most children strongly agreed (64%) or agreed (26%) that they would want to help a pet who looked unhappy. Only 2% (n = 20) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would want to help, with the remaining neutral or unsure.



Comparisons

Children who lived with a pet were significantly more likely to strongly agree that they would want to help a pet that looked unhappy (67%) than children who did not live with an animal (42%).

Likewise, **children who lived with a pet** were significantly more likely to strongly agree that they would want to help a pet that looked unwell or injured (71%) than children who did not live with an animal (51%).

Children who lived in an urban **location** were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they would want to help an animal that looked unhappy (87%) than those in town/fringe areas or rural areas (94%). However, this difference was not significant for wanting to help an animal that looked unwell or injured.

Female children were also more likely than male children to agree that they would want to help a pet that looked unhappy (92% female; 86% male) or a pet that looked unwell or injured (93% female; 88% male)



Negative experiences with pets

66% of children reported having some kind of negative encounter with a pet

All children were asked about any negative encounters with pets they had experienced. Specifically, children were asked to think about whether any of the following had happened to them:

A dog jumped up at me	29%
A pet scratched me	27%
A dog or cat growled at me	25%
A pet frightened me	21%
A pet nipped me*	19%
A pet chased me	13%
A pet hissed at me**	12%
A pet knocked me over	9%
A pet kicked me***	3%
Other	1%
I don't know/I can't remember	5%
I don't want to say	5%
None of these have happened	24%

* a nip is a small, light, or gentle bite that doesn't break the skin/cause bleeding

** for example a cat, snake, or lizard

*** for example a donkey or horse

Approximately one quarter of children (24%) shared that they had never had any type of negative experience. On the other hand, 29% of children responded that 'A dog jumped up at me', 27% responded that 'A pet scratched me', and 25% reported that 'A dog or cat has growled at me'.

Children who reported any of the above experiences (n = 678) were asked to share more detail about what happened. For those who had experienced multiple scenarios, they were asked to think about the most recent time. These additional details included: the type of pet involved in the experience, whose pet it was, and how many times this had happened.

Pet involved in negative experience



73%
a dog



16%
a cat

39% A pet I know (family or friend)

30% A pet I don't know

27% A pet I live/lived with

Type of pet

Almost three quarters of children (73%) reported that the animal was a dog, and 16% reported a cat. The remaining selected other animals including hamster, rabbit, fish, guinea pig, horse/donkey, fish, and outdoor bird.

For those that reported a negative experience with a dog, the most common experiences were 'jumped up' at me, 'frightened me', 'growled at me' and 'scratched me'. For those that reported a negative experience with a cat, the most selected instances were 'hissed at me' and 'scratched me'.

Owner of pet

Of children who reported a negative experience, they were most likely to indicate that the pet was 'A pet I know (family or friends' pet)' (39%), followed by 'A pet I don't know (a stranger's pet)' (30%), and 'A pet that I live with or used to live with' (27%)

Frequency of experience

Of the children who reported any of the above experiences, 1 in 4 shared that it had happened more than two times (25%). 61% shared it had happened 1 or 2 times, and the remaining said they didn't know or couldn't remember.

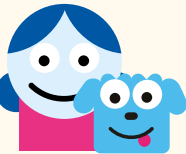
Comparisons

Children living with pets in the household were relatively more likely to report experiencing many of the above encounters. This included 'a pet scratched me' (31% pet owners, 19% non-pet owners) and 'a pet nipped me' (22% pet owners, 13% non-pet owners) among others.

There were also differences in likelihood of negative encounters by **gender** and **social deprivation**, but only for certain items. Specifically, female respondents were more likely than male respondents to select 'A dog jumped up at me' (34% female; 26% male) and 'A pet scratched me' (32% female, 24% male). Those in least deprived areas (IMD 8-10) were more likely than those in most deprived areas (IMD 1-3) to select 'A dog jumped up at me' (35%, IMD 8-10; 25% IMD 1-3), 'A pet nipped me' (25%, IMD 8-10; 15%, IMD 1-3) or 'A dog/cat growled at me' (22% IMD 1-3, 29% IMD 8-10).

Notably, there were also some interesting differences by **demographics** as to the owner of the pet involved in the negative encounter. Of children who reported such encounter, those from households with an income of under £25,000 were more likely to report an experience with 'A pet I don't know (strangers' pet)' (36%) than those from households with a gross income of £25-49k (25%) or £50k+ (28%). Conversely, these respondents from lower income households were less likely to report an experience with 'A pet that I live with or used to live with' (18%) than those from an income of £25-49k (34%) or £50k+ (32%).

A dog jumped up at me

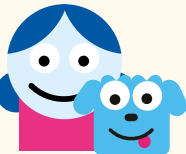


31%
pet
owners



24%
non-pet
owners

A pet scratched me



31%
pet
owners



19%
non-pet
owners

A pet nipped me



22%
pet
owners



13%
non-pet
owners

Bite experiences with pets*

All children were asked if they had ever been bitten by a pet – including a pet at home, a family's pet, or a stranger's pet.

About 1 in 5 children surveyed (21%) shared that they had been bitten by a pet (10% by a pet they live with, 8% by a friend or family's pet, and 6% by a stranger's pet). The remaining respondents shared that they had never been bitten (64%), that they didn't know or couldn't remember (8%), or that they didn't want to share if they had been bitten (7%).

All children who were bitten by pets (n = 218) were also asked to indicate what type of pet it was that bit them. The most common response was a dog (44%), followed by a cat (27%).



64%
of children have never
been bitten by a pet



10%
of children have been
bitten by a pet they
live with

Children who had been bitten by pets



44%
of those who had been
bitten were bitten by a dog



27%
of those who had been
bitten were bitten by a cat

8% of children had been bitten by a hamster. 6% had been bitten by a rabbit. 3% had been bitten by a guinea pig. 2% were bitten by a lizard.

* A bite is defined as breaking the skin and causing bleeding

Comparisons

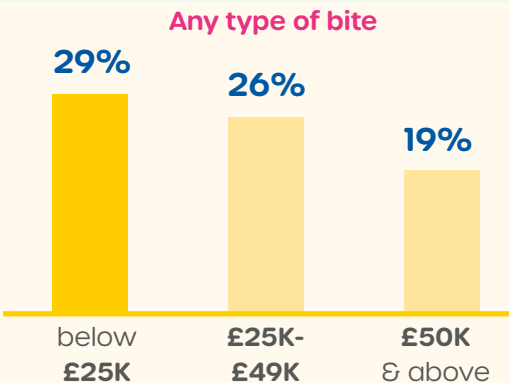
Children from households with a gross income of less than £25k were more likely to have been bitten by a pet (29%) than those from households with a gross income of £50k or more (19%).

This was also reflected in **social deprivation**: children living in the most deprived areas (IMD 1-3) were more likely to have been bitten by a pet (26%) compared to 15% living in the least deprived areas (IMD 8-10).

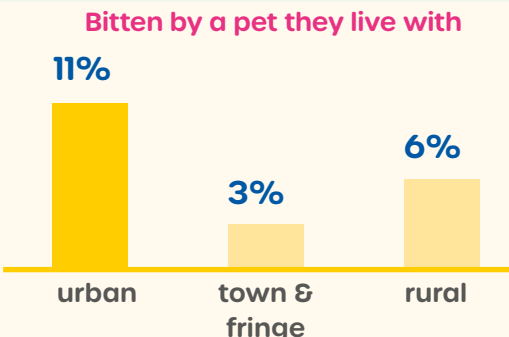
There was also a difference in **location** type. Children living in an urban location were more likely to have been bitten by a pet they live with (11%) than those in town (3%) or rural (6%) locations.

Finally, **children living with pets** were more likely to report being bitten by a pet (26%) than children not living with pets (13%). Interestingly, those not living with pets were much more likely to indicate that they didn't know, couldn't remember, or didn't want to share their bite experiences (23%) than children living with pets (9%).

Bite experiences by income



Bite experiences by location



Children's experience of dog bites

Children who reported being bitten by a dog (9% of all children, n = 97) were asked to share additional information about their experience. This included how many times they had been bitten, what they were doing before the (most recent) bite, and what (if any) medical action was taken to care for the bite.

Only 6% of children who had been bitten by a dog reported being bitten multiple times, however, almost half (47%) indicated that they didn't know, couldn't remember, or didn't want to share.

More than half of all children (63%) who had been bitten by a dog shared that they saw a doctor for the bite.

49% shared that they saw a doctor the same day and 7% sharing that they saw a doctor and stayed in the hospital overnight.

Children were asked to think about what they were doing before the bite occurred ("What were you doing before they bit you? We're just trying to understand what happened, remember your answers will be kept anonymous). They were allowed to select as many options as applied. The most common activity before a dog bite was playing with the dog (27%). Other common occurrences included picking up the dog (18%), feeding the dog (16%), and stroking the dog (15%). Children also reported sitting near the dog – both away from their bed (16%) and near their bed (9%). Only 10% of children indicated they weren't doing anything with or near the dog before the bite occurred.

What was the child doing before being bitten by the dog?

27% children were playing with the dog



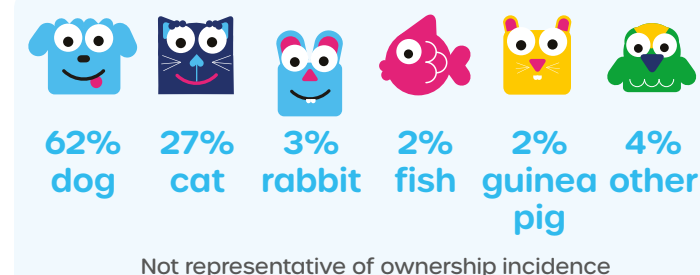
Pet care and learning at home



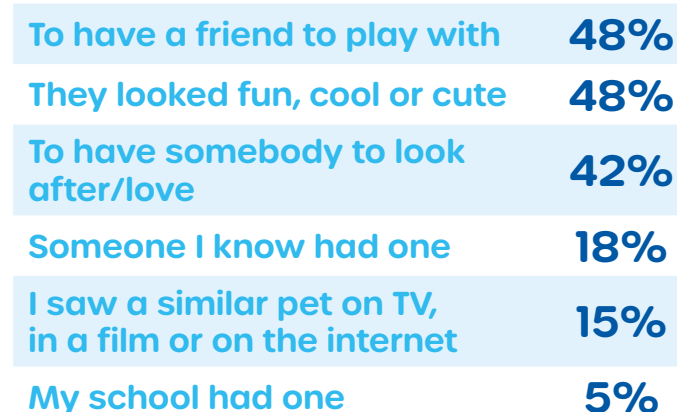
1 Acquiring pets

All pet owning children were asked to think about their pet when responding to a series of questions about pet ownership. If children lived with multiple pets, they were asked to think about the pet whose birthday was coming up next.

Of the 672 pet owners, children reflected on the following species:



Thinking of their chosen pet, children were queried as to if they had asked their parents to get the pet. Of these pet owners, more than 1 in 3 said that they asked 'a lot' (36%) and 29% asked sometimes. 21% of children said that they didn't ask at all, and 9% said that they didn't ask because the pet was in the house before they were born. The remaining 6% said that they didn't know or couldn't remember. Of the children who asked for their pet, they were asked why they wanted them. Children could choose from the following reasons:



Children could also select 'Other' (6%), 'I don't remember' (9%) or 'I didn't want a pet' (1%)

The most common reason that pet owners selected was 'to have a friend to play with' (48%) and 'they looked fun, cool, or cute' (48%). Another popular reason was to have someone to look after/love (42%). Less common reasons were 'someone I knew had one' (18%), 'seeing one on tv/film/etc' (15%) and 'because school had one' (5%).

Comparisons

There were some notable differences in whether children had asked for pets by location.

Children **living in more deprived areas** were more likely to have asked for a pet than children in less deprived areas (73% IMD 1-3; 59% IMD 4-7; 63% IMD 8-10). Likewise, children in urban areas were more likely to have asked for a pet than children in rural or town areas (68% urban; 48% rural).

Children reflecting on their dogs were more likely to have asked for their pet than children reflecting on their cats (68% dog owners; 58% cat owners). However, children reflecting on their cats were also more likely to share that the cat was living in the house before they were born (14% cat; 8% dog). Markedly, children reflecting on dogs were also more likely than cat owners to report that they wanted their pet because they had seen 'a similar pet on TV, in a film, or on the internet' (19% dog; 9% cat).

There were also differences in the reasons children asked for their pet by **location** and species. Children living in urban locations were more likely than children living in rural locations to want a pet because they 'looked fun, cool or cute' (52% urban; 26% rural) and 'to have a friend to play with' (51% urban; 39% rural). Children in rural locations were more likely to want the pet for 'Other' reasons (13% rural; 5% urban).

I saw a similar pet on TV, in a film or on the Internet (e.g. YouTube)



To have a friend to play with



Someone I know had one





2 Enjoying pets

Children living with pets were also asked what they enjoyed about their pets. Provided with the list of options below, they could select as many as they liked:

They are cute and cool	70%
Having a pet to look after/love	66%
Having a pet friend to play with	62%
Taking pictures of their pet	46%
My friends think I'm cool because of their pet	21%
Dressing up their pet	18%

More than half of all children shared that they enjoyed their pet because they are 'cute and cool' (70%), to 'look after/love' (66%), and because they are 'a pet friend to play with' (62%). About half said they like taking pictures with the pet (46%). Less common answers included 'my friends think I'm cool' because of the pet (21%) and 'dressing up' their pet (18%). Less than 1% of children said they didn't enjoy their pet.

Comparisons

There were few differences in enjoyment of pets by demographics.

Female children were more likely to select the item 'Having a pet to look after/love' than male respondents (72% female; 62% male). Additionally, those from most deprived areas (IMD 1-3) were more likely to enjoy their pet because 'their friends think they are cool' because of the pet (29%) compared to those from least deprived areas (IMD 8-10) (16%).

There were also differences in response by **species** of animal. Specifically, children reflecting on dogs were more likely to select 'dressing up' their pet, and 'my friends think I'm cool' because of their pet than cat owners.

What children enjoy about their pets

Dressing up their pet



11%
cat owners



22%
dog owners

My friends think I'm cool



12%
cat owners



26%
dog owners

3 Time alone with pets

Children were asked to think about their chosen pet and indicate how often they are left alone with them without a grown up.

70% of children shared they were left alone with their pet at least once a week (39% every day, 32% once a week or more). 12% of children said they were left alone less than once a week, and 13% shared they were never left alone. The remaining 5% were unsure.

How often children are left alone with their pet

Every day	39%
2-6 days a week	23%
Once a week	8%
1-3 times a month	3%
Less often	9%
Never	13%
Don't know	5%

Comparisons

Children under 9 years old were less likely to be left alone with their pet everyday (34%) than children 9 years or older (42%).

Children reflecting on their cats were more likely to be left alone with their pet everyday (47%) than children with dogs (36%).

How often children are left alone with their pet (by age)

Every day



34%
under 9
years old

42%
over 9
years old

Never



17%
under 9
years old

11%
over 9
years old



Caring for pets

Pet owning children were asked to select what activities they do for their pet from the following list:

I play with my pet	77%
I give my pet cuddles	70%
I give my pet food and water	67%
I groom my pet/brush their fur	46%
I take my pet for a walk with an adult	42%
I train my pet or teach them tricks	37%
I check whether my pet is unwell	33%
I clean up after my pet*	31%
I give my pet their medicine	18%
I give my pet the opportunity to exercise	12%
I give my pet the opportunity to exercise outside their home**	3%
I don't do any of these	1%

* for example, poop scooping, cleaning their home

** for example, letting them in the garden, a run

Overall, 98% of children with pets shared that they did at least some sort of interaction/caring for their pets. More than three quarters of children (77%) said that they played with their pet, 70% cuddled their pet, and 67% give their pet food and water.

Comparisons

There was little difference in pet care across demographics, even after accounting for species owned.

Among children who answered questions about their cat, the most common activities reported included playing with their pet (82%), giving their pet cuddles (79%), and giving their pet food and water (67%). Likewise, among children living with dogs, the most common activities also included playing with their pet (80%), giving their pet cuddles (73%), and giving their pet food and water (69%). Many children living with dogs (68%) also shared that they take their dog for a walk with an adult.

What children do for their pets

Groom their pet



53%
cat
owners



47%
dog
owners

Train or teach their pet tricks



26%
cat
owners



45%
dog
owners

Give their pet cuddles



79%
cat
owners



73%
dog
owners



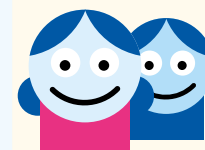
Children without pets

Children who lived in a house without pets were asked what sort of activities they did for other people's pets. Once again, these activities were included in a list and children were allowed to select as many as applied.

69% of respondents indicated that they did some type of activity for other people's pets. The highest proportion of respondents indicated that they 'played with' another person's pet (48%), that they give another person's pet 'cuddles' (35%), and that they give another person's pet 'food and water' (26%).

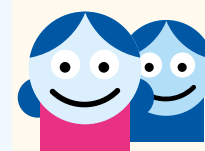
12% of respondents said that they didn't do any of the activities for pets and 7% shared that they never see pets.

What non pet-owning children do for other people's pets



48%
play with
the pet

35%
give the pet
cuddles



12%
don't do
anything

7%
never see
pets

Comparisons

There was little difference in pet care across demographics, particularly after accounting for pet species.

However, **female** children were more likely than male children to report playing with other owners' pets (56% female children, 42% male children), giving other owners' pets cuddles (46% female children, 30% male children), and cleaning up after other owners' pets (9% female children, 2% male children).

What non pet-owning children do for other people's pets by gender

Playing with other owner's pets



56%
female
children



42%
male
children

Cleaning up after other owner's pets



9%
female
children



2%
male
children



67%
of children
give their pet
food and
water

5 Lessons about pets

Pet-owning children were asked what they had learned about how to behave around their chosen pet. They were provided with the following list and asked to choose as many lessons as they liked:

To be kind and touch them gently	74%
To give them space when they are eating	58%
To give them space when they are sleeping	57%
To notice when their pet wants to be left alone and needs space	56%
To give their pet lots of cuddles	54%
To not take things (toys, food) away from their pet	44%
To tell their pet off if they do something they shouldn't*	30%
I have been taught something else	4%
I have not been taught anything about how to behave with pets	2%

* for example, shout at them

Almost three quarters of pet owners (74%) shared that they had been taught to 'be kind and touch them gently'.

The other most commonly reported lessons were

'To give them space when eating' (58%),

'To give them space when sleeping' (57%),

and

'To notice when they want to be left alone' (56%).

Comparisons

There were few differences in lessons taught by demographics of pet owners.

However, children from households with a gross **income** of less than £25k were less likely to be taught 'to be kind and touch [their pet] gently' (62%) than pet owners from households with a gross income of £50k or more (79%), and 'to notice when [their pet] wants to be left alone and needs space' (income of less than £25k, 48%; income of 50k+, 60%). This same pattern, in relation to these specific lessons, were reflected in **social deprivation**. Of children living in the most deprived areas (IMD 1-3), 68% were taught 'to be kind and touch [their pet] gently,' compared with 81% of children living in the least deprived areas (IMD 8-10). Of children living in the most deprived areas (IMD 1-3), 50% were taught 'to notice when [their pet] wants to be left alone and needs space,' compared with 62% of children living in the least deprived areas (IMD 8-10).

There were also differences in lessons learned by pet **species**. Specifically, dog owners were more likely than other pet owners to have been taught: 'To not take things (toys, food) away from [name of pet]' and 'To tell [name of pet] off if they do something they shouldn't (e.g. shout at them).'

Lessons learnt about pets

To not take things (toys, food) away



38%
cat
owners



50%
dog
owners

To tell pet off if they do something they shouldn't (e.g. shout at them)



18%
cat
owners



37%
dog
owners

To be kind and touch them gently

62%	79%	68%	81%
less than	more than	IMD	IMD
£25K	£50K	1-3	8-10

Children without pets

Children without pets at home were also asked what they had been taught about how to behave around pets (in general).

Children could choose as many answers as applied from the same list below:

To be kind and touch them gently	59%
To give them space when they are eating	38%
To not take things (toys, food) away from them	35%
To give them space when they are sleeping	34%
To notice when they want to be left alone and need space	30%
To give them lots of cuddles	27%
To tell them off if they do something they shouldn't*	16%
I have been taught something else	2%
I have not been taught anything about how to behave with pets	9%

* for example, shout at them

Similar to pet-owning children, the most common lessons they had learned were 'To be kind and touch them gently' (59%) and 'To give them space when they are eating' (38%).

More than one third of non-pet owning children also reported knowing 'To not take things (toys, food) away from them' (35%) and 'To give them space when they are sleeping' (34%).

A further 9% shared that they had not been taught anything how to behave with pets, and 14% indicated they didn't know or couldn't remember any lessons.

Comparisons

There were few differences in lessons learned and demographics of non-pet owners.

However, **female** children were more likely to have been taught 'to be kind and touch them gently' (68%) than male children (53%) and 'to not take things away from them' (female children, 43%; male children, 32%)

Lessons learnt about pets by gender

To be kind and touch them gently



68%
female
children



53%
male
children

To not take things away from them



43%
female
children



32%
male
children

Didn't know or couldn't remember any lessons

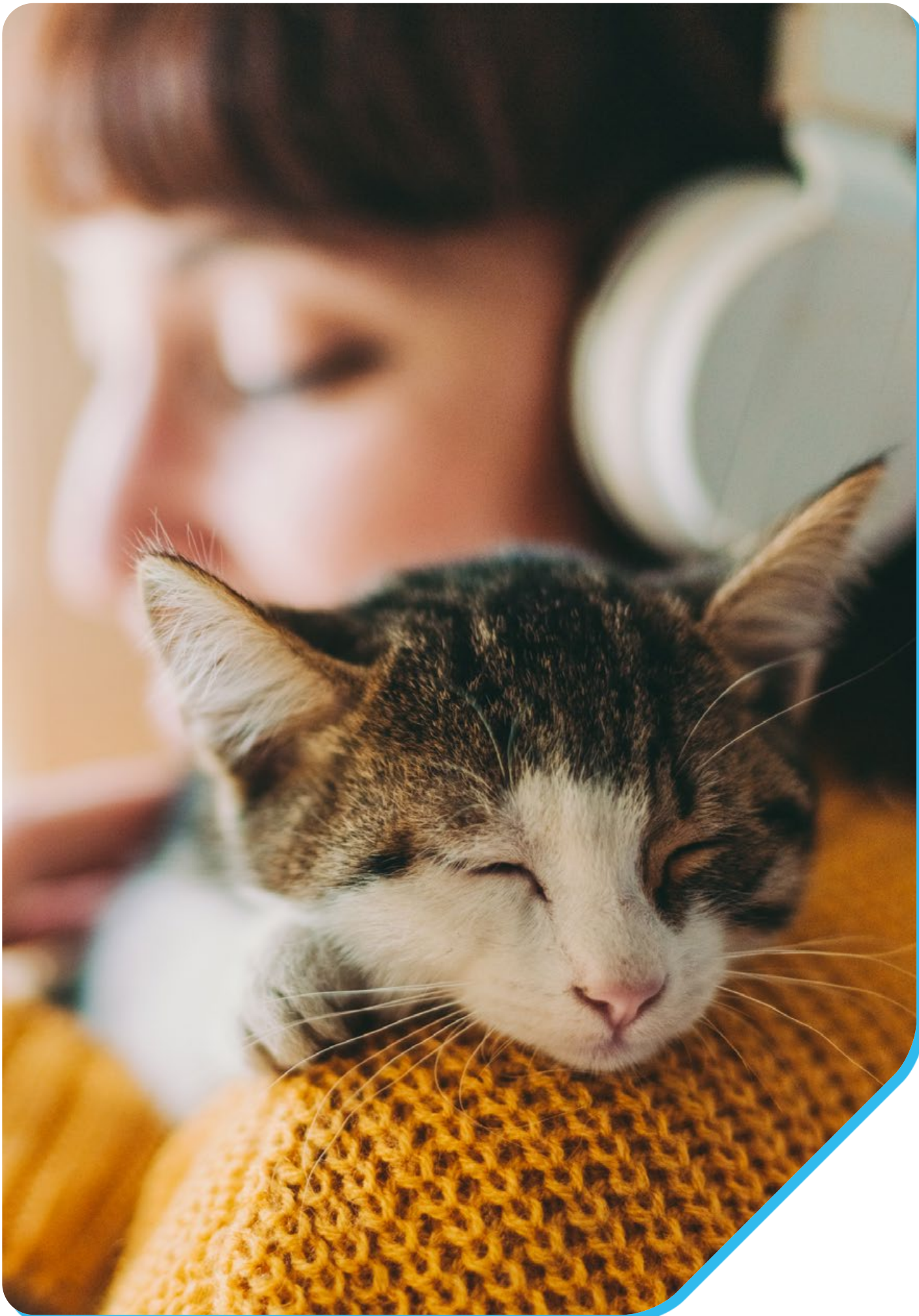


7%
female
children



18%
male
children





6 Pet discomfort

Pet-owning children were asked how they know if their pet doesn't like what they are doing. They were provided with the following list and asked to choose as many as they liked:

If my pet moves away from me	54%
If my pet tries to wriggle away from me when I'm holding them	53%
If my pet hides (e.g. under a bed)	38%
If my pet nips, bites, or scratches me	34%
If my pet hisses or growls	33%
If my pet goes still and stiff (freezing, tense)	24%
If my pet shakes and shivers	22%
If my pet shows their teeth	20%
If my pet squeals at me	2%
Something else	2%
My pet always likes what I'm doing	5%
I don't know how to tell if my pet doesn't like what I'm doing	3%

More than half of all pet owners shared that they know their pet doesn't like what they are doing if they 'move away from me' (54%).

If they 'try to wriggle away when holding them' (53%) was also recognised as a sign that their pet doesn't like what they are doing. 5% of pet owners reported that their pet always likes what they are doing.

Comparisons

Of course, signs of animal discomfort differ by species. Therefore, we took a closer look at what signs of discomfort different pet owners were aware of.

For dog owners, the most common sign of pet discomfort reported by children was if their pet 'moves away' from me (57%). For cats and rabbits, the most common sign was if their pet 'tries to wriggle away when I'm holding them' (61% cats).

! Children recognising signs that their pet doesn't like what they are doing



Concluding thoughts

Results of this survey provide valuable insight into how 7 to 11 year old children in the UK both perceive and interact with the pets in their lives. Findings demonstrate that, overall, children who live with pets at home have a deeper understanding of animal welfare needs and are more interested in further learning about pets.

Many children believe that pets like dogs and cats, especially their own, can feel emotions and communicate.

But both children with and without pets often feel less certain about this when it comes to smaller animals, such as rabbits. In fact, less than half of children believe that rabbits are capable of feeling or communicating. Children surveyed also had varying levels of knowledge about caring for pets. Whereas some children were aware of the importance of gentle touch and giving pets space, only about half of all children had been taught to give pets space when eating or sleeping.

The survey also shed light on the more challenging aspects of pet experiences. Nearly three quarters of children shared that they had experienced some sort of negative interaction with a pet (including occurrences of being frightened by, growled at, jumped at, or scratched). Approximately 1 in 5 children reported being bitten (by any type of pet), with 1 in 17 sharing that they had experienced a serious dog bite (requiring professional medical attention).

Looking ahead, we aim to use the insights gained from this survey to enhance and inform our pet education resources.

By understanding children's perceptions and beliefs about animals, we can tailor our materials to address knowledge gaps and provide more accurate, engaging content. Our goal is to create accessible, age-appropriate animal welfare education that not only informs but also encourages empathy and responsible pet ownership. Educators can use these reports to better understand the existing knowledge and misconceptions among the children in their care, helping to shape lesson plans and discussions that promote a deeper connection with and respect for animals.

Ultimately, by integrating these findings, we hope to contribute to a future where all children are equipped with the tools they need to foster compassion and make informed decisions about animals and their wellbeing, helping to shape a generation of responsible pet owners.

Nearly three quarters of children shared that they had experienced some sort of negative interaction with a pet.

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