

A STUDY OF THE TRANSFERENCE BETWEEN EMPATHY TOWARDS
COMPANION ANIMALS AND EMPATHY TOWARDS
HUMANS IN CHILDREN

by

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schoolyard bullying have turned into vicious attacks and even murder.

Professionals and lay persons alike have struggled for many years to understand the roots of violent behavior. Research in this area suggests that there is a connection between cruelty to animals and violent interpersonal relationships. There is growing evidence that childhood cruelty to animals is often a precursor to violence toward humans.

If there is a connection between violence towards animals and violence towards people, then there may also be a connection between empathy towards animals and empathy towards people. Evidence of a positive correlation would further support early interventions to prevent cruelty to animals. Social service agencies, law enforcement, and animal welfare agencies have acknowledged that abused children often come from households where animals are also mistreated. Conversely, when pets are abused, children in the home are also at risk. These agencies have worked together and implemented programs to detect and prevent violence to both animals and children. Humane education programs have been developed for schools to teach children to be kind to animals, and in turn to be kind to one another. Healthcare professionals have found that pets can provide beneficial therapy for patients of all ages. This discovery offers further reason to promote positive animal/human relationships.

In order to teach children pro-social behaviors, we must understand how and when behaviors are developed. Empathy is one behavior that is essential to caring for others. Only when a child feels empathy can he or she begin to develop a caring attitude toward others. There are many definitions of empathy and many facets of this behavior. Furthermore, the connection between empathy towards companion animals and empathy towards humans must be explored in order to develop effective violence prevention programs.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to review, analyze and critique the literature relating to empathetic attitudes of children and its relationship to child and companion pet interactions, and draw sets and implications for professionals. The second is to formulate a set of recommendations for professional people, parents, and individuals concerned with the welfare of children.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Violence in our society is a growing concern. There is evidence of increasing violent behavior in young children. Problems such as teasing and schoolyard bullying have turned into vicious attacks and even murder. For many years professionals in the fields of criminology, psychology, psychiatry and social work have struggled to understand the roots of violent behavior that affect our neighborhoods and communities. Research in this area indicates a connection between cruelty to animals and violent interpersonal relationships. This connection is not a recent discovery. In 1905, Freud suggested that clinicians pay special attention to children who are cruel to animals. Today there is growing evidence that childhood cruelty toward animals is often a precursor to cruelty to humans (Beck, no date). However, until recently, this connection received little attention. Boat calls the relationship between violence to children and violence to animals "an ignored link" particularly in the field of child psychology, and suggests that this link be explored further (1995).

Simply recognizing this negative connection is not enough. The question remains "What can be done to prevent such violence?" Social services, law enforcement and animal welfare agencies have acknowledged a connection between domestic violence and animal abuse. They have discovered that abused

children often come from households where animals are also mistreated. Conversely, when pets are abused, children in the home are also at risk. These agencies have implemented interactive programs to detect and prevent violence to both children and animals. "Cross coverage" and "Cross training" programs allow animal agencies to report abuse of animals to child protection services and social services may report to animal protection agencies when there are pets in a home where children are abused (Boat, 1995).

Humane education programs have been developed to teach children to be kind to animals. "People and Animals" and "Operation Outreach USA" are two examples of programs that strive to improve interpersonal relations by emphasizing interspecies relations (Ascione, 1997). Programs such as these are a step in the right direction. But again, there is a call for further research. Ascione laments the lack of studies focusing on the role of animals, especially pets in the psychological and social development of children (1997). More and earlier interventions are needed to prevent violence, and further studies are needed to show evidence of the violence connection.

If cruelty to animals is linked to violence towards people, then will the reverse be true? Is empathy toward animals connected to empathy toward people? If so, efforts must be made to establish this positive connection. Showing evidence of a positive correlation will give further support to educating

children to be kind to animals for the sake of the children as well as the animals. The focus of this paper is on domestic animals, specifically pets. Although the term "animals" is used in much of the research, the objective is to investigate and apply this information to pets or companion animals.

Health care professionals are aware of a positive connection between companion animals and people. They have found that companion animals can provide beneficial therapy for many patients. "Pet therapy" is a term that has been used to describe therapeutic interaction between people and animals. Pet therapy has been used extensively in nursing homes, school visitations, and even hospitals. Both physical and emotional rehabilitation can be enhanced when professionals use pets in caring for their patients (Allen, 1998). More recently, teachers and school psychologists are using pets to promote empathy in the classroom and reach troubled children. The positive effects of pet therapy suggest further investigation into the child-pet relationship.

Every society teaches pro-social behaviors to children. Empathy is one behavior that is essential to caring for others. There are various definitions of empathy. Oakin and Reich make reference to William Damon's book "The Moral Child" where Damon defines empathy as "reacting to another's feelings with an emotional response that is similar to the other's feelings" (1999). Another definition of empathy is "being able to place oneself in the place of the other, to

understand the point of view of the other" (Locke, 1993). Ronald D. Gordon, (as referred to by Hyslop and Tone) in a paper entitled "Empathy: the state of the art and science", sees empathy as "nonegocentric prosocial behavior" that altruistically accepts concern for another's welfare and interests. Gordon acknowledges, however, that a problem with research in empathy has been a lack of conceptual clarity (1988). Only when a child feels empathy can he or she begin to develop a caring attitude towards other human beings. Researchers have found the capacity for empathy in very young children.

By two or three years of age, children can perceive that others have feelings and perceptions that differ from their own. There are many facets of empathy, which make it a difficult concept to measure. Although there is evidence that empathy is related to the altruistic behavior of adults, it has been difficult to make the same conclusions with respect to empathy in children. The connection between empathy and pro-social behavior in children is influenced by measurement techniques. Therefore, it is important to replicate empathy studies and continue to develop new measurement scales in order to assess empathy more accurately in children (Litvak-Miller, Willa, McDougall, Daniel 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Research has found a link between empathy toward companion animals and empathy toward people in adults. The literature also reveals that many

altruistic feelings such as caring for animals are developed during early childhood. Therefore, the problem to be focused upon in this study is the relationship between empathy toward companion animals and empathy toward people by children.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to review, analyze and critique the literature relating to the empathetic attitudes of children and its relationship to child and companion animal interactions. The second is to formulate a set of recommendations for professionals, parents, and individuals concerned with the welfare of children.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Research in the area of cruelty to animals and interpersonal violence is scattered throughout literature in the fields of psychology, criminology, animal welfare, and social sciences. Because these various fields have separate and disparate reasons for studying cruelty to animals, it is difficult to summarize their findings. Even groups that appear to have similar concerns such as environmental groups and animal activists disagree on what constitutes cruelty. While environmentalists take a pragmatic approach, the animal rights organizations have moral motivations (Motavalli, 1995). Montavalli states that environmentalists tend to be pro-science and that often means they have no sympathy for the anti-vivisection movement, especially when it comes to lab smashing.

The greens aren't likely, for instance, to send bail money to Animal Liberation Front activist Rod Coronado, recently sentenced for his role in an arson attack on a Michigan State mink research lab (1995).

The association between cruelty to animals and violence against people is not completely accepted by psychiatrists for a number of reasons. For one thing, there is concern about putting too much emphasis on one single symptom. Clearly, we cannot say that violent behavior is related to one character trait any

more than we can say whether heredity or environment is the single predictor of a child's behavior. Studies that have tested the association between cruelty to animals and violent behavior have resulted in contradictory findings.

Felthous and Kellert (1987) reviewed several studies pertaining to animal cruelty for the purpose of finding whether scientific literature shows an association of "repeated, substantial cruelty to animals in childhood and later violence against people that is serious and recurrent" (cited in Lockwood and Ascione, 1998). Their review found that most studies finding no association did not define the behavior of "cruelty". In other words, a single violent act could be considered "cruelty". Swatting a fly could also be considered "cruelty". In contrast, the studies that identified recurrent impulsive violence found an association with animal cruelty. Methods of data collection were also reviewed, and the authors found that researchers using the "chart method" of written information found no association, while those interviewing the subjects directly found an association. While the authors admit that clinicians can be biased in their data collection, they emphasize that interviews must be thorough. Further research is needed, but replication studies should apply the "minimal methodological rigor" and use the direct interview method of data collection (1998).

The Violence Connection

Society has generally categorized acts of violence as street violence, cruelty to animals, child abuse, and domestic abuse, among others. However, there is growing evidence that violent acts are not all separate and distinct, but part of a cycle. The factors and influences that foster violence towards humans and animals spring from the same roots (Allen, 1998). According to Ascione, studies confirm that in households where domestic abuse is present, pets are fifteen times more likely to be harmed or killed than in households where there is no domestic violence. But the danger to pets is only part of the story. While people who commit domestic abuse are more likely to harm pets, the reverse is also true. Research shows that those who abuse animals are also much more likely to commit acts of violence against people. This connection is supported by many studies. The Massachusetts SPCA, for example, looked at records of people convicted of animal cruelty and found that 70 percent had committed at least one criminal act and another 38 percent had committed acts of violence against people. It appears that these violent behaviors form a continuing cycle. Children who commit violent acts against animals at an early age are at high risk of moving on to commit other acts of violent crime. Very often, these individuals were abused themselves. A study of convicted murderers found that of those who had been sexually abused as children, 58 percent had committed acts of animal

cruelty (compared to 15 percent of convicted murderers who had not been abused). Although childhood cruelty to animals is considered a predictor of adult violent behavior, it does not mean that every child who is abused or who commits or witnesses animal abuse will go on to become a criminal or abuser. Statistics don't indicate how many or few children will commit acts of violence in later life, only that a history of domestic violence is an important risk factor. With 969,000 cases of child maltreatment reported by child protection service agencies in 1996 alone, there's a lot of risk (Allen, 1998).

Several studies show evidence of the human animal abuse connection. Allen reports that in Ascione's study of women in a Utah shelter for battered women, "nearly one in four reported that concern for their pets had kept them from coming to the shelter earlier." Almost as many reported "coercion" as their partner's motive for harming a pet. Perpetrators often make such threats or carry them out to keep another from reporting the abuse- or leaving. The same study found that 71 percent of battered women who owned pets reported threats against their companion animals while 57 percent reported actual harm. In another study by Ascione, children of mothers in a "safe house" were interviewed. Seventy percent of these children reported witnessing animal abuse that involved "pain, discomfort, torturing or killing the pet." Pets are often victims in a domestic violence "pecking order". In one study, 16 percent of women interviewed

admitted directing their own anger at children or companion animals, and several also reported that one of their children had abused or inflicted harm upon a pet. Still another study by the Royal SPCA of Britain found that of 23 families being investigated for companion animal abuse, 82 percent were also on record with social service agencies as having "children at risk" (Allen, 1998).

A study of 267 college undergraduates explored the link between corporal punishment (excluding spanking) by parents and the perpetration of animal abuse. The findings revealed that males who abused animals in childhood or adolescence were physically punished more frequently by their fathers, both as preteens and teenagers than males who did not perpetrate animal abuse (Flynn 1999).

Fostering Empathy in Children

Negative aspects of behavior have been the focus of many studies. "Aggression, anxiety, guilt, and self-centered motives and behavior have been so much the cloth of theory and research that questions of a "softer" side of young human beings seems almost unscientific" (Yarrow, Scott, and Waxler, 1973). There is a definite need to study the positive behaviors in children to determine how these behaviors are fostered.

Empathy, kindness to others and altruism are all closely related concepts that are referred to throughout the literature. Regardless of which specific concept is discussed, there is a general purpose in studying these behaviors in

children. There is a need to study early manifestations of kindness or altruism to understand how, in the course of development these behaviors are fostered, suppressed, and specifically channeled (Yarrow, 1973).

Whether empathy can be "taught" has long been debated. There is a general agreement that the ability to empathize with others is conducive to healthy interpersonal relationships, yet there is much controversy as to how empathy develops and whether it can be taught. One of the reasons for this controversy is that the definitions of empathy in the literature have been confusing and contradictory. Schafer (1959) defined empathy conceptually as an "inner experience of sharing in and comprehending the momentary psychological state of another person" (cited in Hatcher & Nadeau 1994). Other definitions focus on the cognitive aspect of empathy; i.e. an ability to "understand" another person's situation. Still others emphasize the affective aspect of empathy as an ability to "feel" for another person. It is easy to see the problems in teaching a concept that is defined in so many ways.

Despite the confusion in definitions, there is some evidence that empathy can be taught. In a study of college students, a group trained in peer-facilitation skills showed improved empathy scores more than a group that did not receive such training. Furthermore, although the college females began with higher empathy scores than the males, the changed scores resulting from training

sessions were equal for males and females, suggesting that males are as trainable as females (Hatcher & Nadeau, 1994). There are a number of studies in the literature, which suggest that adults who show little empathy can be taught such skills. The authors of such studies suggest that their subjects must be developmentally ready for training, and that a capacity for empathy ripens over time. (Dalton and Sundblad, 1976; Guzzetta, 1976; Therrien 1979).

How do these findings relate to children? Can children also be taught empathy? Learning concern for others is a basic component to developing empathy. We know that infants are entirely "me" centered; that a child must first recognize others as human beings with basic needs similar to their own in order to develop concern for them. According to the literature on child development, this recognition of others begins to develop early in life. Children as young as two or three years of age can perceive that others have feelings and perceptions different from their own. Children at this age are able to experience sympathetic distress, and act on it while recognizing that the other's needs may not be the same as their own. This awareness, called "empathetic concern" is what Hoffman (1975, 1977) labels as the third level of empathy.

As a child grows in cognitive and linguistic development, this ability continues to expand. By late childhood, the child should be able to empathize with a wide range of emotions, and recognize that people can experience distress

not only in certain situations, but also in the context of overall life experience. This gradual development of sympathetic concern for others has important consequences for the relationship between empathy and behavior. But measuring empathy can be as difficult as clearly defining the term. Although many studies have shown no connection between empathy and pro-social behaviors, the problem seems to lie in the frequently used picture/story measurement techniques (Litvak-Miller, Willa, McDougall and Daniel 1997).

An investigation of empathy development in middle childhood (second, fourth and sixth grades) used a multi-dimensional approach including tests, interviews, and teacher-rating assessments. In addition, this study measured four different components of empathy (perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress). The results showed that girls were more empathetic than boys, and older children showed more empathetic concern than younger children. The most interesting finding was that "empathetic concern and perspective taking were significant predictors of pro-social behavior" (Litvak-Miller et al., 1997). Therefore, if, as the literature states, empathetic concern begins to develop early in childhood, and recent studies show that empathetic concern may predict pro-social behavior in children, then attempts to teach or foster empathy in children are worth investigating.

Programs Promote Child/Companion Animal Relations

Pets have been used to help children in a variety of ways. Gifted students for example, often need help building relationships with others. Their special abilities can isolate them from their peers, and they may feel that they have few friends. Counselors of gifted children point to the importance of developing empathy so that these children come to appreciate that other people have psychological needs that are very similar to their own. Involving children with pets can help develop personal responsibility, compassion and empathy. There can also be benefits from basic companionship (Cross, 1998).

Students in the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine use well-trained dogs to assist developmentally disabled children. The "Cornell Companions" program promotes the belief that pets can make a difference in the physical and emotional well being of those they touch. Students report that the animals bring out the best in children who don't always interact very well with people ("Animal-assisted therapy," 1998). Animals make ideal therapy "assistants" because they don't judge people and don't recognize that some individuals are "different".

We're learning more about the capabilities of animals while the children learn how to care for animals. This program gives us a

chance to cultivate empathy and understanding. We're beginning to recognize that pets are powerful healers, themselves, and that generates a lot of respect for the human/animal bond (1998).

Professional therapists have begun to value the use of companion animals in treating problems as simple as loneliness in elderly patients, to more complex problems such as severe autism in children. Beck describes what has been labeled PFT (Pet Facilitated Therapy) as a "bridge by which therapists can reach patients who are withdrawn, uncooperative and uncommunicative." When first given pets, these patients often have an immediate emotional reaction of joy. After several sessions with companion animals, patients will respond to the therapist and then to other people when previous social contact had been impossible (1983).

In prisons, a pet program has been shown to stabilize problem prisoners. Companion animals can elicit affection and nurturing even from people with a history of violence towards others. In nursing homes and psychiatric institutions companion animals can benefit both the patients and the staff. Working in such institutions where no one is really expected to get better can be depressing. But the implementation of PFT often makes the staff more optimistic, and they in turn treat residents and

the animals with more consideration of the patient's essential humanity (Beck, 1983, p. 162).

However, Beck cautions that PFT has not been rigorously evaluated. Skilled therapists have made observations, but they have not been confirmed by the kind of controlled experiments that test the validity of more conventional treatments. Obviously, companion animals are not always the answer. In fact sometimes they can cause problems of their own. But these problems and failures are not often reported. If they are reported, it is not with the same enthusiasm that the mass media gives to promoting PFT. Another concern is that most reports about PFT don't pay attention to long range effectiveness (1983, p. 164).

Humane education programs in schools are one way that animal welfare agencies have tried to develop humane attitudes in children. The Hammond Project is one example of humane education that was implemented in every public school in Hammond, Indiana (Vockell and Hodal, 1980). In this program, trained presenters visited classrooms with well-planned lessons designed to actively involve children in discussions of animal life and care. Prior to starting this program, the schools were matched by socioeconomic factors and randomly assigned to three groups, ("light treatment" group received posters and printed materials only, "intensive treatment" group received the entire program with

trained speakers and a control group, which received neither). The participating children (in grades three through six) were not pre-tested, but were given two forms of a post-test called the "Fireman Test". These tests designed by the authors were intended to measure children's attitudes towards animals by asking children what they would rescue from a burning home. Children were asked to choose from a list of inanimate possessions and pets. Results of the tests indicated there was no statistically significant difference between groups receiving the "light" or "intensive" training (1980). Vockell and Hodal offered possible reasons for the apparent failure of the program (such as failure to pre-test) and made suggestions for improving future humane programs.

We hasten to point out, however, that even negative results are important. Knowing that one course of action is the wrong course is an important step in eventually choosing the right course of action.

Humane attitudes do exist. There are children who respect animal life. We need to find out what methods result in or sustain humane attitudes and incorporate these methods into our programs (1980).

Ascione reviewed a variety of humane education programs (including the aforementioned Hammond Project). He noted that these

programs vary greatly in approach, duration, ages of children, and measurement techniques, and that most have lasted no longer than one school year, (which he called typical "one-shot" humane education programs).

We cannot use an inoculation model and assume that if humane education is "covered" in third grade, the effects will last till adulthood. We need longitudinal studies that follow children exposed to multiple years of humane education. These studies will allow for a more realistic assessment of intervention effectiveness (1997).

The Transference Theory

One of the basic assumptions of humane education programs that focus on inter-species relations is called transference or generalization. This concept suggests that teaching children to treat animals with kindness and respect will, in turn, affect the way children treat each other. Currently, we know more about the connection between family violence and violence towards animals than we know about the beneficial aspects of humane education (Ascione, 1997). Research in the area of children's attitudes towards pets indicates that several factors influence attitudes. Pet ownership, parent attitudes, and children's ages were among these factors (Kidd & Kidd, 1990).

Pet ownership does not guarantee a good human-pet relationship. There are many that own pets and neglect or abuse their animals. It is the attachment to animals that is important. Researchers have reported that children's attitudes towards their pets are directly related to the level of attachment to their pets (1990). Nevertheless, pet ownership does influence children's attitudes. Children with pets obviously have more opportunities to interact with pets than children who do not own pets. Playing and interacting with pets stimulates interest. In addition, most children who own pets have parents who consider the pet a member of the family and thus parents model activities and interest towards the family animal (1990).

Results of research tests support the idea that parental attitudes do count. Magnuson, Martinson, and Page (1986) suggest that parent attitudes strongly affect children's attitudes towards pets (cited in Kidd & Kidd, 1990). In fact, they found an inter-generational continuity of values and attitudes toward pets, with the children having more positive attitudes than the parents, indicating that there are variables other than parental attitudes which affect the formation of children's attitudes (1990). The age of a child is connected to his or her attachment to pets. The literature shows that development of empathy is also connected to age. As the child develops from infancy to adolescence, the emotional matching as well as the range of emotions to which one responds steadily increase (Hoffman, 1978,

1982), and it is probable that relationships with pets develop along the same lines (1990).

What is the relevance of this developmental relationship? Is there "transference" between empathy towards companion animals and empathy towards humans in children?

In the most significant study of humane education, Ascione assessed the impact of a yearlong school based program on two groups of children. The younger group consisted of first and second graders, and the older group was students in fourth and fifth grades. Generalization to human-directed empathy was also measured. Since prior programs were given so little time (10 hours or less in a school year), this program allotted 40 hours of instructional time, to determine whether more intensive instruction would make a difference. Teachers were trained to use the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education's (NAHEE) curriculum guides. These activities and guides were designed to be used as part of regular instruction in language arts, social studies, math, health and science. The study used a pretest-posttest design with 16 classrooms randomly assigned to an experimental group (E) and 16 to a control group (C). Four instruments were used to measure all C and E group students at the start and end of the study. Results of the study showed that for the younger children, there was a significant positive correlation between scores measuring humane attitudes towards animals

and those measuring humane-related empathy. For the older children the correlation was also positive and statistically significant.

These correlations provide evidence for a clear yet nonredundant relation between children's attitudes about the treatment of companion and noncompanion animals and their human directed empathy as measured by the B-P (Bryant Primary Empathy Measure) and B-I Bryant Intermediate Measure) (1992).

After reviewing and testing many humane education programs, Ascione concluded that children's attitudes towards the treatment of animals can be enhanced (1992). He calls the significant correlation (though moderate in size) between attitudes and empathy measures "encouraging" (1992).

That children's attitudes towards the care and treatment of animals have significant relations with human-directed empathy is important for our understanding of the role of companion animals in the lives of children. In addition, these positive relations serve to tie research on companion animals with the literature on the role of empathy in children's general moral development (1992).

This is truly encouraging for anyone interested in the well being of both children and animals. Almost every author cited in this paper, called for further research. Their call is an important one; the potential benefits are enormous.

In conclusion, this review of literature reveals that there is a broad interest in the area of interpersonal violence and violence toward animals. The literature shows that there is also interest in learning how prosocial behaviors such as empathy are developed in children. Programs such as Pet Facilitated Therapy and humane education have been implemented to benefit both children and animals. The Transference Theory suggests that if children are taught to be kind to animals, they will in turn, learn to treat one another with respect and kindness. However, none of the literature can offer indisputable evidence that children actually benefit from humane education programs, or that they are able to transfer empathy toward companion animals to empathy toward humans. Therefore, in order to prevent violence and promote empathy development in children, parents and professionals must take steps to accomplish their common goals.

Chapter III

Critique, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Critique and Conclusion

A review of the literature reveals that there is much concern about the nature of interpersonal violence and cruelty to animals in our society.

Psychologists, teachers, law enforcement, social services and humane societies share an interest in curbing violent behavior, particularly in children. There is an abundance of evidence in the literature that a connection exists between violence towards people and violence towards animals. However, various programs designed to enhance child/companion animal relations have produced contradictory findings. In order to promote such programs and develop new approaches to healthy child/companion animal relations, several issues must be addressed.

Violence in our society has been the focus of many studies over the years. The literature recognizes that violent acts are often part of a continuing cycle. Even Sigmund Freud was aware of a violence connection as evidenced by his warnings that clinicians pay attention to children who are cruel to animals. But research conducted in this area is confusing and contradictory. Some of the confusion is due to the various definitions of cruelty. There is disagreement among both professionals and lay persons as to what constitutes "cruelty".

Animal rights organizations may believe harming animals for any reason constitutes cruelty, while others such as environmentalists may view scientific use of animals (such as medical research) necessary and not "cruel". People often place more value on (or deem more important) one species of animal over another. There are even discrepancies in our court systems. Punishments and fines for harming horses, for example, are more severe than for harming cats or other companion animals. Conducting and comparing tests to measure cruelty to animals is difficult when researchers have differing ideas about the concept being measured. Furthermore, methods of data collection vary from one test to another. This has a direct affect on test results. Written tests and interviews are the two most common methods of collecting data for research in this area. Some studies have used the written test method, other studies have conducted various types of interviews, and still other studies have used a combination of both methods. This review of literature found that research showing a connection between violence towards people and violence towards animals had two common elements: first, the term "cruelty" was clearly defined; second, the direct interview method of data collection was used. Further research in this area should utilize these findings. Considering the enormous number of both child and animal abuse cases reported annually in this country, more research is desperately needed.

Promoting empathy (whether human or animal directed) requires knowledge and understanding of positive social behaviors and how those behaviors are developed in children. Once again, the literature is controversial. Empathy has been defined in many ways. Professionals in child development fields differ in their theories as to when and how children can experience empathetic feelings towards others. Measuring empathy is no easy task, especially when children are the subjects. Along with the usual concerns (such as interviewer bias) when conducting research, children present new concerns. Some question whether children give truthful answers on tests and in interviews, or whether they might choose an answer that they perceive to be "correct". Even more controversial is the question of whether empathy can be taught. However, if we believe that environment plays a role in forming a child's personality, we must also assume that positive behaviors such as empathy are somehow learned or fostered. Continuing to investigate how empathy develops is certainly a worthwhile cause.

Efforts to enhance child/companion animal relations include humane education programs and pet therapy programs, among others. Therapists have reported that companion animals have successfully "reached" patients (young and old) who were previously uncommunicative. Although pet therapy is popular, very little testing has been done to validate the effectiveness of these programs.

Documented research on pet therapy could help to further establish and promote the human/companion animal empathy connection.

School implemented humane education programs strive to promote healthy relations between children and animals, for the benefit of both. Though these programs have been evaluated more than pet therapy approaches, the results have been less than dramatic. Most evaluations of humane education show little or no statistically significant improvements in children's attitudes towards animals. However, almost all humane education programs have been brief. One-hour classroom presentations and programs involving visiting speakers two or three times during one school year have been the norm. Where else in the field of education do we present a concept once and presume that concept has been learned? Education is a continuous process of building knowledge, skills and understanding. It's clear to see why most of these programs have failed.

The most intense humane education program found in the literature involved forty hours of training in a single school year. This program was the only one that resulted in significant positive correlation between empathy towards companion animals and empathy towards humans in children. These findings indicate that children's attitudes towards animals and others can be enhanced. Humane education programs may be an avenue to accomplish this goal if the programs are well designed, well implemented and long lasting. This hint of

success should provide interest and motivation for further research and replicated studies.

Recommendations

Almost every study in this review of literature called for more research. In order to determine whether the transference theory is valid, much more testing is needed. Researchers should review the previous studies and follow the recommendations of those who have conducted tests in this area. Testing methods should also be reviewed and critiqued before conducting further research. Since the interview method has been shown to be more effective than the chart method of written information, interviews should be conducted strictly and carefully. In other words, the interviews should be very thorough, using trained interviewers to guard against bias. Replication tests should be conducted only on the studies that have applied the most reliable research methods.

Schools should be open minded to the possible benefits of pet therapy (for school psychologists) and humane education programs. However, schools must also be thorough in their investigations of such programs before implementing them into the curricula.

Parents and all professionals working with children should be aware of the importance of empathy development. Reading and studying about the stages of child development and how behaviors are learned is a step in the right direction.

Teaching children to be kind to animals should include explaining that animals, like people, have feelings. Modeling appropriate behaviors towards animals is equally important.

Before bringing a companion animal into the home, parents must consider more than just the responsibility aspects of pet ownership. Parents model behaviors that their children will likely imitate. Parents should be aware that their relationship with the family companion animal may influence their child's behavior towards the pet, and possibly the child's behavior towards others.

Is the transference theory valid? Do children actually transfer feelings of empathy towards companion animals to empathy toward others? It is interesting to note that even critics of the transference theory are quick to point out that more studies are needed. Several researchers finding no generalization of empathy also cited possible explanations including lack of time given to educating children, and questionable testing methods. Since the literature is currently inconclusive, there is much work to be done. Parents, schools, and professionals must continue to learn about child empathy development, conduct research, and implement trial programs. Continued efforts could benefit both children and animals, and even contribute to curbing violent behavior in our society.

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