



CARING FOR PETS

DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD



ABOUT THIS ROUTINE:

Caring for pets is a great opportunity to support STEM learning! Talk about STEM ideas and use STEM words as you and your child care for your pet together.

Tell your child you want their help **noticing** what your **pet needs** to stay healthy and happy. Pets are **animals** that are members of our families, and just like us, they are **living things**. They grow, change, and have needs.

"What do you think our **pet needs** right now?"

As you care for your pet together, talk about how living things are different from non-living things: "**Our pet needs food and water** every day. Does your toy need food? Why not?" Help your child **notice** how **pets grow and change over time**, connecting their observations to the bigger idea that all living things have needs.

If your child is interested in keeping track of what your pet needs, consider creating a pet care task chart together. Set it up with a row for each pet and a column for each task, using drawings or visual cues your child can recognize. Your child can use stickers, stamps, or checkmarks to document when each task is completed. This a great way to build responsibility and reinforce that pets depend on us for their care.

STEM LEARNING AREA:

Life Science: Concepts related to living things

- **Living Things:** Animals, including insects and people, and plants

Every child is different. Do what works best for encouraging your child's independent exploration during this suggested daily routine. These are only suggested activity adaptations. Consider consulting your child's care team first.



Follow your child's lead and interests. Enthusiastically ask your child questions about what they are doing and what they like.



Answer your child's questions. If you do not know the answer, work together with your child to discover the answer.



Encourage your child to participate in the activity as much as possible. Praise your child's efforts and successes.



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ADAPTATIONS FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT MY CHILD'S LEARNING?

ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENT

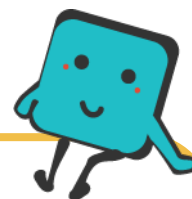
- Place materials and pet toys within reach
- Place task chart where the child can reach

MATERIALS

- Have child's assistive technology ready and available, including augmentative & alternative communication (AAC) device
- Use adaptive devices (reacher) to help your child pick up pet toys
- Provide a task chart (see following page for example)
- Have a variety of materials available for completing the task chart

INTERACTIONS OR INSTRUCTION

- Model safe and loving interactions with your pet(s)
- Model documentation of tasks completed in the task chart
- Narrate or sign your child's actions
- Use a variety of methods of communication (sign language, gestures) to meaningfully engage your child
- Communicate with your child at eye level
- Speak or sign slowly, emphasize keywords, and wait for a response
- Praise your child's efforts with words, facial expression, and body language
- Make eye contact and smile as you talk to your child
- Support children with communication challenges or visual impairments by using actual objects or pictures to represent steps of the routine
- Consider using visual cues or a tablet with pictures of the objects to signal next steps or each step of the sequence (see following pages)
- Use Braille on the visual cue cards to support children with visual impairment
- Model and demonstrate how to do the steps of the routine



Adaptations are simple changes you can make to your child's space, toys, or activities to help them stay engaged and learn STEM ideas and words during daily routines.

Need visual cues?

Visit [STEMIE's Visual Cue Library](#) or check out STEMIE's tips for creating and using visual supports with [A Guide to Visual Supports](#).



Quick Tip:

Communication may include the use of words, signs, gestures, and different types of cues, such as touch, object, movement, or visual.

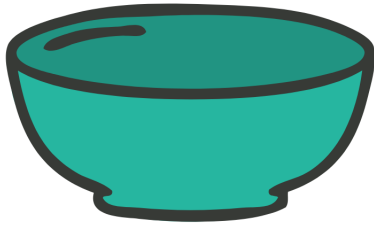




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VISUAL CUES FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

USE TO DIRECT PET CARE



Bowl

Help family member give pet food and water



Ball

Gently play with AFTER the pet is done eating



Hair brush

Check with family member if pet needs anything else (bath, go outside, go on a walk, be brushed)



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VISUAL CUES FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

TRACKING PET CARE

Day	Give Food & Water	Play With/Walk	Cleaning
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			



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ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

1 – ANIMAL SOUND OBSERVER

Description: Help your child to **notice** the **different sounds pets** make. Encourage them to imitate and make different sounds themselves with stuffed and toy animals.

What My Child Is Learning!

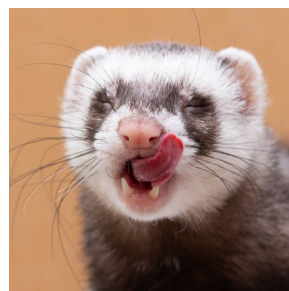
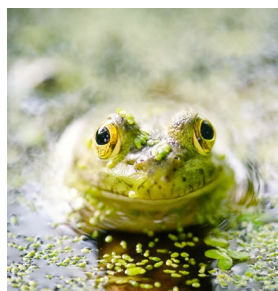
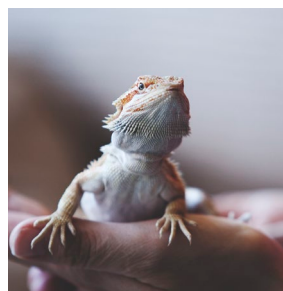
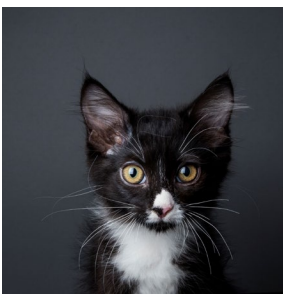
Children learn best by interacting with people and objects. Introduce STEM words, ask questions, and encourage them to make connections between words and real-life experiences. This helps children develop fundamental critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

As you care for your pet, invite your child to stop and listen to the **sounds** they hear. Ask: "What **sounds** does our pet make? Can you describe it? Is it **loud** or **quiet? High** or **low?**"

Encourage your child to notice how pets use **sounds** to communicate. Narrate: "Our dog is **barking** at the door. I wonder what they are trying to tell us?" Ask: "How does our pet sound when they are happy? Does it sound the same when they want food or want to play?"

Listen for the **quieter sounds** pets make too, like a fish tank bubbling, a hamster running on its wheel, or a bird rustling its feathers. Ask: "Do you hear that? What is making that sound? Does it sound the **same as or different** from barking or purring?"

Encourage your child to experiment with making their own sounds while playing with stuffed and toy animals.





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ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

2 – PET SCIENTIST

Description: Invite your child to notice that family pets are living things with needs, like food, water, shelter, and care. Just like humans.

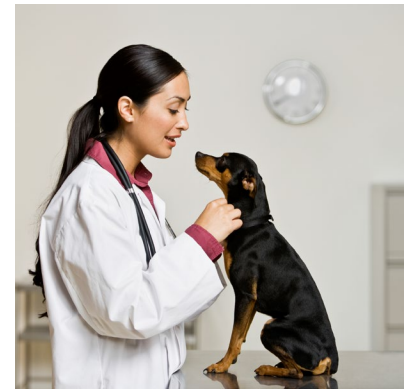
What My Child Is Learning!

Children learn best by interacting with people and objects. Introduce STEM words, ask questions, and encourage them to make connections between words and real-life experiences. This helps children develop fundamental critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Encourage and demonstrate how to gently interact with your family pet. As you care for your pet together, talk about how pets are **living things**, just like us: "**Our pet needs food, water, shelter, and care** every day. Just like you do! What do you think would happen if we forgot to feed them?"

Invite your child to look closely at their pet's body and talk about what they notice. Point out characteristics and body parts: "**Birds have beaks and talons**. What do you think those are for? **Cats and dogs are furry and have paws**. How do you think their paws help them?" Ask: "What other parts of our pet's body do you notice? What do you think those parts help them do?" Help your child connect body parts to needs and behaviors: "Our **cat** uses its **whiskers to feel** things around it. Our **fish** uses its **fins** to move through the **water**."

Pretend with your child that they are a veterinarian caring for animals. Use stuffed animals or toy animals to discuss **different animals' needs, body parts, and characteristics**. Ask: "What does this animal need to stay healthy? What do you think is wrong? How can we help it feel better?"





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ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR DAILY ROUTINE EXPLORATIONS WITH YOUR YOUNG CHILD

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- Visit a pet store or animal shelter
- If you have a dog, give the dog a bath
- Make origami pets
- Pretend play with friends taking care of pets or running a vet clinic
- **Design and build** a bird feeder
- Create a pet journal, add graphs, drawings, observations, photos...
- **Design and build** a bird house or other animal habitats
- Talk about the variety of pets (dog, cat, bird, frog, turtle, snake, bunny, mouse, gerbil, ferret, ants, worms...)
- Check out our Storybook Conversations for *Feathers and Hair, What Animals Wear* by Jennifer Ward on **STEMIE Learning Trajectories** (<https://stemielearningtrajectories.fpg.unc.edu/>).
- Check out these books about pets:
 - *See How They Grow: Pets* by DK
 - *Caring for Your Pets* by Ann Owen
 - *The Perfect Pet* by Margie Palatini

