

Work Experience Guidelines for Students Working with Animals (Secondary Schools)

These guidelines provide information for host employers, students, parents and schools.

Secondary students undertaking work experience involving animals could be exposed to risks not found in other work places. To provide a safe and rewarding experience, host employers must recognise the hazards which could place a student at risk, and consider the inexperience and likely capabilities of the student. Activities must be carefully selected and planned, and the risks managed.

Work places where animals are housed, cared for and provided with medical treatment include:

- **veterinary practices**
- **zoos and wildlife sanctuaries**
- **farms and dairies**
- **animal parks**
- **animal shelters**
- **stables**
- **pet shops**
- **animal boarding facilities**

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: *NO student under 15 years of age should be permitted to undertake work experience involving direct contact with animals. (There may be other activities in your work place, however, that are both safe and suitable for a student aged under 15.)*

What host employers should consider

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AND CONFIDENCE WITH ANIMALS

Students should provide information about their experience with animals when they are being considered for work experience (see the Form *Secondary School Work Experience Application Form*). The school's Work Experience Coordinator will review this Form and sign off if satisfied that the student understands the nature of the work experience, and the constraints which will apply in regard to contact with animals.

PROVIDING APPROPRIATE INDUCTION AND SUPERVISION

Work experience students must be given a thorough induction briefing, and must be adequately supervised while at your work place. This means allocating responsibility for the student to a staff member. Supervisor(s) should be familiar with the summary of the student's prior experience with animals, and must explain which activities and locations are prohibited. *All* staff must understand some tasks are not to be asked of the student.

Inform the student that **safety** is the most important consideration during their stay, that you have a legal duty of care for the student during the week, and in turn they must act to safeguard themselves by observing all requirements you have put in place to protect them.

MANAGING POTENTIAL EXPOSURE TO ANIMALS

The student must understand that animal behaviour is unpredictable. Before exposing a student to any animal, a risk assessment must be conducted to establish the likelihood of the animal displaying potentially injurious behaviour.

There are some animals to which students must **NOT** be exposed (*i.e.* come into direct contact with). These include any animal with a known history of behavioural problems, any animal with an injury or condition that is causing them pain or stress, and animals likely to be protective of their young.

Risk assessments should be documented, as should the control measures established to manage risk. These measures may be suitable for trained staff but not for others with less experience – this should be considered before a student is asked to carry out the task in question.

The following Table gives some examples of both suitable and unsuitable (prohibited) activities:

Examples of potentially suitable activities *	Examples of unsuitable (prohibited) activities
Grooming (brushing or combing only – the use of hydrobaths presents animal handling risks to which students should not be exposed).	Assisting with any medical procedure, including medicating an animal. This includes holding or restraining an animal while staff carry out the required task.
Exercising (only by walking the animal or supervising while the animal is allowed free movement for a set period – e.g. animals boarded at veterinary practices).	Bathing an animal (e.g. in hydrobath).
Feeding (this means placing food and water for animals, not hand feeding).	Handling (or being exposed to) any hazardous substance used in animal treatment – drugs, syringes, anaesthetics.
Cleaning cages or enclosures <i>provided animals have been removed from the area</i> or have been assessed as presenting negligible (or manageable) risk.	Using (or being exposed to) any hazardous plant or equipment, such as x-ray equipment used in radiology.
Observing medical procedures, provided these are not viewed as likely to be distressing for the student.	Carrying out any manual handling task that presents significant risk (e.g. carrying/stacking food containers, lifting heavy animals into or out of cages or pens).

* Subject to satisfactory assessment of the animal *and* of the student's experience with animals, as well as their capability and confidence. Direct supervision must be provided – students must not be left alone with an animal.

What students and parents should consider

Hazards associated with animal handling and restraint are difficult to control. Animals of every species are unpredictable, and even people experienced in animal behaviour will occasionally suffer injury when a previously placid animal suddenly becomes aggressive (usually through stress).

Your child's host employer has a duty of care to all persons in the work place (staff, customers and visitors) but can not guarantee *complete absence of risk* without separating your child from animals altogether. This would defeat the purpose – and remove the interest and enjoyment – of being placed in an environment where animals are present.

Parents can help a prospective host employer to plan suitable activities by providing information about your child's experience and capability with animals (e.g. they may have a horse of their own and be confident in grooming and preparing feed). The Application Form asks questions designed to give a host employer some background before they make a decision to accept a student for work experience. It's in their interest, and in yours, that the information provides a full and accurate picture.

Role of the school in assessing student suitability

The school's Work Experience Coordinator should review the completed Form Secondary School Application Form. If this provides satisfactory evidence of relevant experience working with animals, it should be forwarded to the prospective host employer.

If the school has concerns about the student's suitability, the work experience should not go ahead.

These Work Experience Guidelines have been developed in consultation with RSPCA, Australian Veterinary Association, Victorian WorkCover Authority, Victoria Police, principal and parent associations, Careers Education Association of Victoria, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Catholic Education Office, Melbourne Zoo and Victorian Farmers Federation. Changes have been made to the original form to suit the requirements of the City of Darebin.

