

What I learn at Haw's "Kids and Critters" camp:

Every year I accept an invitation to teach animal bite prevention programs to all the kids attending Haws summer camp. They love to hear tales from my on-the-job experiences, and to tell the truth, I enjoy telling them. Hopefully, the kids recall the lessons that accompany my tales. Our discussions lead me to believe they absorb my lessons on being safe around animals.

The kids do not realize I learn a lot from them, too. One thing I have learned is to put a camper in charge of helping run my laptop. The kids know how to run technology better than I do! I have learned that saying something and showing a slide depicting it, does not always translate when the lesson goes "live". Now, as a parent, I know this, but to see it play out before your eyes is, well, a little frustrating. Within literally minutes of discussing why we ask permission to pet a dog, the kids rush to see a dog coming into the room. The message eventually gets through, but Wow...talk about the need for repetition!

Another lesson I gleaned from Kids and Critters camp has to do with what goes on at camp versus what is reported at home. They are rarely the same! Hence, lesson learned: ask open-ended questions. Instead of "were there any puppies in camp today?" ask, "What was the craziest thing the camp puppies did today?" It is the difference between a grunt from your kid or their sharing a story. I am all for the stories.

I have lunch with the kids, after my main presentation. I learned pack lunches nowadays are nothing like old school standards of PB&J, an apple and chips. One kid had sushi! I had to look twice, and when I did, he offered me a taste. I like my fish in an aquarium, so I passed on his offer. Another child was creating an edible piece of art, with fruit roll-ups, celery and a container of peanut butter used as the glue. Impressive! I am going to have to crank up my creative efforts next year when I join them for lunch!

Here is a lesson I learned after I took my foot out of my mouth. I complimented a child on their guinea pig artwork. Whoops! Turns out the object in the drawing was a family cat. So, from this young artist, I learned to ask about the picture first and compliment their effort afterward. Another artist had drawn a memorial to his dog who had recently passed away. It was obvious that it was a bittersweet effort on his part. To ease the mood, I asked him what was the silliest thing that dog ever did. The boy shared a very funny anecdote about this dog and his sister's dental retainer. We both had a laugh at his fond memory. That lesson was my reminder that love can overcome sorrow, if you give it an opportunity.

Thanks to the Kid's and Critters campers for all my memorable lessons. Camp coordinators and counselors have my full appreciation and respect for the amazing job they do. They make camp a fun place to learn how to live a humane way of life.

Sincerely,

Jill Posanski

Waukesha County Humane Officer