

DISCUSSION TRIGGERS



THE USE OF ANIMALS IN MEDICAL RESEARCH

Every Breath Podcast Teachers Resource

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Discussion Trigger 1:

Is it different to test on monkeys and dogs than it is on rats?

SONNY We're very concerned about the use of primates in brain research.

The objection to the use of animals in research for some people appears to vary depending on which animals specifically are involved. There appear to be two main justifications for this speciesism:

1. *The more like us the animal is (e.g. primates) the higher the level of objection*
2. *The more attractive in appearance and/or behavior (e.g. dogs, cats and other animals kept as pets) the higher the level of objection*

It is important to understand the numbers of animals from different species that are used:
http://www.rds-online.org.uk/pages/page.asp?i_ToolbarID=2&i_PageID=32

Issues/Prompts

- What do we mean when we say an animal is more like us?
- Should the appearance of an animal make a difference in whether it is used in medical research? Why?
- Should the intelligence of an animal make a difference to whether it is used in medical research? Why?
- What factors should determine whether an animal is used in medical research?
- Does it make a difference that only a relatively small number of “higher mammals” are used in medical research?
- Some anti-vivisectionists say it is wrong to use animals because they are so like humans? Some anti-vivisectionists say it is wrong to use animals because they are so different the results of animal research are not transferable to humans. Is it possible to hold both these views?

Discussion Trigger 2:

What responsibilities do we have to animals?

SONNY It's a farm. They breed dogs there. Experiment dogs. The conditions they keep them in look really bad.

LINA You sure? I thought they had rules and regulations for that sort of thing.

SONNY They have, but that doesn't mean people stick to them.

Issues/Prompts

- Why do we have responsibilities towards animals?
- Do animals have rights? What are they? What is a right? Are these the same rights as humans?
- Is it ever right to use animals to serve humans? In what ways do humans use animals? Which of these, if any, do you think are justifiable?
- What are our responsibilities towards:
 - Domestic animals?
 - Wild animals?
- Animals used for other human purposes?
- What laws or regulations do we need to ensure these responsibilities are carried out?
- How can we ensure they are carried out?

Discussion Trigger 3:

What rights to protest should people have? What about the right to carry out legal research?

SONNY Oh. Listen. Kelsey's invited me to a Protest on Wednesday night. Outside this new Animal Research Laboratory they're trying to build in town.

LINA (WORRIED) Sonny.

SONNY It's a peaceful protest. Don't worry.

LINA Some of these animal rights people are really violent.

Issues/Prompts

- Where do you think Lina gets her view from?
- How does the media tend to present Animal Rights protesters? Is this fair? Why do the media choose to do this? (See INFORMATION SHEET: Articles)
- The media's focus on the extreme behaviour of a small minority of Animal Rights protesters distracts the public from the real issue. Do you agree?
- Why do people protest? In what ways do people protest? Which of these do you think are acceptable and which are unacceptable?
- "Animal rights protesters using violence are undermining a free and civilized society." Do you agree?
- New laws make it a criminal offence to cause "economic damage" (i.e. financial loss) to medical research companies or to protest outside the homes of scientists. An animal rights activist said : "The government is bringing in laws to protect people who murder animals." Do you agree?
- What do you think of Sonny's protest in the play? Did he go too far? Or not far enough?

Discussion Trigger 4:

How can the public find out what takes place inside laboratories that conduct experiments on animals?

SONNY (TO RAZ) We've been leafleting in Town, about the Animal Research Laboratory actually. I could give you some information about it if you like.

ANITA If you like reading unproven propaganda he means.

Part of the issue with being open and transparent about what takes place inside laboratories has come about from the fact that extra security has been put in place to counter destructive protest. BUT there is easier access now and greater openness if carefully planned.

Issues/Prompts

- Do the public have a right to know what goes on in animal research laboratories?
- How can you get hold of truthful information? What sources of information are available?
- How can you ensure you get a balanced perspective?

Discussion Trigger 5:

Some research is aimed at gaining knowledge about how the body works, and may result in helping us better understand illness. Is it still OK to use animals here?

ANITA Basic research is about acquiring knowledge. It doesn't have to lead to a cure for something.

SONNY So then why do it if . . . (it doesn't)?

ANITA (OVERLAPS) Because we need to know. We need to understand.

SONNY You don't need to know, you just want to know.

Basic research accounts for about one third of animal research in the UK. It increases scientific knowledge about the way humans and animals behave or develop and function biologically. It is not necessarily intended to lead to applications to humans. (Nuffield Report: the Ethics of Research involving animals p2)

Issues/Prompts

- What is the value of basic research? What useful outcomes might there be?
- Is it justifiable to use animals in this way when we don't know what the value of the research might be?
- What is the purpose of science?
- Is it ever wrong to limit the quest for knowledge?

Discussion Trigger 6:

Research into life-threatening illness involves some suffering, or the death of, thousands of animals. Is that OK?

SONNY So you think it's alright to perform unnecessary operations on defenceless animals who can't say no?

ANITA Look. If you ever have the misfortune to suffer from a brain disease you'll thank the scientists who've used monkeys for helping you.

SONNY I'd rather thank the monkeys. How many of them suffered? And died?

Should drugs be given to ease the retention of bad memories for victims of crime or disaster relief workers? What impact would altered memories have on 'normal' memory in context with a particular situation? Should people who are traumatised by their memories be treated in other ways?

Issues:

- Is human suffering worse than animal suffering? Why?
- UK legislation allows scientists to cause animals pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm during medical research. Is this justifiable?
- Is human life more important than animal life? Why?
- What can we learn from religious perspectives?
- If research on animals can lead to reducing human suffering, is it ethically right not to do it?

Discussion Trigger 7:

What does the Buddhist perspective teach us?

SONNY What's the Buddhists view about Animal Rights?

RAZ Ah. They say that no living thing should be harmed, if you can help it. We all breathe the same air don't we? Animals and humans. Every breath is precious. Breathing's very important to Buddhists.

Issues:

- In what ways do humans use animals?
- Which of these count as harmful?
- Which of these can be avoided?
- Is it possible to live without causing harm to animals?

Discussion Trigger 8:

Is it right to use genetically modified animals in research?

ANITA The mice used are genetically modified OK. They're created specially for testing Asthma medicines.

SONNY That doesn't make it OK Anita. Scientists playing God again.

ANITA It means that they're exactly right for the tests, they get the most accurate results.

SONNY They just see them as tools, not living breathing animals. Are you saying they deliberately create Asthma suffering mice?

ANITA Asthma suffering mice?

ANITA Yes.

Some animals are genetically modified in order for them to replicate human disease/ conditions as closely as possible. The closer the similarity with human illness the more precise the research results which in the long run may reduce the numbers of animals used in medical research. However, in the short term the numbers of animals may increase as they become an improved means of research.

Issues/Prompts

- Is it right to genetically modify animals?
- Is it right to deliberately create diseased animals?
- What does Sonny mean by "Scientists playing God."
- What if, in the long run, such animals lead to medical breakthroughs in the treatment of humans or animals or a long term reduction of number of animals used in medical research?