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Keep Animals Safe

JEN REEDER

Collin Elvidge, a 12-year-old who lives in Pennsylvania, loves his family's dog Bella. She's a pug, a little white dog with a black face and a nose kind of like a pig's – she makes funny snorting noises!

So it bugged him when his 7-year-old neighbor, "Stanley," used to be mean to Bella after school. Stanley would tease the poor puppy and even threw his backpack at her once.

"Bella's so small – what's she gonna do?" Collin says. "People should be nice to dogs."

If Stanley's mom and dad saw him being mean to Bella, they would tell him to stop, but when they weren't there, Stanley would continue his tricks. Though he felt "weird," Collin and his younger brother and sister would tell him to stop trying to hurt their pet.

"We'd be like, 'Don't do that' and he'd ignore us," Collin says.

Now that Stanley is older, he isn't mean to Bella anymore. He told Collin he used to do those bad things because he was afraid of dogs.
"Fear causes a lot of bad things in the world," says Dr. Gregg Takashima, a veterinarian (a doctor for animals) at Parkway Veterinary Hospital in Oregon. "We should protect animals. Animals are so loyal – they trust whoever their owner is. It's up to us not to betray that trust."

When people are mean to animals on purpose and try to hurt them, or don't give them things they need, like food and water, it is called animal cruelty. Animal cruelty is bad because it can make a pet sad or hurt or even kill them.

What should you do if you see another kid (or even a grown up) being cruel to an animal by doing mean things like throwing rocks or poking them with sticks? Tell a grown up you trust, like your mom, dad or a teacher. They will know the best way to help the person stop being cruel to animals. Maybe they don't know that what they're doing is bad, or can learn to stop being afraid of animals (if that is why they are being mean). You'll be helping your friend or neighbor by getting them to stop their animal cruelty.

One reason it is good to tell an adult about the problem is that it can be dangerous to talk to the person teasing or hurting animals if you don't know them, or if you think they might hit you for saying something to them. But if it is your friend and you feel safe talking to them the way Collin talked with his neighbor Stanley, you should not yell at them even though you might be very angry.

"They won't listen to you if you're mad," says Dr. Takashima.

You can also help stop animal cruelty by showing people how to act with animals: by having fun and playing with them! Throw a ball for a dog to catch, run a cat toy along the ground for a kitten to pounce on, whistle or sing to a bird, give a toy to a hamster. Animals can be our best friends if we are nice to them!

Freelance journalist Jen Reeder was 7 years old when she got her first cat and named her Pretzel Popcorn Reeder.

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