

IMPORTANT

- The information we provide on our rights4children website is for general guidance. It is not legal advice.
- If you need legal advice, please contact an independent advocate or a solicitor.
- Article 39 tries its best to make sure information is accurate and up-to-date. However, we cannot guarantee this. We'd appreciate you letting us know if you notice any errors or out-of-date information: info@article39.org.uk

Pets

- ✦ Children and young people who live in group settings – like children's homes, schools, hospitals and prisons – often want their own pet.
- ✦ This is understandable because many people your age love having pets. Then there is the added bonus that pets can be an excellent source of love and loyalty. They are there for you, in good times and bad times.
- ✦ It's a big responsibility looking after a pet. They need a lot of care and attention. This is a great reason for having them – because you can learn new skills and show how trustworthy you are. But it's also a reminder that pets have needs and they must be looked after well.



Did you know the average life-span of a dog is about 13 years, and the average life span of a cat is around 14 years?

If you want a pet, there's a lot to think about. Like who will look after it, will it be safe and what happens when a child close to the pet leaves? Some people are allergic to certain animals, so this would be an extra thing to think about in a group setting. We're not saying it's impossible to have a pet in a group setting. You just need to think about it carefully with others.

Your rights – general

The law says you have to be 16 years old to be responsible for a pet.¹

This means if you are under 16, you cannot legally own a pet. Someone else where you live will have to take legal responsibility for the pet.

The good news is that there is nothing in the law that stops group settings from having a pet.

However, there are legal rules about how a pet must be looked after.

A person responsible for an animal must do his or her best to make sure the animal's needs are met. These needs are set out in law as:

- + The animal's need for a suitable environment (for example, dogs need a lot of space and rabbits need grass and plants).
- + The animal's need for a suitable diet.
- + The animal's need to behave normally (for example, dogs need a lot of exercise and cats enjoy being independent).
- + Any need the animal has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (goats and donkeys need company and should never be kept alone, for instance).
- + The animal's need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.²

Your right to be listened to, and to have your wishes and feelings taken seriously, relates to pets too. If you feel strongly about having a pet, please speak with a member of staff. They should listen to you and try to understand your point of view.

Any decision would have to take into account your views and needs, and the views and needs of others too.

If you are living in care or custody and you are struggling to be heard about your wish to have a pet, you could ask an advocate to help you. There shouldn't be any limit to what they can help you with – so long as it's about your rights and you being heard.

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1 Section 3(4) Animal Welfare Act 2006.

2 Section 9 Animal Welfare Act 2006.