What Causes Cruelty?

by Bill DeRosa

There are some forms of cruelty that we are familiar with and that occur quite commonly among children. We frequently see or hear about children pulling insects apart or crushing insects or other small creatures under their feet. (Saltandiners, snakes, and toads are common victims.) This behavior may simply be the result of children’s curiosity about what animals look like on the inside. Or some children may pull apart small creatures as a way of getting the attention of their peers or even of adults. It may also be that children learn to imitate adult behaviors such as fly-swatting and spraying insects with insecticide. Thus, destroying small creatures does not seem objectionable in many ways may encourage youngsters to refrain from violent behavior toward the creatures they commonly encounter. In addition, you may want to provide new ways in which children can relate to small animals. For instance, try taking students on an insect safari to observe the animals in their natural habitats. (See our article “From Ick to Learning” in the March 1984 issue of HUMANE EDUCATION.)

Research has primarily centered on other forms of cruelty, which, though less common than the insect-crushing variety, receive a great deal of publicity. Such behaviors such as fly-swatting and spraying insects with insecticide. Thus, destroying small creatures does not seem objectionable in many ways may encourage youngsters to refrain from violent behavior toward the creatures they commonly encounter. In addition, you may want to provide new ways in which children can relate to small animals. For instance, try taking students on an insect safari to observe the animals in their natural habitats. (See our article “From Ick to Learning” in the March 1984 issue of HUMANE EDUCATION.)

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