

Caring for stray animals

It's not as easy as it may seem

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I think back to a few years ago, when animal welfare groups were almost unheard of on Facebook and helping an abandoned kitten find a home was no easy feat. Thankfully, with the help of animal lovers who care, we have come a long way in this regard.

I see a lot of people stopping on the way to work or school to feed a hungry stray doggo, or a few. Our feline friends often receive this kindness too. I know these animal lovers mean well, but if you really do care about that stray dog near your house or the cat that is always meowing for food, please feed responsibly! No, sharing your kacchi with a dog isn't exactly an act of kindness. So what is safe for our furry friends? I got in touch with someone I have always admired for the helping hand she has always reached out to animals in need - arts journalist and animal welfare activist, Naziba Basher.

"Animals are not human beings and cannot digest everything that we can. For example, chocolate is toxic for dogs, and cow milk is toxic for cats. Salt and turmeric are things that can cause fur loss and other problems. I always stick to yoghurt or water for cats, and bread and water for dogs. You can also give them meat based food, but keep in mind that boiled protein is more ideal for them than fried," she advises.

I come across rescue posts on animal welfare groups and pages very frequently. Helping an animal in distress is certainly an admirable task, however, "rescuing" is not a matter to take lightly. We are talking about a life here. Picking up a kitten and bringing it home because you find it cute is not rescuing, that is theft. More common and equally distressing is when someone with good intentions wants to help a kitten or puppy but is unsure of whether it has a mother.

"I have seen and experienced this time and again, and I have constantly had to tell people to not rescue if they are unsure," says Naziba, "First, if you are unsure about whether the stray has a mother or not, do not bring it home. Many times the mothers go out hunting and it can take all day, or longer. It's best to wait for a day or two and check if the mother comes back. If she doesn't, then you can bring it home and take care of it. And the second thing you need to be sure of is whether you can keep it in your house. It is absolutely necessary to be sure of that, or at least have a back-up foster home before you pick up a stray."

It is also not a good idea to try to touch or cuddle stray puppies and kittens, I know how adorable they are but human smell on the little ones can often cause the mother to abandon her babies.

Another thing you should keep in mind is that the animal you want to rescue could be someone's pet. If this is some heartless owner that has abandoned the animal, then please find a new home, but pets can get lost, even with very responsible owners. I would advise you make a Facebook post and try to figure out if an animal needs help getting back to its original home. Look for collars, and if the animal looks well fed and groomed chances are it does have a home.

If you have rescued an animal and are fostering it



temporarily, it is your responsibility to hand over the animal to a decent and loving home. Check if the person interested in adopting will really care for the animal, don't just give it away to a stranger because they ask for it.

If you find an injured animal or you think it may be seriously ill, then it should be taken to a vet. Remember to take care if you are trying to transport the animal as you could end up injuring it further. In such cases you can always take the help of experts from Care for Paws, or any of the animal welfare groups on Facebook – there are

a lot of experienced and kind souls who can tell you what to do and help you take the animal to a vet.

Careless actions, no matter how trivial they seem, can seriously put an innocent animal's life in danger, but by acting responsibly you can help welcome it into your family or save its life!

Salma Mohammad Ali fears she is becoming a crazy cat lady and uses writing as a means to grasp on to sanity. Send her your views/hate/love at fb.com/salma.ali209



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