

A photograph of two wolves in a grassy field. In the foreground, a white wolf is walking towards the right, looking slightly ahead. Behind it, a grey wolf is partially visible, also looking in the same direction. The background is a soft-focus green field with some trees.

Living in a Pack

Use this fun activity to describe the structure of a wolf pack, including the different roles of each wolf. Children will learn how wolves communicate with each other and be able to compare human families to a wolf pack.

Grade Level: Pre-school – 6th grade Time: 30-60 mins

North Dakota Science Standards K.2.1, 1.4.2, 2.2.2, 3.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.4.4

Animals show how they are feeling by communicating with others through body language and sounds. Wolves also communicate this way and have special ways of working together as a group.



Warm-Up Activity instinct/learned

Stand in front of your group and without speaking demonstrate various feelings. Cross your arms in front of your body, tap your foot, etc. to show impatience. Ask children to guess your feeling.

Ask: How were you able to tell how I was feeling?

Background Information

Wolves live in a family group called a pack. The size of this group can be anywhere from 2 to as many as 20-30 wolves. The gray wolf pack has a special way of working together as a group. There are normally 2 wolves in charge of the pack - the dominant male and his partner, the dominant female. Think of them like parents - they raise the young pups, choose where to live, capture food and guard their territory. Last year's pups and other wolves help, but the alpha pair makes the decisions.

The word "dominant" means commanding, controlling, leading or prevailing over others.

Ask: Can you imagine living with that many people in your family? What would it be like?

Discuss advantages and disadvantages to living with a large group of people. If people started to disagree or argue, how would the final decision be made? Who would take charge?

How do you suppose the other wolves know who the leaders are? Stop for a moment to think about how our own families work. Discuss who makes the decisions at home and how this person(s) was/were chosen. The dominant male and female are usually strong. They have a way of showing that they are important. How?

Choose someone to look and act important without saying a word.

Discuss his/her body language. The dominant pair walk and act proud. Their tails are high in the air and their ears are up. The other wolves keep their tails lower and never really look at the leaders. Whenever a wolf moves towards a more important wolf it will keep its body very low to the ground, its eyes down, its ears tucked back. Then it will lick the muzzle and the mouth of the leader.

**Ask: What do you do when you want to play with someone?
What have you ever seen your pet dogs do?**

Wolves have their own way of asking other wolves to play. The wolf that wants to play will bow down in front of the wolf it wants to play with and wag its tail. Anyone who has a dog or has played with a dog has seen this happen. Sometimes the wolf will smile or grin and plan to show another wolf that it wants to play.



Activities:

1. Charades!

In order to stress the importance of communicating non-verbally, create cue cards with different emotions on them (happiness, surprise, confusion, etc). Be creative! Then have members of your group pick out a card and act out the emotion.

Next, repeat the activity acting out the emotions as a gray wolf would show the actions.

2. Leader of the Pack

Place children into groups of 4 to 6. Select one child to be the leader or the dominant male and female of the pack. Make a list of tasks to be completed non-verbally (moving to a location in the room, beginning a hunt, playing, all lying down, hiding, capturing prey, etc). The leader tries to communicate the task to his/her group.

You can adapt the level of difficulty of the emotions and actions depending on the age group.