Your Kids, PETA’s Pawns: How the Animal “Rights” Movement Targets Children
Introduction

Everything kids see—in school, on television, in magazines, and on the Internet—helps shape their development. But few parents realize how animal rights activists like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Humane Society of the United States, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, and their allies use these vehicles to reach kids through clever communications campaigns.

PETA begins a graduated process of indoctrination with kindly animal “welfare” messages on a website geared toward young children. By slipping in radical animal “rights” propaganda into the benign “help-animals” theme, PETA lays out the path to its next, more extreme age-specific website, “peta2,” its “youth outreach division.” The blurring line between caring for animals and “liberating” then begins to disappear as teen celebrity endorsements, schoolyard demonstrations, and other activities help transition middle- and high-school students from passive sympathizers to “PETA’s army of animal rights rebels.”

Most parents would be shocked if they knew the details of PETA’s marketing tactics aimed at children. In 2014 for example, PETA was forced to publicly apologize after its volunteers surreptitiously distributed comic books to elementary school students that contained “graphic photos of bulls being de-horned and an infected udder on a dairy cow,” according to the Los Angeles Daily News. PETA even ambushes kids playing an online Pokemon-themed children’s game with graphic videos of dead animals as “prizes.”

Psychologists and school officials have denounced PETA’s child-propaganda as “despicable,” “traumatizing,” “beyond insensitive,” and “an absolute atrocity.”

Meanwhile, PETA’s blatantly extreme actions serve as “cover” for seemingly more mainstream groups such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)—an animal rights group not affiliated with any local humane societies or pet shelters—and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). However, these groups are equally radical as PETA—they’re just more deceptive.

PCRM advocated for national school lunch “reform” in 2009. But by reform, PCRM means the complete elimination of meat, cheese, and milk from school cafeterias. The largest single source of PCRM’s funding is a wealthy animal-rights activist in Florida who also gives millions to PETA. This helps demonstrate that PCRM’s anti-dairy and anti-meat zealotry is motivated more by ideology than health.

HSUS has its own kid-targeted programs, starting with its “KINDNews” magazine mailed out to elementary school classrooms across the country. As kids grow older, HSUS seeks to keep them in the loop by asking them to form a club or to advocate for animal-rights issues.

Like PETA and PCRM, however, HSUS is an animal-rights group that believes meat and dairy products are markers of a “cruel” diet. Unlike PETA, HSUS never drops the kindly animal “welfare” façade, hoping instead to snooker Americans into thinking that its agenda differs from PETA’s.
"We are after the kids who are looking and searching for something."

— "PETA Kids" coordinator Marci Hansen

How PETA & the Animal Cult Movement Target Kids

With $51.9 million in annual income (2014), PETA is among the richest, most influential animal rights organizations in the world. It sees children as a way to effectively maintain its power by ensuring that its violent and destructive messages will be promoted for generations to come. Although many parents are familiar with PETA’s attention-grabbing media stunts, few are aware of PETA's coordinated campaign to bypass parental authority and indoctrinate children with its radical philosophy.

The Providence Journal (Rhode Island) reported in 2013 that PETA “plans to run ads in bus shelters showing a traditional Thanksgiving image to adults and a different, bloody, image to children.” The ad incorporated lenticular technology so while parents see a benign image, children shorter than 4’3” (the average height of an 8-year-old) see “two children spattered with blood and horrified as the mother cuts into a live bird.”

In the words of its founding president Ingrid Newkirk, PETA’s goal is “total animal liberation.” In addition to spelling the end of meat and dairy foods, this extremist organization has vowed to eliminate animals from zoos, aquariums, circuses, and rodeos. Its activists campaign aggressively to ban fishing, fur, leather, wool, pet ownership, and biology-class dissection in schools. And PETA opposes all medical research on animals (including lab rats) — even to cure diseases like AIDS and cancer.

PETA’s clever advertising campaigns are necessary to achieve its goals because most people are not naturally inclined to adopt this radical philosophy. As one animal cult leader candidly told Great Britain’s Observer newspaper in 2003: “We are after the kids who are looking and searching for something.” Through a sophisticated campaign designed to convert the next generation to its cause, children of all ages are snared by PETA’s predatory net and told that their search is over.

PETA’s graduated process of indoctrination begins when children enter elementary school and continues through adolescence. At each stage, PETA increases its expectations for “animal liberation” recruits, going behind the backs of parents at every opportunity.
An Online Minefield For Children

In 2002 PETA president Ingrid Newkirk insisted on CNN’s “Crossfire” that “everything [PETA does] is based at adults.” But at the time Newkirk made that statement, PETA was already operating several children’s websites, each designed to appeal to a different age group.

PETA begins marketing itself online to elementary-aged children with the “PETA Kids” website. Another Internet site, “peta2” targets middle- and high-schoolers and “seeks to inject the concept of animal rights directly into the bloodstream of today’s youth culture.” It targets adolescents with its “question authority” theme, featuring games, violent imagery, and street lingo for maximum appeal. And international youth-oriented PETA websites target young minds in other countries, including specific pitches to kids in India, Germany, and the United Kingdom. In its 2014 annual review, PETA boasts that peta2 “reached out to 241,000 young people.”

Peta2 links to PETA’s other online material, potentially exposing web-surfing minors to its graphic and often sexually-oriented messages for adults, such as porn star Jenna Jameson’s invitation to “pleather yourself” in faux-leather lingerie to “add some flare in the bedroom.” Another page gives instructions on how to “Veganize Your Sex Life” and stay “cruelty-free between the sheets” with links to vegan condoms and lubricants.

But even if they manage to avoid straying from PETA’s child-centered websites, kids see invitation after invitation to join “PETA’s army of animal rights rebels.” Over and over, animal-rights messages are hammered home, including these:

- PETA tries to overrule parents by telling kids “what to eat,” demanding that they adopt a meat-free, dairy-free, and egg-free diet. One game on the PETA Kids page describes graphic chicken slaughtering methods, such as “baby chickens have their beaks seared off with a hot knife and their wings and legs broken” before showing four bloody chicks sliding into a pot of boiling water (it also depicts the game’s heroes taking “shots” of chocolate milk at a pirate bar).
- PETA capitalizes on teen celebrity endorsements (including pop superstars and television idols) to glamorize its message. And with its “PETA Kids Superstars” program, it offers what every kid craves—validation—in the form of online “celebrity” status to everyday children who act out in the name of animal rights.
- PETA gives teens detailed instructions on refusing to participate in biology-class dissection projects that violate their “strongly held religious and moral beliefs.” PETA tells kids to “call the Animal Legal Defense Fund,” which will “put you in touch with an attorney in your area.”
- A cartoon infographic tells children on PETAKids.com that eating meat is “Mass, Mechanized Murder” that destroys the planet. It also attempts to convince children that that “Eating meat means eating poop” and “Drinking milk also means drinking pus.”

“Everything we do is based at adults.”

— PETA president Ingrid Newkirk denies targeting children on CNN
Teenage Rebellion, PETA-Style

PETA invests heavily into reaching impressionable children and youth—and claims to have “the largest youth membership of any social justice organization,” including the more than 600,000 kids it says have signed up for its email list. But the animal liberation movement needs more than cheerleading: It needs foot soldiers. Enter “peta2,” the group’s website for tweens and teens and “youth outreach division.” On the website, celebrities deliver the overall messages, telling kids “what to wear,” “what to eat,” and how to adopt a “vegan” lifestyle. But peta2’s “question authority” message is tinged with violent, edgy graphics, and sometimes contains suggestions to commit illegal acts.

As kids grow up and basic animal-rights propaganda sinks in, PETA gives young adolescents a road map for getting “active” in the “movement.” It’s called the “peta2 Street Team,” and it’s one part scavenger hunt, one part Marlboro Catalog. PETA brags that more than 100,000 children have already signed up for its “Youth Action Team.”

Through the peta2 Street Team, PETA essentially pays children to adopt its tactics. Street Team members perform specific animal-rights “actions” in exchange for points, which can be redeemed for PETA merchandise and other prizes like smartphone cases, a book that equates human rights with animal rights, and stencils (which implicitly encourages graffiti as a “great activist tool”).

Peta2 employs endorsements from actors, athletes, singers, and bands who it dubs vegan “heroes.” A favorite tactic of these PETA-endorsing celebrities on peta2 is taking off their clothes. A professional skateboarder “strips down,” an actor skinny-dipping in a kiddie pool is barely blurred out, and a page thankfully marked “Not Safe For School” shows a nude singer barely covering herself. peta2 also enlists the help of bands with violent lyrics like, “One finger, one trigger, one scope, one eye. Kiss your loved ones goodbye.” Perhaps the most famous celebrity who has participated in peta2 promotions is Canadian pop star Justin Bieber, who has infamously made headlines for spitting on fans, smoking marijuana, drinking underage, and vandalism.

It also brings the rebellion offline and into your home: peta2 ran a contest instructing kids to print an image of a tampon and tape it “on the cartons of eggs in your fridge at home” because “If you wouldn’t squeeze out your girlfriend’s tampon to make an omelet, it doesn’t make sense to cook a chicken’s period for breakfast.”

Parents, do you know what your children are learning, and does it square with your values? I think we have some activists among us who are pushing an agenda we know little about or dismiss as inconsequential.”

— Chicago Sun-Times letter to the editor from a concerned parent

A combination of celebrity and sexual content drives many PETA messages.
Incredibly, PETA also deputizes public school teachers to promote their message. Through the warm-and-fuzzy veneer of its “Teachkind” program, PETA encourages educators at every grade level to incorporate animal cult propaganda into their classrooms. In its 2014 annual report, PETA boasts that its “education division gave numerous presentations at elementary schools” and “provided teachers around the country with curriculum guidance.” In 2013, the organization claimed to have “reached more than 75,000 educators at conferences, through mailings and through teachkind.org.”

PETA provides lesson plans, books, videos, literature, stickers, and posters—all aimed at incorporating the group’s message into existing class culture, teachers are directed to explain “that President Lincoln was an advocate of animal rights.”

The overall curriculum of Teachkind is designed to lead children to accept PETA’s radical animal rights doctrine; in some instances, it subtly encourages kids to break the law. One “research and discussion topic” designed for high school students asks: “Is it ever acceptable to break a law (such as breaking into an animal laboratory and freeing animals)?” The students on the receiving end of this lecture aren’t likely to know that PETA endorses this sort of burglary, arson and worse.

The Teachkind curriculum for first- and second-graders uses storybook discussions, citing examples of animal “exploitation” in fairy tales like The Three Little Pigs and Cinderella. Teachers are told to serve vegetarian meals to their classes and “discuss the nutritional problems with bacon and other pig-derived foods.” And in a factually challenged attempt to equate pet ownership with human slavery, teachers are directed to explain “that President Lincoln was an advocate of animal rights.”

PETA’s website for teachers also offers to provide speakers who can appear in person or give a classroom presentation via Skype on animal rights issues. PETA’s chosen emissaries have included a convicted felon named Gary Yourofsky. The group hired Yourofsky in 2002 as a “humane education lecturer,” with the explicit goal of putting him in front of college, high-school, and even middle-school audiences.

Yourofsky sports an Animal Liberation Front (ALF) tattoo on his forearm. The ALF, a criminal organization responsible for arsons, death threats, and physical assaults, has been called a “domestic terror” group by high-ranking directors within the FBI. In January 2005, the ALF officially made the Department of Homeland Security’s list of terrorist threats.

Yourofsky has been arrested over a dozen times for animal-rights crimes, and was sentenced in 1999 to six months in a Canadian maximum security prison for the felony burglary of a farm. In his standard speech, Yourofsky compares himself to Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and even Jesus Christ. According to Yourofsky: “What we must do is start viewing every cow, pig, chicken, monkey, rabbit, mouse, and pigeon as our family members.”

In a 2007 lecture at the University of Indiana, Yourofsky declared, “I hope that fathers accidentally shoot their sons on hunting excursions, while carnivores suffer heart attacks that kill them slowly. Every woman ensconced in fur should endure a rape so vicious that it scars them forever.” And he’s clear on how to enforce these “family” values, telling the Toledo Blade in 2001 that activists should “not be afraid to condone arsons.” PETA also endorses the twisted activism of convicted ALF arsonist Rodney Coronado, who spent 57 months in prison for the 1992 arson of a Michigan State University research lab. In 2007, Coronado was sentenced to another year in prison for publicly demonstrating how to make a firebomb.

In April 2004, PETA youth outreach coordinator Karin Robertson told MSU’s State News: “If Rod Coronado can speak and encourage people, that’s really a good thing. His message is supportive of animal liberties and animal rights. We don’t condemn anybody’s activities.” PETA president Ingrid Newkirk went on network television to call Coronado a “fine young man.” Her organization contributed over $70,000 to his legal defense after his arrest for the MSU arson. When he was sentenced, the U.S. attorney implicated Newkirk in the crime as well.
PETA exploits children for publicity

As the organization targets it’s Lewd and offensive campaigns to children, it’s no surprise the PETA also exploits them to score activist points and media attention.

An anti-fishing campaign launched in at least three states shows PETA has no qualms sexualizing young children, telling parents “Don’t Let Your Kids Become Hookers.” It warned parents who enjoy the sport that taking their children fishing “sends a dangerous message that it’s entertaining to torment and abuse animals.” PETA even took their disgusting campaign international and protested with the same message outside of the 2013 Toronto Sportsmen’s Show. A local commentator called it a “kid-focused smear campaign” with the goal of “get them young, get them forever.”

In North Carolina, parents were upset after PETA employees dressed a 12-year old girl in prison stripes, placed her inside an animal cage, and put her on public display as the centerpiece of an anti-circus protest.

PETA pulled a similar stunt in 2014 but this time with a 6-year old boy. The Salt Lake City Weekly reported the group planned to chain up the child dressed in an elephant costume. The report noted PETA has “a history of using children as protest props.” A local PETA employee did not dispute this characterization, telling the paper that “Numerous children have joined PETA demonstrations over the last several years.”

Not content with exploiting the abuse of children in shocking advertisements, PETA also uses kids as protest props – often in chains or cages.

In January 2004, PETA sent a costumed activist into primary schools in England and Ireland to promote vegetarianism to children. Newspapers reported that PETA’s representative distributed “graphic leaflets detailing animal killings” to young children, along with claims that “drinking milk is unnatural.” PETA has been similarly invading schools in the United States for more than two decades.

Unfortunately, responsible parents who monitor their kids’ reading material, supervise their Internet activity, and keep tabs on their school lessons are not necessarily out of the woods. In today’s violent culture, most U.S. school districts forbid unapproved visitors from entering school grounds. Undeterred, PETA activists now congregate just outside school property, lying in wait for children as they come and go.

PETA has camped outside schools in at least 15 states, passing out anti-fish, anti-milk, and anti-chicken trading cards to children as they walked home. The cards show cartoon images of children suffering various illnesses and embarrassing conditions, supposedly as a result of not being a vegetarian. The characters include “Pimply Patty,” “Diabetic Diane,” and “Ear Infection Enrique.” One registered dietitian told reporters that the PETA campaign was “based on sensationalism” and “a real tragedy. It targets teenagers who really are calcium deficient and need to drink their milk.”

Dieticians aren’t the only ones who have spoken out against PETA’s aggressive tactics. After one incident in 2010 where PETA employees confronted children on their way home from school, a parent responded with a letter in the Columbus Dispatch: “I am offended that PETA would pass out propaganda to my 7-year-old without my knowledge or consent. I am insulted that they would turn their public-relations bid into a circus sideshow. My child is not a means to their end.”

The school’s superintendent told the newspaper that the tactic of wearing cartoonish animal costumes while hugging and posing for pictures with elementary students without parental consent “is desensitizing children to come up to a stranger.”

Parents and educators in South Africa were similarly outraged when anti-chicken PETA activists targeted an elementary school without permission. As a spokesman for the nation’s Education Department told newspapers: “It is unacceptable to terrorize children like this. PETA should be strongly condemned.” The school’s principal agreed, “I don’t think that all of the children will be able to distinguish that it concerns a campaign. They might take every word for true.”

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While some of PETA’s attempts to draw children into vegetarianism are irresponsibly misleading – such as its claims that non-vegetarians are more susceptible to illness – other campaigns inappropriately use graphic images to scare children out of consuming meat, fish, and dairy products. In 2002, PETA activists (including one dressed like a pig) set up outside middle schools in New Hampshire and Massachusetts with a graphic video display of pigs being slaughtered. One protester carried a sign that read “Pigs are friends, not food.” After PETA showed up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Mayor Evelyn Sirrell told reporters: “It’s an absolute atrocity to use children this way … a lot of kids were traumatized by what they saw.”

Just When You Thought Schools Were Safe ..
PETA doesn’t limit itself to harassing and propagandizing kids in and around schools. Circuses are apparently fair game, as are theaters, restaurants, and even school field trips. In 2004 PETA started handing out “Buckets of Blood” to children outside of KFC restaurants, middle-schools, and high-schools. The red-and-white striped buckets are meant to resemble KFC’s signature fried-chicken container. But according to the Associated Press, “instead of fried chicken, each is filled with items including a bag of fake blood and bones, a bloodied plastic chicken and a cardboard caricature of a blood-spattered Colonel Sanders holding a butcher knife toward a terrified-looking chicken.”

PETA launched a similar campaign in 2000, distributing “Unhappy Meals” to children outside of McDonald’s restaurants (focusing on the franchises with playgrounds) in states from California to South Carolina. The giveaway included a bloody toy pig, a stuffed Ronald McDonald doll holding a butcher knife, and a game that asked children to lead a fictional cow through a maze. PETA’s written instructions read: “If she takes the wrong path, her throat will be slit with a butcher’s knife.” Parents were not amused, telling an Albany, New York television station in 2009, “I don’t want my son to be around something like this. This is not fair for a child,” and “I think it’s unhappy that they target children.”

Denver’s Rocky Mountain News classified PETA’s attempt “to manipulate adults by traumatizing their children” as “despicable.” The Omaha World Herald declared that “it’s the vulnerable children who will likely suffer for the anxiety-inducing insensitivity of the attack on what should be a happy, family-oriented outing.” Dr. Jeffrey Dolgan, chief of psychology at Denver’s Children’s Hospital, told the Denver Post that PETA’s “Your Mommy Kills Animals” campaign is “beyond insensitive.” He warned: “The implication is that mother is a murderer and a killer ... Some vulnerable kids will not do well with this. It is potentially very anxiety-arousing. Someone has made a mistake.” Sadly, given PETA’s lengthy track record of targeting children for activism, the implication that “mother is a murderer” was clearly not an innocent mistake.

In 2004, PETA gave these “Buckets of Blood” to children exiting fast-food chicken restaurants in at least 10 U.S. states.

PETA’s most controversial child-oriented campaign to date kicked off in late 2003. In more than 15 states, the group handed out a comic titled “Your Mommy Kills Animals” to children of fur-wearing women, outside holiday performances of The Nutcracker and other theatrical shows. The comic’s front page shows a ’50s-era cartoon mom with a sadistic look on her face, stabbing a bloody rabbit to death with a giant knife. It urges children: “Ask your mommy how many animals she killed to make her fur coat.” The back cover describes women who wear fur as “terrible people,” and tells kids: “One of those terrible people is your mommy. Your mommy kills animals! I bet you didn’t know that.”

PETA’s “Mainstream” Allies

PCRM

Don’t be fooled by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Only a small fraction of this phony-baloney “physicians committee” actually graduated from medical school. While this group tries to appear as a respectable organization of doctors, in reality it’s nothing more than PETA in a lab coat.

PCRM both reaches out to parents and advocates for policy changes that will affect what kids eat and drink. And it’s exactly the same as PETA’s diet: No meat, milk, cheese, or other animal products.

PCRM’s “healthy school lunches” campaign is a ploy to inject an animal-rights-approved diet into the lunch line, coded in euphemisms such as “plant-based.” And on its website PCRM propagandizes to parents, scaring them away from milk and other nutrient-rich animal products in favor of “kid-friendly” vegan diets. PCRM’s subsidiary “The Cancer Project” also offers a guide tailored towards parents (and featuring kid-friendly art) that scaremongers about meat, fish, and dairy products.

PCRM makes plenty of pseudo-scientific claims that favorite kid lunches containing hot dogs or bologna can cause cancer. PCRM president Neal Barnard, who has served a medical advisor to PETA (and as president of the PETA Foundation), wildly claims that cheese is “dairy crack” and “morphine on a cracker,” and further hysterically writes that “to give a child animal products is a form of child abuse.” Appearing on TV recently, Barnard claimed that milk is “hurting our kids.”

In fact, vegan diets can put kids at risk for nutritional deficiencies. Animal products are rich in nutrients, including vitamin B12, which isn’t found naturally in “plant-based” foods, vitamins A and D, and calcium. Moreover, omega-3s found in fish are linked to higher IQs in children.

PCRM’s dietary “advice” is fueled more by ideology than nutrition. (It’s worth noting that PCRM gets much of its money from a single wealthy animal-rights activist in Florida who owns a vegetarian restaurant.)

Barnard used to be president of The PETA Foundation (now called the Foundation to Support Animal Protection) which has funneled money from PETA to PCRM. Barnard also has co-signed letters, on PCRM letterhead, with the leader of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, which the Department of Justice deemed a “domestic terrorist threat.” The American Medical Association has slammed PCRM, calling it a “fringe organization” that uses “unethical tactics” and is “interested in perverting medical science.”

The “Humane Society” of the United States

Perhaps the most deceptive animal-rights group of all is the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Key HSUS personnel, including its corporate activism director, cut their teeth at PETA. But HSUS’s campaigns to indoctrinate kids are far more cynical than PETA’s.

HSUS targets elementary school classrooms with KINDNews, a magazine distributed nine times a year. The cover story of a recent edition of KINDNews featured a child with a gasmask next to an article attacking animal agriculture. The kicker? HSUS urged its young readers to write their Congressmen, the USDA, and the EPA.

In other words, HSUS is trying to recruit a child army of lobbyists that it can command, preferably for the rest of their lives. Lobbyists, you ask? That’s right—HSUS’s spending on lobbying is greater than its spending on grants to pet shelters.

Most Americans are under the mistaken notion that HSUS is somehow related to their local humane society’s pet shelter. It isn’t. In fact,
HSUS contributes only one percent of its $130-million-plus annual budget to local pet shelters.

Like PCRM and PETA, HSUS wants to force veganism into schools. HSUS tells kids they can “help animals” by “add[ing] meatless meals to school lunches.” HSUS also suggests that kids can “try to show [their] friends that vegetarian is a better choice.”

And as kids grow out of KINDNews, HSUS has advice on how to start and run a club. In its how-to guide, HSUS tells students to “offer animal-friendly refreshments” and helpfully lists several vegan recipes hosted on HSUS’s website. And HSUS assures college students that “you can help make mealtimes a little easier for yourself and others who want meat-free foods.”

Says HSUS CEO Wayne Pacelle: “I think getting to young people ... is so important. Getting our message out to young people can really send them in our direction and cause them to really act on our beliefs.”
“Our nonviolent tactics are not as effective. We ask nicely for years and get nothing. Someone makes a threat, and it works.”

— PETA president Ingrid Newkirk

“We’re at war, and we’ll do what we need to win.”

— PETA vice president Dan Matthews

“Go throw a brick through their window. I don’t care—whatever it is that you need to do to get them out of their business, go do it.”

— PETA organizer and convicted federal felon Andy Stepanian

“I find it small wonder that the laboratories aren’t all burning to the ground. If I had more guts, I’d light a match.”

— PETA president Ingrid Newkirk

“To give a child animal products is a form of child abuse.”

— Neal Barnard, PETA medical advisor and former president of the PETA Foundation

“We feel that animals have the same rights as a retarded human child because they are equal mentally in terms of dependence on others.”

— Alex Pacheco, PETA Co-founder

“Even if animal tests produced a cure for AIDS, we’d be against it.”

— PETA president Ingrid Newkirk

“I think it would be great if all of the fast-food outlets, slaughterhouses, these laboratories, and the banks that fund them exploded tomorrow. I think it’s perfectly appropriate for people to take bricks and toss them through the windows.”

— Bruce Friedrich, PETA’s Vice President for International Grassroots Campaign