

Lesson Plan: Baby Squirrel Rehabilitation - First Responders

Materials Needed:

- Computer with internet access
- Notebook and pen/pencil
- A small cardboard box (like a shoebox)
- An old, soft t-shirt or fleece blanket
- A bottle that can be filled with warm water (e.g., a plastic soda bottle or reusable water bottle)
- Optional: Art supplies for the final project (paper, markers, colored pencils) or access to digital design software (like Canva) or video editing software.

Lesson Overview for Adelae

Hello Adelae! Since you're passionate about helping baby squirrels, this lesson is designed to move beyond facts and into practical, real-world application. Today, you won't just learn **what** to do; you'll work through a realistic scenario to practice your critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Our goal is to understand the most responsible, ethical, and safe way to help an animal in need, focusing on the ultimate goal: getting it to a licensed professional. Let's get started!

Part 1: The Hook - A Question of Ethics (10 minutes)

Let's begin with a little warm-up to get you thinking. In your notebook, jot down your initial thoughts on this question:

"Is it always the right thing to 'rescue' a baby animal that you find alone?"

Consider a few angles:

- When might it be the **wrong** thing to do?
- What could be the unintended consequences of "helping"?
- What is the difference between interfering and intervening?

We'll revisit your answers at the end of the lesson. This is a core ethical question that all wildlife rehabilitators grapple with.

Part 2: Guided Activity - The Case of the Lone Squirrel (45 minutes)

This is a problem-based learning scenario. Read the situation below and follow the steps, using the provided resources to make the best decisions.

The Scenario:

You're walking in your backyard and you hear a faint peeping sound near the big oak tree. You look down and see a tiny baby squirrel, no bigger than your thumb, lying on the grass. Its eyes are still closed. It's not moving much, but you can see it breathing. The squirrel feels cool to the touch.

There's no sign of a nest on the ground or a mother squirrel anywhere.

Your Mission: Act as a responsible First Responder.

Step 1: First Assessment & Safety (Do this first!)

Before you do anything else, you must assess the situation for immediate danger. Is the baby in a safe place? In your notebook, answer:

- What are potential dangers to the squirrel in its current location? (e.g., predators like cats, hawks; location like a road or puddle).
- Based on the scenario, does the squirrel appear to be in immediate danger?

Your Action: The baby seems safe from immediate predators but is exposed. The #1 goal is to reunite the baby with its mom. Mom won't come back if it's cold. Your first job is to get it warm.

Step 2: Building a Temporary Reuniting Box (Hands-On Activity!)

Let's build the tool for the job. Gather your cardboard box, t-shirt, and water bottle.

1. Fill your bottle with warm (not hot!) water. It should feel like a comfortable bath. Wrap it in a sock or part of the t-shirt so the direct heat won't harm the baby.
2. Place the wrapped bottle in the shoebox.
3. Use the rest of your soft t-shirt or fleece to create a donut-shaped "nest" inside the box. Place it next to the warm water bottle (not on top of it). This is where the baby squirrel would go. It gives it a heat source without burning it and a soft place to curl up.

Critical Thinking Question: Why is it crucial to use a "reuniting box" instead of just taking the squirrel inside your house right away?

Step 3: Research & The Right Call

Now that you have a plan to keep the baby warm and safe while you try to reunite it, your next step is to find professional help. It is illegal in most places to keep wildlife without a license. Your goal is to be a temporary helper, not a permanent owner.

Using the internet, find the answers to these questions:

1. Search for "wildlife rehabilitator near me" or use your state's Department of Fish and Wildlife website. Can you find the name and phone number of a person or center that handles small mammals? Write it down.
2. Research the "two-hour rule" for reuniting baby squirrels. What does it mean?
3. What should you NOT give a baby squirrel to eat or drink? Why is giving it cow's milk or water especially dangerous? (Hint: Look up aspiration pneumonia and dehydration from improper formula).

Step 4: Formulate Your Plan

Based on your research, write a clear, step-by-step plan in your notebook for what you would do next in our scenario. It should start from the moment you have your reuniting box ready.

Example start: 1. Gently place the baby squirrel in the nest inside the reuniting box, next to the warm water source. 2. Place the box at the base of the tree where I found it... etc.

Part 3: Creative Application - Be a Wildlife Hero! (45 minutes)

Your work as a first responder was excellent. Now, let's use that knowledge to help your community. Many people mean well but do the wrong thing when they find wildlife. Your task is to create an educational resource that teaches people what to do if they find a baby squirrel.

Choose ONE of the following projects:

- **A Community Brochure:** Design a tri-fold brochure that could be left at a vet's office or community center. It should be eye-catching, easy to read, and contain the most critical steps (assess for danger, keep warm, contact a professional).
- **An Infographic Poster:** Create a one-page digital or hand-drawn poster with clear visuals and minimal text. Think of it as a "Do This, Not That" guide.
- **A 60-Second Public Service Announcement (PSA) Video:** Write a script and film a short, informative video for social media. You can act it out, use drawings, or even animate it if you have the skills.

Your Project Must Include:

1. A catchy title.
 2. The three most important first steps (e.g., Warmth, Safety, Call for Help).
 3. A clear warning about what NOT to do (especially "DO NOT FEED").
 4. Emphasis on the importance of contacting a licensed rehabilitator.
 5. Your design should be clear, accurate, and creative!
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Part 4: Reflection & Wrap-Up (10 minutes)

Let's look back at the beginning. Re-read your answer to the question: **"Is it always the right thing to 'rescue' a baby animal that you find alone?"**

How has your perspective changed after today's lesson? Write a few sentences in your notebook describing how your understanding of "helping" wildlife has become more complex and informed. Share your final project and your reflection with your instructor.

Fantastic work today, Adelae! You've learned the critical skills of observation, problem-solving, and responsible action—the true foundation of helping wildlife.