Research In Review

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. (Saltandans, 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 crush or 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 to some youngsters because such behavior is often condoned by adult society.

What Research Tells Us

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 forms of cruelty, which though less...