

HANDLING AND PRESENTATION OF SNAKES

1. In showing the animal, the instructor will have an excellent opportunity to dispel old myths. They can bring the student to a higher level of appreciation of how snakes live and how they fit in with other animals.
2. Many of the students will have developed “anxieties” about all snakes. They may have learned these from parents and other adults.
3. It is an excellent learning experience for the students to touch the snakes and to inspect them up close. With careful supervision, provide them with this opportunity, but NEVER attempt to force the student to touch a snake. Do not ridicule, use repetitive requests or thrust the snake close to the student.
4. Before leaving for a presentation, inspect your snake. Observe if its eyes appear cloudy and “bluish,” which indicates it will soon cast its skin. This opacity partially impairs its vision and we should refrain from handling it. Let it go through this stage unmolested.
5. Check the feeding log. DO NOT handle a snake for at least three days after it has been fed. If handled, the snake may regurgitate its meal.
6. Before making a pick-up, observe the general situation in the snake’s box. What is its position, coiled, stretched out, etc.? Slowly open the door so it knows you are present. If all is OK, remove its water pan to avoid tipping it over. If you do accidentally spill the water in its cage, please note it will have to be dried out, since it is unhealthy for the snake to remain wet.
7. Concentrate on the fact that in picking up and handling the snake, you must support it under as great a part of its body as you can. If it crawls, keep moving your hands one in front of the other as necessary to provide support. With large snakes, such as a boa constrictor, it is best to drape the snake over your shoulder or around your waist to provide the most support. You could also encourage it to coil around one arm.
8. Make the pick-up using a “scooping” motion, sliding both of your open hands underneath the snake, giving it support under as much of its body as possible. Remember, it is accustomed to being supported evenly by the ground under its entire length. You want to duplicate that support.
9. NEVER, NEVER handle the snake by grabbing it between your fingers at the back of its head. To do so may damage the animal. It also may make it belligerent toward people and thus difficult for you and others to handle in the future.
10. With the snake on your open hands, lift it clear of the cage. Immediately bring your elbows close to your body and get the snake in close to your body. Support it on your forearm and open hands, moving them as necessary to retain control. Keeping it close to your body will help you to take maximum care to not drop the animal.
11. Provide support by keeping your hands open and relatively flat. You NEVER, NEVER try to restrain the snake by closing and squeezing your fingers around it. Such squeezing action could severely

damage its ribs. Also, take care to NEVER force its body into a sharply formed “V” shape as this may severely damage its backbone.

12. Before allowing your students to touch the snake, CAUTION the students to only stroke the snake’s body with their open hands. Watch closely to prevent any student from wrapping his hand around the snake or “pecking” at the snake, slapping or trying to hold or pinch with the thumb and forefinger. Do not permit touching the snake’s head. Take care that the students do not crowd closely around, so as to “gang up” on the snake on all sides. This may seem like a lot of “do not” rules, but in actual practice you will generally find that most students will easily respond by wanting to learn how to treat the animal.
13. While they are touching and observing, remind the students of the service snakes provide to man. Remind them, there is no need to kill or to fear the gentle, non-poisonous snakes. Remind them how to identify the dangerous poisonous snakes and that while they should be avoided, there is no need to wantonly kill even those – since they, too, serve a function. While the students are taking turns touching, you have an excellent opportunity to reinforce the significant features made during your introductory statements about the snake.
14. After touching the snake, ALL students MUST clean their hands with provided alcohol hand wash.
15. Keep the excitement level at the presentation at a low level. Above all, you keep calm with the snake. While giving good instructional information, always pay attention to the safety of your animal.