

Ten tips for speaking about Animal Research

With animal welfare remaining a public concern, it is important that those who carry out or fund research on animals talk openly about this work. Here are some tips for talking effectively to those outside the sector.

1. Openness is the answer

The biggest concern for many people is the perception of secrecy surrounding animal research, so being open and honest is reassuring, even if the answer is not always what they may want to hear. Animal research is complex, there are costs to the animals and limitations to the animal model as well as benefits, and it is ok to admit that.

2. Remember that most people support responsible research

Polls (IPSOS MORI, 2016, ANZCCART 2021) show that over $\frac{3}{4}$ (79%) of people accept the use of animals in scientific research as long as there is no available alternative and there is no unnecessary suffering to the animals. What most people don't know is that research is regulated and that researchers must demonstrate how they will meet those conditions before the research can go ahead. Fewer people than we think are opposed to using animals in research, and many of these are willing to discuss why the research is important. This is not an 'off limits' topic, but one that should be discussed honestly and sensitively, to support greater awareness and understanding.

3. Accept that some people will never agree with animal research

This is not a black and white issue, and there are ethical quandaries. Our aim should not be to convert people, but to give them enough information to properly understand the issue and hold better-informed opinions. Our job isn't to change minds, but to change perspectives. You won't persuade everyone, but if you can replace uninformed dissent with informed dissent, that is enough. Try to remember that we all want to see better animal welfare, and that without the critical voices both the animals and our science would suffer.

4. Acknowledge that you don't know everything

You will not know the answer to every question asked, and you don't need to. If you know a little about how research has helped our understanding of one illness, then you know more than most people do. It is ok not to know all the answers, candour and honesty are generally appreciated.

5. Don't try to defend all research

It is likely that you disagree with some research practices, and there will be research carried out around the world that you have no knowledge of. When people ask you to comment on specific instances of research that they've heard of, don't feel obliged to defend it. Ethical standards and practices vary, and speaking up for the good practices you know does not make you an advocate for all science.

6. Don't be afraid to talk from the heart

Passion has volume and intensity. Speak from the heart about the research you care about. Share your passion for this work with others. Often, people associate animal research with product testing, and they may not know that it can be about developing new medicines or treatments that help people and save lives. Talking about what motivates you inspires people and helps them to share your point of view.

7. Speak about your own experience

Our own experience is more powerful than any generalisation. It cannot be refuted and gives other people an insight into your ideas and motivations. It is more powerful to talk about the condition of specific laboratory animals that you have worked with than to talk generally about welfare standards.

8. Beware the 'killer' argument

In most exchanges arguing does not help your case. Instead offer your views, experience and perspectives and seek to have a conversation that allows alternative views, finding common ground wherever possible.

9. Put your research in context

Everyone wants to know that animals used in research are looked after well by people who care about them. The research might be necessary but cruelty is not. But we can worry so much about the animals that we forget the human context: animal research is done to alleviate human suffering. The more specific you can be about the contribution your animal research could make to human medicine and the suffering it could help to combat, the better.

10. Learn how to walk away

Most discussions about animal research are productive, but every now and then these discussions may become heated. It can be helpful to prepare a mental 'script' to close down these situations with minimum conflict, something like 'well, this is a difficult subject and we won't all agree, but I am glad you feel as passionately about animal welfare as we do'.

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<https://www.amrc.org.uk/Blog/top-10-tips-for-speaking-about-animal-research>

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