

Prairie Pride

What do humans get from their families? Love, affection, support, and protection are just a few of the benefits of our family groups. We form families to share resources, provide social connection, and experience joy.

Humans are not the only animals to benefit from families. Many other creatures live in family groups too. One animal that has a family structure similar to humans is the prairie dog.

Prairie dogs are rodents that live in groups called coteries. These groups include one or two males and one or two females, plus their pups. The coteries congregate in bigger groups called colonies, just like human families live near other families to form communities.

When you think of prairie dogs you probably imagine them popping up from holes in the ground. That's true! They burrow under the earth to build networks of tunnels. Just like human family homes, prairie dog tunnel homes have rooms for sleeping, going to the bathroom, and nursing their pups.

Did your dad give you a kiss and hug this morning before school? Prairie dogs family members also kiss and nuzzle each other to show affection. They groom each other too, similar to how your mom might have brushed your hair when you were younger.

Another benefit prairie dog families offer is the ability to protect each other. They use short barks to warn about predators. The barks can communicate the species, color, size, direction, and speed of the approaching predator. Their language is even more complex than the language of dolphins and chimpanzees.

Clearly prairie dogs are more like humans than we might have believed. Next time you're at the zoo, take some time to watch them popping in and out of their holes. You might see them spending time with their families just like you do with yours.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Prairie dog tunnels have a room for _____.
 - a. Sleeping
 - b. Nursing
 - c. Going to the bathroom
 - d. All of the above

2. How do prairie dogs show affection?
 - a. Kissing and nuzzling
 - b. Hugging
 - c. Barking
 - d. Digging tunnels

3. A coterie is like a family in the same way a colony is like a _____.
 - a. Tunnel
 - b. Prairie dog
 - c. Group
 - d. Community

4. What is surprising about prairie dog language?
 - a. It sounds like a bark
 - b. It communicates complex information
 - c. It warns about danger
 - d. It is a lot like English

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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