

A NEW PET FOR CHRISTMAS?

It's easy to envision the joy on a child's face when he unwraps what could be the best holiday gift he has ever received – in fact the greatest gift he has EVER, EVER received – a cuddly, adorable puppy or kitten who purrs or coos gently as he snuggles contentedly in his arms. The child can hardly contain his excitement at the prospect of sharing his life with such a loving, beautiful, exuberant living creature – one whom he instinctively knows will be his best, truest and most loyal friend and companion. The child is ecstatic – his parents are thrilled by their boy's pleasure and gratitude upon receiving the gift he has wanted "more than anything" for the past several years. Finally, the boy's and whining begging, cajoling and beseeching have paid off. His parents have finally succumbed to his tearful and heartfelt requests for his own dog.

His well-intentioned but ill-informed parents have bought their son an 8-week old Siberian Husky (sled-dog) with beautiful white and silver fur and ice-blue eyes. Their son had fallen in love with a sled dog after viewing a film about them. Heeding their son's fervent wishes and with the best and kindest of intentions, the parents located a local breeder of Siberian Huskies they'd seen an ad for in a magazine and contacted her without checking on the breeder's credentials and qualifications. Instead of conducting research on the Internet and contacting the American Kennel Club, or searching for a breeder recommended by a veterinarian or local vet college or animal behaviorist or expert, they went ahead and purchased a pup. They failed to study the breed's characteristics (physically as well as behavioral) and didn't know enough to request a health history of the animal. They simply purchased the dog on impulse with the idea in mind that they would make their son's holiday the most joyful and memorable ever! They failed to devote serious thought and deliberation to the obligations, responsibilities and commitments associated with pet ownership. They did not study the various aspects involved with owning a pet including financial requirements which incorporate the initial adoption or purchase fee along with veterinary costs for vaccinations, spay/neutering, health issues that may arise including illness or injury, proper care and training, socialization or obedience training, the cost of toys, bowls i.d tags, collar and leash or the commitment of time and TLC, the change of lifestyle which accompanies the addition of a pet to the family (we're talking exercise and playtime and plenty of interaction) – all of which constitute A BIG MISTAKE!

Before adopting or purchasing a pet, it is essential to carefully consider your lifestyle and whether you are able to accommodate the addition of a new family member who will require regular and ongoing physical as well as emotional care and commitment throughout the course of his life. Are you prepared to spend time and money to care for and train, socialize and exercise, play with and feed and provide adequate food and shelter, grooming for this animal on a day to day basis for many, many years (cats can live over 20 years – dogs can also live up to twenty years. Is it legal for you to have the pet of your choice in a home or apartment? Will it have adequate shelter and privacy? Do you travel frequently or work long days away from your home? A dog or cat does not generally cope well spending too much time alone, and destructive behaviors may result from being a “latch-key” pet.

Before adopting a pet or deciding to give a pet as a gift, it is essential to consider the following:

Does the potential recipient really want a pet?

-Have you discussed the realities of pet ownership and the costs, time commitment, veterinary care and responsibility of pet ownership with that individual?

- Is the potential recipient aware of ALL the obligations pertaining to pet guardianship including playtime, exercise, feeding schedule and comfortable sleeping space?

-Is holiday time the optimum time to give someone a pet? Are you engaging in many social and professional activities? Planning to go away? Planning to entertain guests, etc?

-Keep in mind potential holiday hazards a new pet may have to confront, i.e. holiday ornaments, rich foods, lights, tinsel, electrical cords, toxic plants, etc.

It is so important to introduce a new pet to your friends and family when you actually have time and energy to devote to making the new family feel accepted. Once you have determined that it is a wise decision to adopt a pet or give a pet as a gift, it may benefit the animal and recipient to simply receive a gift certificate from the rescue organization, breeder or shop from which you plan to purchase the pet and gift the certificate along with some accessories (i.e. leash, collar, feeding & water bowls, framed picture of the pet to be adopted) and wait to deliver the pet until after the hectic, often frenetic holidays are over – thus giving both the pet and his new family the most favorable opportunity to get to know (and love) one another!!!