

How to Choose the Right Pet for Your Family

Deciding to incorporate a pet into your family can be one of the most important decisions you make. After all, the pet may spend a significant number of years with you and share many life experiences with you and your children. Adding a pet to your family can deeply enrich and improve the quality of your life and teach both you and your kids many profound life lessons including compassion, loyalty, responsibility, unconditional love and respect and appreciation for all creatures and our planet. The right pet can also become a beloved family member.

Never make the decision to adopt a pet in haste or spontaneously. A pet, particularly a dog or cat, requires love, affection, interaction, exercise, proper nutrition, regular veterinary care – and a lifetime commitment from you to provide for his care and well-being. Before introducing a pet into your home and lives, discuss the decision (pros and cons) with your family. Carefully and thoughtfully consider the suitability and compatibility of the pet which best accommodates your lifestyle, budget, time and space parameters. Do you and your kids have the time to provide a pet with a quality life – or is your schedule full of work and other activities that would preclude you from spending time and devoting attention to a pet? Would the pet be a burden rather than a joyful addition to your lives?

Children and their animal companions often forge a unique bond – full of love and trust. An animal companion provides unconditional love, loyalty, friendship, and companionship and is nonjudgmental. He makes a child feel safe and comfortable. He becomes the child's confidant and accepts him for who he is. Children, who have animal companions, tend to be better socialized with their peers as well as adults. Their confidence is increased and their self-esteem is generally higher than children who do not have a pet. Children learn compassion and responsibility while learning to care for their pet.

Bear in mind, that you, as parent, will always be ultimately responsible for the pet's care and well-being. However cooperative and willing to take care of a pet, children are, well," children" and, however well-intentioned, are easily distracted or involved with social obligations, extracurricular activities, homework, chores and other activities. Are you willing to take on this additional responsibility?

Conduct research and discuss the various types of pets that are available and best suited to your household and lifestyle. Visit animal shelters and rescue organizations with your family. You can save the life an animal by adopting a shelter or rescue dog or cat. Discuss the benefits of pet guardianship with friends, relatives and neighbors who have pets. If you are planning on adopting a pet from a shelter or rescue organization ask animal welfare workers/volunteers to determine which one is the most appropriate for you – one that all of you will love and from which you will derive great pleasure. The rescue and shelter volunteers are often very knowledgeable about the specific pet you are thinking of adopting and can provide you with much information regarding the animal's health, personality, socialization skills, and energy/activity levels.

Careful thought and awareness of the responsibility that comes with pet guardianship are extremely important. However, the joys of having a pet far supersede any challenges or responsibilities involved.