

INTRODUCING A PET INTO THE FAMILY

by

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You've finally made the decision. After lengthy discussions as to the pros and cons of owning a pet, you've decided that the time is right. Your children are no longer infants; they have spent plenty of quality time with Aunt Trudy's Labrador Retriever, "Sunny" and her Siamese cat, "Simone". They have played with a neighbor's German Shepherd. Uncle Fred has brought his Border Collie, "Billy" over to the house many times. The kids have also learned about animal companions and how to care for them in school where they have turtles, bunnies, gerbils and hamsters in the classroom. Although the kids love every kind of animal, it seems they are most enamored of the canine variety and want a dog of their own.

While the kids have been begging for a dog for a long time (it seems like forever!) you want to make certain that they (as well as you and your husband) are really ready to assume responsibility for the life of another living being that will reside in your home. Your little boy is 8 – his sister is 5. You want your kids to learn responsibility. Still, ultimately you will be the primary caregiver and supervisor of your children. Are you all ready to share this responsibility?

Before you adopt your new canine, do your homework!!! Go on the Internet. Read about and research the various breeds of dogs that most appeal to you and your family and determine which seem most compatible with your personalities and lifestyle. Decide if you want to purchase a dog from a breeder (make sure he's reputable and has references!) or if you'd like to adopt an animal that is in need of a loving home from a shelter or "rescue" group.

There are countless breed specific rescue groups across the country, which feature purebred representatives of virtually every kind of dog from Mastiffs to Dachshunds. These rescue groups are easily located on the Internet and commonly feature a gallery of dogs available for adoption along with details about the animal's age, health and personality.

There are many wonderful, healthy and loving animals that have been abused neglected or abandoned and are in need of loving homes. Too many pets end up in shelters or in rescue organizations simply because their owners lacked sufficient understanding about the breed they selected. Perhaps you can adopt an animal in need of a home!!! Go together as a family so you can see how each of you interacts with a potential adoptee. Most organizations or shelters have special visiting areas and afford you the opportunity to "play" or visit with the animal. Jointly decide which animal is best suited for your family.

Before you take the final step of actually purchasing or adopting a pet, make sure you have asked yourself the following questions:

- How much time does my family realistically have to spend with a pet?
- How intelligent/trainable is the breed of interest?
- How well does it get along with other dogs? People?
- How large is it, or if it's a puppy, how large will it get?
- Is the dog good (patient and trustworthy) with children?
- How much exercise and space will it require?
- Is my backyard fenced so that my dog can safely run and play and not escape?
- Can we afford to take care of a pet? Its food and medical costs?

Once you've determined that you can care for a pet, take the pet you've selected to a veterinarian (ask pet-owning friends for referrals) for a check-up to determine if he's healthy or prone to any health problems. Your vet should provide you with a vaccine and regular exam schedule. Ask him to recommend the food and diet best suited to your dog's needs. It is a good idea to have your pet tattooed or micro chipped by your vet as a permanent means of identification should he get lost or stolen. Also, inquire about flea, tick and heartworm prevention and spaying/neutering.

Once you learn that the pet is in good health, make your home dog friendly and safe both inside and out. Check the fence to make certain your dog won't be able to escape. Inside, determine where your pet will eat and sleep. Provide bedding and separate bowls for his food and water.

Have the family decide on the pet's name, then purchase a comfortable, secure collar, an identification tag with his name and your phone number, and a leash.

When your family is ready to take your pet home, each of you should pet and speak soothingly and comfortingly to him. As easily and gently as possible, put on his new collar, name tag and leash. Speak softly and calmly as you guide and help him into your car. Gently pet him.

When you arrive home, orient him to his new surroundings -walk him around your home and introduce him to your back yard while he's still on leash. Bring him into the house and take him to his special "place" – then guide him through your house slowly and calmly so that he will become familiar with it. Allow him to experience the "scent" of each room. Finally, show him his bed and his special place and remove his leash. Give him fresh water and talk to and pet him gently. Give him some doggie toys to play with. Hold him in your lap - cradle him in your arms and welcome him into your family!

So, now, you've completed all your homework. You've read and researched. You've asked the appropriate questions and received answers to them. Your expectations are realistic – And you have finally found the dog of your family's dreams. Good job – well done! You and your family are now ready to enter into one of life's most enjoyable, rich and rewarding relationships and to experience the unconditional love and acceptance that only a beloved companion animal can provide!!! Congratulations!!!