

Should I Get a Dog for my Kids?

We all know that children and dogs share a very special relationship. Kids forge a unique and powerful bond with their animal companions. They play with them, talk to and laugh with them, walk with them, do their homework with them and even share their strongest feelings and deepest secrets with them. Dogs love children unconditionally and never yell at or punish them for not doing their homework or chores or for not cleaning their bedroom. Kids and dogs - you just can't beat this winning combination!

Kids learn compassion and responsibility by learning to share life with and feed and care for their pets. They learn to value and appreciate all living creatures. They learn a lot about life itself, getting sick or old, living in the moment, sharing companionship and friendship— and also the care and commitment an animal companion requires and deserves.

When is it appropriate for a child to have a pet? It truly depends on the child's family situation and his own maturity. As a parent, know that you are ultimately responsible for the care and well-being of your family pet. Children are well-intentioned and may promise that they will take care of the pet on their own. But we, as parents, know, that children are easily distracted and preoccupied with their own responsibilities such as school, extracurricular activities, human friendships and social obligations. They may be very well-intentioned, but lack the maturity to assume full responsibility for another living being.

Before adopting a pet into your family, it is very important to have serious discussions about the obligations and responsibilities associated with pet guardianship or "parenthood". Your child must thoroughly understand that a pet is a sentient, living creature who may be shorter lived than he, who may get sick and require veterinary care, who depends on humans for his regular food, water, grooming, exercise and overall wellness. He is a vulnerable creature who depends entirely on his human caregivers. You must also decide which type of dog best suits your family's personality and lifestyle and to whom which responsibilities of the pet's daily needs will be delegated.

Much thought and deliberation of each family member is required to determine if a pet is appropriate for you. Consider that the pet should be spayed or neutered, receive his vaccinations and regular visits to the vet to make sure he is in good health, have a nutritious and healthy diet, daily exercise and playtime, frequent interaction with his human family, and receive socialization and obedience training. Each member of the family must understand that the pet requires a lifetime commitment to keep him as happy and healthy and comfortable as possible. If you do not have the time, space or budget to

provide a healthy life for a pet, please do not adopt one. There are countless homeless animals who have been surrendered to animal welfare organizations and shelters and ultimately euthanised simply because their owners did not take the time to conduct research as to the time, space, activity level and money associated with keeping a pet or consider how much attention, interaction and care an animal companion requires. A pet has the potential of becoming a loving, devoted, loyal, unconditionally loving and beloved family member. If he is neglected, he can become sick, bored and destructive. Whether or not to get a dog for the kids is an extremely important decision. Take the time and make the effort to determine if a pet is in your child's future!