

I Want a Pet For My Child

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Having been a child myself and going through the begging for a pet, I can honestly say the AVERAGE child is not responsible enough to be sole caretaker of an animal. Yes, the child may care for it for a few weeks or even months, but go to any shelter or rescue group and ask how many animals per year are given up or neglected when the kids stop caring for them and the parents do not want to. I remember my parents getting on my case because I forgot to poop scoop the back yard or clean a cage. I spent five years at a shelter and then several more involved with rabbit rescue. I hated June, July and August (post Easter when the baby bunnies were now hitting sexually maturity and no longer cute babies). I hated these months because Christmas puppies and kittens were now adolescent brats and the owners could not or would not deal with them. I hated seeing the lines of animals coming in and the reason for giving up was often "The kid lost interest." I hated the fall, as all the pets bought over the summer would be dumped because the kids were in school and the parents unwilling to care for the animal. Had these parents had the guts to stand up and use some brainpower, these animals would never have been gotten.

What do you need to think about before bringing an animal into the life of your child and family? In over 20 years of various animal work, I have developed a series of things to ponder.

- **Time Commitment:** How much time each day do you have to devote to the animal? Are you willing to commit to the pet for its life? (This can be anywhere from three to 70+ years depending on if you get a mouse, a parrot or a tortoise).
- **Human Medical Issues:** Are there any allergies or medical conditions in your family that could cause issues resulting in having to get rid of the animal? If there are suspected health concerns, consult a doctor before considering a pet.
- **Cost:** Can you afford an animal? Getting the kitten or puppy or rabbit or guinea pig is not the big expense. It is possible to spend far more in the first year alone in supplies, food, vet care, etc., than you did on the animal. Regardless of where you get a pet, the animal is the cheap part! Can you afford day to care or medical emergencies? A dog owner can spend over \$1,000 a year on a dog they got for free.
- **Housing:** Can you properly house the pet? Being left in the back yard with a hut and water is not proper housing. Also, these pets are more prone to become nuisances (dogs barking out of boredom) and victims of "pranks" or theft. In order to be truly socialized, an animal must be part of the family.

- Lifestyle: What is your lifestyle like? Do you travel a lot? Is there a lot of mayhem and commotion at your house?
- Grooming: Most pets need grooming. Even short-coated ones benefit from a going over with a fine comb and brush every week. Should you get something like a longhaired guinea pig, Angora rabbit or heavily coated cat or dog, you may have to devote time daily to brushing.
- Need: Why do you want to share your life with an animal? Companionship, participating in sports, protection or because your kids are driving you crazy asking and you want to shut them up?
- Experience: Dogs for example: there are many breeds that are not appropriate for a novice dog owner. Many people see Border Collies (*Babe*) and Jack Russell Terriers (*Frasier*, *Wishbone*) and must have one. What about those 101 Dalmatians? What makes a dog excel in Hollywood often makes it a tough pet for the ill-prepared family who does not realize the needs of the dog. Reptiles though caged pets can be very tricky to maintain. Do you have or are you willing to get the experience to care for the pet you want to get? Will you work with your child to ensure the animal is well cared for?
- Long Term: What will happen to the animal if you have a new child? What if you have to move? Thousands of pets are given up because of a new child or move. Have you thought about the long-term needs of the animal? Remember, some animals have very long life expectancies.
- Golden Years: What when the animal ages? Are you prepared to cope with the onset of old age or when the pet is no longer "useful" will you get rid of it. Can you handle the increased health issues that can go along with a senior animal?

Now, you have weighed all the things mentioned above and decided to go ahead and share your home with an animal, who will be the primary caretaker? The average child will lose interest, sometimes within days or weeks – are you as the parent willing to continue proper care for the duration of the pet's life? If not, no matter how much your child pesters, whines and screams, stand your ground. And do NOT let another family member or friend usurp your authority. Live animals are NOT gifts to be given casually as one would a sweater.

Animals are living, thinking beings that need more than good intentions to live and bond. Each year, thousands of animals end up in rescue, dying, neglected or dumped in the "wilds" by families who gave into the pleas of their children. Never bring in an animal if the adults in the house are not willing to be ultimately responsible for it.