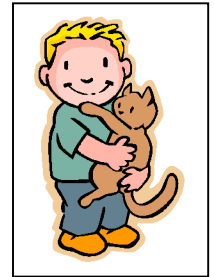


Are you thinking of getting or giving a pet as a gift?



Holidays are a time of great excitement, and are really not the best time for introducing a pet into a household. The animal may be treated as just one more toy, rather than as a new family member, and when the newness wears off, the pet is forgotten or ends up at the shelter. Puppies and kittens form lifetime behaviors and personalities in their early weeks, and improper care and training

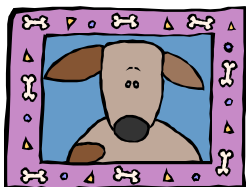
could cause permanent damage, often resulting in euthanasia.

Loving animals and wanting to share your life with a furry companion is not enough. Selecting the right animal to join your family takes careful consideration and research. Too many people rush into pet ownership without adequate information, and the pet ends up at the shelter, where only 1 in 9 get out alive. Before you rush out for your furry ball of love, educate yourself and your family about the realities of pet ownership.

Begin by asking some important questions. The following list mentions dogs and cats, but the questions apply to other pets as well:

1. **Why do I want a pet? Does everyone in the family agree?** “Because it’s cute” is not a good answer. Remember: puppies and kittens grow up into dogs and cats, and may live up to 20 years.
2. **How will a dog or cat fit in with my lifestyle and that of the others in my household?** Think about the activities your family enjoys and whether a pet would be a welcome addition to them. Consider the pet’s needs as well as your own.
3. **How much time do I and other family members have to spend with a pet?** If no one is at home for 10-12 hours every day, a dog may not be for you; boredom often causes destructive behavior in canines. If you are thinking of chaining or penning a dog outside 24/7, please DON’T get a puppy or dog. (See www.DogsDeserveBetter.com.) Cats, birds, and other pets also require love, care, and interaction.
4. **Do I have the money to afford vet bills, spaying or neutering, grooming, food, leashes, toys, beds, treats, kennels, or pet sitters, etc.?** Ask your friends who have pets what it costs for their care. If you can’t afford even the basics, perhaps now is not a good time to adopt. Pet sitting for friends or helping out at the shelter are good alternatives to pet ownership.
5. **What do I know about the characteristics of different breeds?** PLEASE! Do your research BEFORE you adopt! There are huge differences among the breeds of dogs and cats—don’t just adopt on the basis of looks. All too often a pet ends up at the shelter for plain ignorance about breed characteristics on the part of the owner. See www.Petfinder.com and their “Before You Adopt” page. They also have info on the many breeds for adoption.
6. **Are my kids and other family members ready and willing to share the house with a pet participate in that pet’s care?** Think about who will be responsible for the animal’s care. Remember that this is a *lifetime commitment* to another family member.
7. **Am I willing to train my kids in proper pet care and handling?** First, make sure that you know what proper pet care and handling is. Go to the “After You Adopt” page at www.Petfinder.com, or www.ehow.com (type “teach pet responsibility to children” in the search box). Children need to learn the rules and consequences, just as the pet does.
8. **Am I willing to commit to the loving care of another being for up to 15-20 years *no matter what?*** Animals depend on us for *everything*; don’t take this commitment lightly. If you are ready, please remember there are many wonderful dogs and cats at our own shelter...save a life!

These questions are meant to help you get an honest picture of what to expect when you adopt a pet. They are essential questions; answer them honestly. Remember pets have their own emotional, physical, and mental needs just as you do. This should be a *mutually gratifying* relationship. The care you give will be rewarded a thousand times over with unconditional love.



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