

# Why Families With Children Should Consider Owning a Pet

We live in an era where pets are increasingly substituted for children. Each year, it's becoming more common to wish a Happy Mother's Day or Father's Day to "parents" of "fur babies." As a mother of human babies, I [find](#) this a bit insulting. Animals can never compare with children.

Putting aside the question of pets *versus* children, let us instead consider pets *with* children. The two make a great combination.

Last year, we adopted a cat from our local animal shelter. She's been a wonderful addition to our household. My children, ages four and two, learn a great deal from living with her.

A few words of caution: pet adoption is a serious obligation. Please think it through carefully before you take it on.

Also, every animal has its own personality. You need to find one who can handle living with your children. The staff of shelters often get to know the animals they care for quite well. Thus, I recommend you start by describing your family situation and asking them to recommend a pet that suits your home. We did this with our cat, and it worked out great.

Regarding the the benefits pets offer children:

## 1. Pets Connect Children With Nature

Living with a pet teaches children what animals are like – how they are both like and unlike humans. At our house, we have plenty of books about animals and we're regulars at the local zoo. However that's no substitute for daily contact with our

cat. My kids observe what it means for the cat to be a living being.

A child who grows up without a pet may rarely – even never – interact with the animal kingdom. Kids today already get so little contact with nature. Studies [show](#) that the average American child spends a mere four to seven minutes a day in unstructured outdoor play time. That's a tragedy, but addressing it usually requires major lifestyle changes. Adding a pet to your household is a fairly easy way to start to increase your kid's contact with nature.

## **2. Pets Teach Children Responsibility**

Pets need daily care. They're not a plastic baby doll that your child can tuck into a play crib and forget about for a week. When your family leaves town, you need to make arrangements for your pet's care. If the pet gets sick, you need to take it to the veterinarian.

Even young children can care for a pet. They can brush the hair, or measure out food, or even exercise the dog. From helping out and observing your actions, your child will learn what it means to take responsibility for the care of a living being.

## **3. Pets Are a Source of Family Fun**

Pet ownership isn't just work, though. It is also a lot of fun. Pets have their own personalities and their antics can be a source of great amusement.

My children love petting our cat and playing with her. The right pet can be a wonderful playmate for your child. (Though depending on your child's personality and age, you might need to supervise). Your child may well develop an emotional bond

with their pet that endures for years.

Pet ownership is not something to rush into. But if you have children, you should seriously consider it. Your children's lives – and yours as well – could be greatly enriched.

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