

Pets are Great Teachers for our Kids



Are you thinking about adding a pet to your family during the holidays? It's a big responsibility but the rewards are well worth it! Families with children are most likely to own a pet... or two. Children have boundless gifts to offer a pet, including built-in playtime and a cuddle companion. But the rewards work both ways. Our children can learn much from owning a pet, including these 10 valuable life lessons.

10 Life Lessons Owning a Pet Can Teach Your Child

1. **Responsibility:** Pets require daily feeding, exercise, and affection, not to mention grooming and potty time (and clean-up). Older children can learn how to care for another living creature and even younger children can help with feeding and playtime.
2. **Trust:** It's easy to spill your heart out to your pet, who will offer you unconditional support in return. Pets make wonderful trusted companions for children and can be a first step to helping your child build trust in other relationships, too.
3. **Compassion:** Caring for a pet requires compassion, understanding, and empathy. Kids learn to be kind and to take care of others' basic needs.
4. **Bereavement:** When a pet passes away, your child will inevitably feel the pain of the loss, but in turn will learn how to cope during the bereavement period.
5. **Respect:** Owning a pet teaches children how to respect others. They must touch them gently, tend to their needs, and learn not to disturb them when they're eating or sleeping.
6. **Self-Esteem:** Pets show unconditional love, which can be a great boost to a child's self-esteem. So can the satisfaction that comes from having responsibility and caring for a pet's needs.

7. **Loyalty:** A pet's loyalty toward its owner is often unmatched. In turn, children learn the importance of showing loyalty to their devoted furry friend.
8. **Physical Activity:** Children who own a dog learn how fun physical activity can be while they play tug-of-war, fetch, or go for walks with their pet. Research shows children in dog-owning families spend more time being physically active than children without dogs.
9. **Patience:** Bonding with a new pet often takes time. Your child will learn patience while your new pet becomes comfortable in your home and also during training.
10. **Social Skills:** Dogs can be an amazing social "ice breaker." Taking your dog for walks as a family can improve your child's social skills as you interact with others. Pets may also help children with autism to develop social skills such as sharing.

There are many other benefits as well. Your child can have their basic emotional and physical needs fulfilled by a pet, including comforting contact, love, and affection. Research also shows that children from dog-owning homes (during their first year of life) have fewer ear infections and respiratory tract infections, and require fewer antibiotics, perhaps because the exposure stimulates the immune system. Other noted benefits include a significantly reduced risk of allergies and even better grades at school, presumably because owning a pet seems to give kids greater motivation.

Ready for a Pet?

Once your family decides to add a pet be prepared to take over their care if your child does not. Children 10 and under should not be expected to care for a dog or cat completely by themselves, and children under 3-4 should be monitored with a pet at all times. If your older child expresses the desire for a pet, it's a great time to have a talk about responsibility and the permanency of owning a pet and understanding it will require daily care (work) and not just playtime.

Best Pets for Children

If you decide to add a dog to your family, the following are among the top 10 dog breeds for kids:

1. Golden Retriever	6. Newfoundland
2. Labrador Retriever	7. Collie
3. Poodle	8. Bull Terrier
4. Irish Setter	9. Beagle
5. Vizsla	10. Bulldog

No matter which pet you choose, your child stands to benefit greatly, as does your entire family. When children between 3 and 14 were asked about the emotional benefits of owning a pet, 85 percent said they regard their pets as friends and 40 percent looked for their pet if they were upset. And don't forget to visit the Paw Depot when you get your new pet to receive your **Complimentary Pet Starter kit** which includes a Free bag of food, Free treats, Free can of food and a Free leash, harness or collar!

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