

Choosing the Right Animal for You

Pets are also called companion animals because they provide good company and are wonderful friends and family members. Pets are always there to listen to you when you are sad, play with you when you are happy, and enjoy relaxing with you when you have had a long day. Many people say that their pet is their best friend. That is why it is so important when you choose a pet that you make sure you pick the right one for you and your family.

Pets are a big responsibility. They depend on their guardians to keep them happy and healthy for their entire lives. Pets need good food, water, exercise and playtime, a cozy place to sleep, and a lot of love.

Pets can take up a lot of space, time, and money so before your family decides to bring a companion animal home, take some time to think about some of the questions below with your family.

Why do you want a companion animal?

Sometimes people want an animal for the wrong reasons. Maybe they saw the movie *101 Dalmatians* and want a dog like the ones in the cartoon. Or they want a tough dog to guard the house. Or they may want a cat to chase away mice from their house.

The problem with these reasons is that a dog is much more than a cartoon or home alarm system, and cats are more than mousers. They have feelings and needs, and want to be a member of the family.

Is this the right time to get a new companion animal?

It may not be the best time to bring a new companion animal home if there is a new baby in the house, or your family is going on vacation or moving. You need to make sure that your family will have time to help your new pet adjust and get comfortable with your daily routine and home.

Does your family have any allergies?

Find out if anyone in your family has allergies to animals before bringing a new companion animal home.

Does your family already have a pet?

Pets, like people, can be picky about who they are friends with and may not be excited about an additional companion animal. It is important to make sure everyone in your home, including your current pet, is ready to enjoy the company of another companion animal.

Who will be responsible for taking care of the new companion animal?

A companion animal is a big responsibility. In most families, the responsibilities need to be shared. Before choosing an animal think about who will clean the litter box or scoop the poop. Who will do the feeding, the walking or grooming (such as bathing, brushing and trimming nails)? Will that person have time every day? Is that person ready for the responsibility?

How much time do you and your family have to spend with a companion animal?

If your house is empty for eight hours or more each day because people are at work or school, then a rabbit, ferret, puppy or kitten may not be the right animal for your family, as these animals need a lot of attention. But a mature pet or a pair of cats may do just fine.

How much money do you have to spend on a companion animal?

It costs a lot of money to care for an animal. Figure out what all the costs will be for the animal you are interested in bringing into your family. Remember to include food, veterinarian visits, treats, toys, beds, enclosures or crates, and scratching posts. Will you and your family be able to spend this much? Sometimes your pet can unexpectedly get sick and will need extra care; is your family ready for something like that?

So does it sound like you're ready to bring an animal home?

Here are some more questions that will help make the decision on which kind of animal.

Adopt from a shelter or buy from a pet store?

Pet stores often sell animals who come from mills, which are commercial breeding facilities where the animals are raised in sad, dirty, horrible conditions and tend to be sicker and weaker. Some pet stores do have animals available for adoption from shelters though, so check first.

Animal shelters care for a wide variety of animals who need permanent, loving homes. The people who work at the animal shelter are usually very familiar with each animal's story and can tell you more about the animal you are interested in adopting. The adoption fee is usually less than buying an animal from a pet store or breeder.

If you adopt from a shelter, you'll feel great about giving a homeless animal a second chance. Animals from T2T have been spayed or neutered, have received their first round of shots, have a free first visit with a local veterinarian, and are microchipped and tattooed.

What species and breed will be best for your family?

Think about your answers to the questions above on time, money and how busy or quiet your house is and talk to workers at an animal shelter, animal behavior experts or veterinarians. For example, if your family likes to stay indoors and relax a lot, a mellow pet might be a better fit for your family than a smaller, energetic one who likes and needs to run often.

A second way is if you have found a particular type of animal you and your family like, then learn about that animal by reading books, going online or asking others who have experience with those animals to see if they are a good fit for your family.

Younger or older companion animal?

A pet of any age can bond with a new family. Young animals like puppies and kittens can be fun, but they need a lot of extra care, attention and training. Dogs, cats and other companion animals who are older can make great friends. They can usually spend more time alone, which is good if your parents work away from home during the day and you are at school. They are also often already trained and much calmer, but often still love to play.

One or two?

Especially with kittens, rabbits and ferrets, having two is usually better than one. By playing with each other as they grow up, they will learn better behavior. If your family is away from the house for several hours at a time, they can keep each other company as well.