

PETS SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN AS GIFTS

Getting a new pet is a serious responsibility. Although it is tempting to bring home a fuzzy little kitten or puppy to brighten kids' faces, such a "gift" should never be given without a few considerations.

A pet is a living animal that will rely on its owner for most of its needs—not for just a few weeks, but for many years to come. Children may lose interest in the pet, and the whole responsibility will shift to the parents, who may not have the time nor the desire to care for a pet. Unfortunately shelters are too often called upon to provide safe rescue homes for pets given impulsively as gifts.

If you decide to introduce a new pet to your household, make sure you know how to make it a safe and pleasant experience for everyone. Visit the pet shop or shelter and interact with the animals. This is a great way to make sure no one is allergic and to see if children are shy or afraid of a rambunctious fur ball before you end up with one at home.

Solid research and matching the proper breed with your family profile is essential. Some breeds of dogs are not good matches for small children. Likewise some cats may be too active for older people. You also need to decide whether adopting a puppy or kitten versus an adult dog or cat is best for your situation and lifestyle.

Let's say you have done all your homework and have decided to get a dog. Make sure it does not bring home little critters, such as fleas. One female flea can lay 10,000 eggs a day for up to three weeks. Your vet can easily check to see if your pet has fleas. If it does, the treatment is simple and painless. Do not take your new puppy to visit friends or relatives who have dogs. Puppies must have a series of vaccinations before it is safe to socialize them with other dogs.

Kittens should be tested for feline leukemia and feline AIDS before they enter the house where other feline family members reside. Cats are very hierarchy oriented. The first few weeks may be a tough test for humans as the cats roam and establish their own pecking order.

There is nothing more precious than watching our children gamboling and playing with their pets. It brings out the child in us as well. Bringing a pet into your home can be a joyous event that will grow into a long-lasting love affair. I am sure that your family veterinarian will be happy to guide you through the process to achieve the best possible outcome for everyone involved.

