

Caring for Your Family Pet

Should we get a pet? This is a thought to ponder. In North America the family pet is a great addition to any household. When you bring a pet into your life, you begin a journey, a journey that will provide more love and companionship than you will ever have known. While all kinds of pets can bring a family joy, it is important to choose a pet that is right for your home and lifestyle. So ask yourself, what kind of pet would be best for our family? How much time can we commit to having a pet? Who will be responsible for this pet?

These are all common and important questions to ask before you make the decision to become a pet owner. Families often do not consider the responsibilities involved with having a pet.

Large animals like dogs often require daily walks and room to romp and roam. A condominium may not be the ideal location for a German Shepherd, however a cat or bird might make a wonderful addition to your cozy home.

Veterinarians recommend yearly check ups and regular vaccinations. These check ups and vaccinations ensure your pet's ultimate health, however they can be costly. A visit can cost a pet owner anywhere from \$50-\$200. Emergency visits can be very expensive depending on the reason for the visit. Owning a pet is a lot like parenting a child. You would not deprive your child of health care, medication or food; these expenses need to be considered with animals as well.

If you are still considering a pet, who will be responsible for the pet's daily needs? Do you have children? If so why not delegate a chore or two. Studies have shown that children who grow up caring for a pet will be more responsible in the career world. This is a great way to get your children involved, earn spending money and teach them about caring for others. Chores should be delegated with realistic expectations; older children should be given greater tasks whereas young children should have minimal tasks that still require some supervision.

Some important tips to remember when caring for a pet are:

1. Ensure they have the proper diet; your veterinarian can help you find the right plan for your pet.
2. Make sure your pet has plenty of water; it is important for animals to stay well hydrated especially during the warmer months.
3. Never leave your pet in a vehicle for any period of time; this is especially dangerous during the warmer months. If possible take your pet with you when you leave the vehicle.
4. Be patient with your new pet; remember that just like children pets make mistakes and learn as they grow. Pets need our love and understanding. House proof for accidents and plan to be at home or close to your pet as they get used to their new home and family.
5. Love and praise your pet every day. Affection and respect go a long way. Veterinarians are full of information and would be happy to assist you in your search for a family pet. If you have any questions or concerns call your local Veterinarian's office.

By Angela Davis

Angela Davis is a home visitor in the Healthy Families Program at Family Services of Central Alberta, your Parent Link Centre. For more information about programs for children and families, call 343-6400.