



THE RIGHT PET FOR YOUR CHILD

What about Rabbits?

The pet shops sell baby rabbits that are soft, fluffy and pliable, but when the rabbit reaches three to four months of age, they develop their personalities and most find being handled terrifying. Even rabbits who aren't scared of your family members generally can't be picked up; as prey animals, they associate this with being taken by a predator, they'll bolt if you try to hold them, or they will scratch or scuffle to get away. In some instances, if really scared the rabbit will bite.



Rabbits can live to 10 to 12 years of age. Explaining to a 3-year-old that he can't pick up the adorable bunny will never work – so please choose an easier-to-handle pet instead if you have small children.

The Right Pet for Your Childs Age

Thinking of adding a pet to the family? Make sure you're bringing home an animal who is appropriate for your child's age. Any animal should be considered a family pet, with the adults being the primary carers to ensure the welfare of the animal is not left up to children. Children can certainly assist in their care under supervision.

Infants

Infants cannot handle or take care of pets. So, if you already have a family pet when your child is born-or if you adopted soon after-make sure to formally introduce your infant to your pet. Supervise them as they get to know each other, gradually increasing the length of time they spend together.



Toddlers

Toddlers are curious and will pull at an animal's fur, limbs and ears to make contact through touching. Make sure that the pet you've adopted can handle being touched in this way. As your pet and child spend time together (always under your supervision!), take great care that your child doesn't hurt your pet by grabbing. Also be sure that your child doesn't grab your pet's food and water dishes, the litterbox or its contents. If you have fish, keep small hands away from aquarium wires and out of aquariums!

3-5 Years

At this age, your child is learning about contact and empathy. Any contact with any animal must always be supervised. Most experts suggest a guinea pig for a pet. Guinea pigs like to be held, seldom bite and will whistle when excited or happy, to the delight of most children. Your child can also help with responsibilities by filling the water bottle and food dish.



5-10 Years

Children this age have inconsistent attention spans and are best off with small pets such as gerbils and goldfish. Children must be supervised during play sessions and while they do chores such as cleaning cages, filling water bottles and bowls, measuring food and scrubbing cage furniture and toys. This is a good time to develop good hygiene habits around pets with an emphasis on washing hands and surfaces when done with handling or playing.

10-13 Years

Children in their early teens have a great interest in animals and a good capacity for responsibility. They are ready to help care for pets such as dogs, cats and rabbits and can handle feeding and walking the dog, cleaning the cat's litter and cleaning out the rabbit's enclosure. Although children in this age group can be reliable, adults should always check that pets have adequate food and water and that the enclosure or litterbox is clean. Adults must do the welfare check for the animal twice a day. Children can also participate in dog training classes, which can be an excellent learning opportunity for them.

14-17 Years

Teens tend to be very busy, and animals will have to compete for their time and attention. Recommended pets are birds and aquarium fish. They're old enough to take on all the responsibilities of caring for their pet, with adult supervision and guidance. They may even spend their allowance on treats. Parents should note that dogs, cats and rabbits acquired at this time will probably stay in the home when the child leaves for college.