

INTRODUCING YOUR CHILDREN TO A NEW PET



Consider your child's age

Young children aged 3 to 4 can't control their angry and aggressive impulses well and could lash out at a pet, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry warns. Watch children in this age group at all times around pets, both yours and other people's.

What to watch out for

Pulling on tails, ears, fur, or chasing the animal are all signs your child may not be compatible for a new pet. Behavior like this can cause undue stress for a new pet, and can lead to behavior problems in the future such as shyness, fear aggression, hiding, urinating inside, fighting with other pets, or unwanted scratching or biting.

Monitor young children at all times

Be sure every interaction your child has with your new pet is positive. Teach them to notice when the new pet has had enough and needs a break. Talk to them about the importance of being quiet and calm and allowing the animal to come to them rather than chasing it.

Ideal age for a first pet

6 years of age. At this point, your child understands the concept of empathy, and is mature enough to participate in the care and feeding of your new pet. This is the perfect time to obtain a new pet for your child to grow and learn with.

What you can do

Get a cat tower high enough that your child can't reach or put up a baby gate to give your new pet somewhere they can go to escape the chaos of a new home or a new child in their life. Also make sure the pet you adopt has either spent time around young children or has been handled enough to be calm in loud environments.

Remember that the "new" wears off

Children are often so excited for a new pet, but after a week or two, lose interest. Kittens become cats and puppies become dogs, and the former is never as cute as the latter. Make sure your entire family is ready for the lifetime commitment of a new pet even if your little ones aren't.