



# **The Joy of Pets**

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At SCIS you will not have to look far to find a teacher who owns a pet. We may be the leading school as far as ownership in Asia! Ok, that's probably an exaggeration, but cats and dogs (turtles, guinea pigs and snails) are among our teacher community and most of us agree that the joy we receive from our little friends is one of the best stress relievers on the market.

You may ask yourself, "What would I do with a pet when I travel?" Solutions are at the tip of your paws with the plentiful lot of pet sitters, loving Ayis and boarding facilities. Having said that one must admit that apartment living and Golden Retrievers are not always the best match, and culturally speaking, the idea of welcoming a pet into a home varies for sure, but one thing is certain and that is children are amused by animals in most cases they develop empathy and responsibility for having a pet.

Dr. Becker from [healthypets.mercola.com](http://healthypets.mercola.com) shares her viewpoints below.

By Dr. Becker (<https://healthypets.mercola.com>)

## PET and CHILDHOOD

Families with children are the demographic most likely to own a pet... or two. Children have boundless gifts to offer a pet, of course, not the least of which is a built-in playtime and cuddle companion. But the rewards work both ways.

Your child can learn much from owning a pet, including these 10 valuable life lessons.

### 10 Life Lessons Owning a Pet Can Teach Your Child

1. **Responsibility:** Pets require daily feeding, exercise, and affection, not to mention grooming and potty time (and clean-up). Older children can learn how to care for another living creature and even younger children can help with feeding and playtime.
2. **Trust:** It's easy to spill your heart out to your pet, who will offer you unconditional support in return. Pets make wonderful trusted companions for children and can be a first step to helping your child build trust in other relationships, too.
3. **Compassion:** Caring for a pet requires compassion, understanding, and empathy. Kids learn to be kind and to take care of others' basic needs.
4. **Bereavement:** [When a pet passes away](#), your child will inevitably feel the pain of the loss, but in turn will learn how to cope during the bereavement period.
5. **Respect:** Owning a pet teaches children how to respect others. They must touch them gently, tend to their needs, and learn not to disturb them when they're eating or sleeping.
6. **Self-Esteem:** Pets show unconditional love, which can be a great boost to a child's self-esteem. So, too, can the satisfaction that comes from having responsibility and caring for a pet's needs.
7. **Loyalty:** A pet's loyalty toward its owner is often unmatched. In turn, children learn the importance of showing loyalty to their devoted furry friend.

8. **Physical Activity:** Children who own a dog learn how fun physical activity can be while they play tug-of-war, fetch, or go for walks with their pet. Research shows, in fact, that children in dog-owning families spend more time being physically active than children without dogs.<sup>2</sup>
9. **Patience:** Bonding with a new pet often takes time. Your child will learn patience while your new pet becomes comfortable in your home and during training.
10. **Social Skills:** Dogs can be an amazing social “ice breaker.” Taking your dog for walks as a family can improve your child’s social skills as you interact with others. Pets may also help [children with autism](#) to develop social skills such as sharing.

There are many other benefits as well. Your child can have her basic emotional and physical needs fulfilled by a pet, including comforting contact, love, and affection.<sup>3</sup>

Research also shows that children from dog-owning homes (during their first year of life) have fewer ear infections and respiratory tract infections, and require fewer antibiotics, perhaps because the exposure stimulates the immune system.<sup>4</sup>

Other noted benefits include a significantly reduced risk of allergies and even better grades at school, presumably because owning a pet seems to give kids greater motivation.

## **Is Your Child Ready for a Pet?**

Very young children shouldn’t be expected to care for pets without assistance. They can help, of course, but if your child is under 5 you can assume that you’ll be doing most of the pet care. Further, it’s difficult for very young children to understand how to gently handle a pet, which is why they’re often overly rough and may injure an animal – or become injured themselves if the pet retaliates.

Children under the age of 3-4 should be monitored with pets always, and even children under 10 should not be expected to care for a dog or cat completely on their own.<sup>5</sup>

If your older child expresses the desire for a pet, it’s a good time to have a talk about responsibility and the permanency of owning a pet. Be sure your child has expressed a consistent desire for a pet (not simply a passing mention) and understands that it will require daily care (work) and not just playtime.

It’s a good idea to set up expectations ahead of time for what pet-care responsibilities your child will need to fulfill. Discuss these with your child and agree upon them together.

That being said, even if your child commits to the responsibility, only add a pet to your family if you are prepared to take over their care if your child does not. If you decide your child is ready for a pet, resist the urge to give her one as a surprise. Instead, involve your child in each step of the process, including selecting the right pet for your family.

## **What Are the Best Pets for Children?**

This depends largely on the age of your child and your family's lifestyle and interests. Some children enjoy a small pet, such as fish or a hamster that lives in their room, while others are drawn to dogs or cats. All pets require considerable responsibility – even “starter” pets like fish and turtles. Of course, a dog or cat will require far more daily attention.

No matter which pet you choose, your child stands to benefit greatly, as does your entire family. When children between the ages of 3 and 14 were asked about the emotional benefits of owning a pet, 85 percent said they regard their pets as friends and 40 percent looked for their pet if they were upset.<sup>6</sup>

In a city where there is a tremendous amount of dogs that are turned out on the streets after puppyhood, RESCUE dogs are everywhere and ready to find that “FUREVER HOME!” Before you buy a pet from a puppy dealer, think about offering a home to one who is homeless and ready to give and receive an incredible amount of love and devotion.

As Susan Dawson, a researcher in human communications at Manchester Metropolitan University, told the *Daily Mail*:<sup>7</sup>

*“From studies I have carried out backed up by case studies it becomes clear that pet ownership, or simply the chance to spend some time with pets, children can benefit a lot...*

*They learn nurturing skills and are rewarded for their efforts... They are given unconditional warmth which can be reassuring and they actually seem more motivated to talk and describe their experiences.”*

**And a bit more to consider:** In a city like Shanghai where there is a tremendous number of dogs and cats that are turned out on the streets after puppyhood or kitten hood, RESCUE dogs and cats are easily found and ready to find that “FUREVER HOME!” Before you buy a pet from a puppy or kitty dealer, think about offering a home to one who is homeless and ready to

give and receive an incredible amount of love and devotion. Owning a pet is a major responsibility, but what you'll get back can be worth it all.