

6 Keys to Successfully Adopting and Living with a New Pet

Most of us know that warm, fuzzy feeling of seeing a puppy or kitten at play. Pet lovers all know that tug at our heartstrings when we visit a humane society or animal shelter and see the numerous animals looking at us sadly through their cages. We also know the quiver of our lip when we look on the Internet, view the photos, and read the stories of the numerous pets needing new homes, looking to be placed by the hundreds of pet rescue organizations. Many of us, in turn, respond by adopting a pet or two.

There is little else that lifts one's spirits than to come home from a tough day at work or school and be happily greeted by a four-footed friend. If you are thinking of adding a pet to your home, seriously consider adoption – more than four million animals every year go into shelters and rescues and nearly half don't make it out again.

If you're considering adding a pet to your home, there are several things a person should consider. Here are six tips to help insure you and your new pet will spend many happy years together:

1. Don't adopt on a whim - seriously think about this important decision. Consider your lifestyle to help ensure you choose the type of pet that best fits your home situation.
2. Never give a pet as a gift. Your lifestyle may be different from the person you're thinking of gifting with a living creature, and that person may not even want a pet. If you're thinking of adopting a pet for your child remember that you as the adult parent will likely be the one taking care of the animal – if you're okay with being the caretaker, then adopt a pet as a FAMILY, not as a gift to your child.
3. Research! Various breeds of dogs, for example, have different personalities and needs; research the many breeds to help find the best fit for your family. Cats also come in a variety of breeds and different personalities; maybe one suits your living situation and hopes for a pet better than another.
4. Consider your finances and be prepared for health expenses. Pets require annual medical care, and, like people, animals can develop health issues due to genetics or accidents. For example, most cats are litterbox-trained at a young age, but later in life they can develop kidney failure and may not use the box as regularly. You might consider acquiring pet insurance, but that too costs money. Remember: nothing is free, not even a “free pet!”
5. Think about the future. Are you planning to have a baby in the next few years? Do you think you might be moving soon? The number one reason people give for relinquishing a pet to an animal shelter is “I'm moving.” If you are a person who would move without your pet or who would consider giving up your pet because of having a baby, you, and the animal, are likely better off waiting and adopting after you're more settled.
6. Train your pet. Puppies often need to be housebroken, and all dogs need to know the basic commands of sit, stay, no, and come. No pet is perfect, just as no human is perfect. You may want to work with a professional trainer or take your dog to obedience classes -- or train the animal yourself. Training helps insure your pet's safety and also helps the two of bond more closely. And remember: train lovingly, not harshly.

Adopting a pet is a wonderful experience, and having a pet makes a home more cozy, warm, and loving. Pets love us unconditionally, and, like children, they depend on us for care. Follow the above-mentioned tips and you and your pet will share a happier, healthier life together.