

## **Growing Up With Pets Fact File: *Finding a Pet that Fits in the Family***

Pets fit comfortably into the family portrait. As playmates and loyal companions, four-footed friends are often a child's first friend. But families must do their homework before bringing home a furry friend. "Decide what your lifestyle can handle," suggests Gary Holfinger, DVM, chairman and founding member of the Companion Animal Parasite Council. "Never buy a pet on the spur of the moment or because you like the looks or breed."

### **Is the time right for a new pet?**

Ask yourself these questions before searching for a four-footed family addition:

- Are your children old enough to exhibit self control and do they understand "no?"
- Is there an infant in the home who will require full attention?
- How much free time do you have?
- What is the reason you want to bring a pet into the home?

### **Are you getting a pet for the right reason?**

- Do you have the time and money to properly care for the pet?
- Do you want the pet for yourself or the child? Parents generally bear 80 percent of the responsibility.

### **What would be the best breed?**

- Hunting breeds like to chase. Terrier breeds often are high-strung.
- Avoid an aggressive protection dog, which might harm a child it is "protecting."
- Larger dogs work well with children, but they require more maintenance.
- Consult the library or resources like Novartis Animal Health, U.S., Inc. ([www.petwellness.com](http://www.petwellness.com)) or The Humane Society ([www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)).

### **Additional Tips for Choosing a Pet**

- *Involve the veterinarian.* Ask for advice and prevention tips.
- *Bring the children.* Observe how they interact with the animals.
- *Take your time.* Decide whether the pet will fit into your lifestyle. Don't make a snap decision.

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