

Giving or Receiving Pets—an Owner's Responsibility

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Are you planning to give a puppy or kitten to someone as a gift? Or do you suspect someone will be giving you one? If the answer is "yes," you must consider some important points prior to making or receiving this type of gift.

Owning a pet can be a wonderful experience, but it does require responsibilities. Understanding these responsibilities is essential *before* you give or obtain a pet and not after you have given or received a pet.

First, consider the basic obligation involved. Anyone obtaining a dog or cat as a pet accepts a responsibility for that animal's care and existence for the rest of its life. This can average over 10 years with proper care.

If there's any hint long term care cannot be provided, a pet should not be given or received. People need and want pet dogs and cats for various reasons. The basic reason for owning a pet dog or cat is for the companionship and love it can provide to individuals.

Fortunately, most people own dogs and cats for companionship value; however, nearly 20 percent of all pet owners at any time are considered dissatisfied owners. These people view the pet as a nuisance.

Often a pet has been given for children and is received enthusiastically at first. But when the pet becomes an adult and loses puppy or kitten cuddly appeal, it receives little attention or affection from family members.

Pet Expense

Another important point to consider when giving or receiving a dog or cat as a gift is the expense involved. The initial purchase price occurs only one time and is a minor expense compared to the continual costs.

The estimated cost of owning a 30-pound dog the first year is around \$200 to \$225. This figure includes licenses, vaccinations, neutering, and food. After the first year, the yearly estimated cost of owning a 30-pound dog is about \$150.

The cost for a cat the first year would be about \$164 with each succeeding year tallying about \$109. These figures do not include any contingency to provide for medical or surgical emergencies or care of the animals during vacations.

These points must be considered prior to giving or receiving a pet. These are very real responsibilities which cannot be avoided.

The age at which to obtain a puppy or kitten is also important. A socialization period begins at about 3 weeks and



ends around 12 weeks of age. A pet shows peak approach behavior between weeks 5 and 7; this is the best time to introduce all other animals (dogs, cats, horses, adults, children) with which the pet must later associate. If placed with other animals during this age period, the pet will form a close bond with other animals and humans.

At 8 weeks a puppy is first capable of learning by training. But it is also extremely vulnerable to having its personality damaged by traumatic experience between the 8th and 9th weeks of age.

Breed and Size

Consider breed and size when giving a pet. To give a large dog to someone without ample room would be a terrible mistake. A dog with a vast store of energy (common in many intermediate breeds) needs ample room for exercise. If the animal is to serve a specific purpose, consider this prior to obtaining it. Don't give a Pekingese as a hunting dog or a Chihuahua as an outside dog in subzero weather.

Consider the source of the animal. A safe generalization is that healthy animals can be obtained from healthy animals which have received good care. Avoid disappointment by getting healthy puppies and kittens from known reliable sources where a health history, including vaccinations, parasite problems if any and temperament of dam and sire, are known.

Receiving the New Pet

Responsibility starts with advance preparation for the arrival of the dog or cat. Obtaining or giving a pet during peak vacation periods or holidays should be avoided. Too many distractions prevent proper attention to the animal at that time.

When obtaining or giving a pet as a gift, avoid shipping during holidays, peak vacation periods or subzero weather. When shipping during very hot weather, ship either early in the morning or late in the evening for the animal's comfort.

When delivering a puppy or kitten, do not gift wrap, box or package the pet in any way which will endanger its life. This cruel practice has claimed the lives of many puppies and kittens.

When giving or getting a new puppy or kitten, make sure the new owners receive it in the morning. This will allow the animal the entire day to get acquainted with its new surroundings and its new owners. The animal also should be provided a box with bedding where it can find comfort and uninterrupted rest.

Practically all people want to play with a new puppy or kitten. If healthy and rested, the animal also will want to play. But remember, young animals tire easily and need to rest and sleep. Don't play with them until they are completely worn out before allowing them to rest.

In handling a new puppy or kitten, do not pick it up by the front legs. Instead, place a hand under its abdomen, lift it into your arms, and cradle it so its body lies along your arm.

Find out from previous owners what the animal has been fed, and if possible, start your new animal on the same diet. If you intend to change diets, make the change gradually to the new diet. Many well-balanced commercially prepared diets are available.

Find out to what degree a puppy has been housebroken or paper trained and whether a kitten has been litter trained. Don't be surprised if accidents occur during the first few days in new surroundings. The animal must have time to become familiar with its new surroundings before learning the proper area for elimination.

As soon as possible, obtain the advice of a practicing

veterinarian concerning vaccinations and other preventive medicine procedures. Remember, if you give an animal a good healthy start, you'll be rewarded later.

Owner Responsibility

Adequate shelter for your pet must be provided. This means planning for all contingencies. It is essential that shelter for the outdoor pet provide protection against hot as well as cold weather. Many animals are lost because of inadequate shade, insulation, or ventilation.

Prior to obtaining a pet you should decide whether you are going to breed the animal. It is an act of responsibility not to contribute to the large number of unwanted animals in this country. When animals are bred only to teach children the facts of life the lesson provided may be quite different when it comes to disposing of the unwanted litter. Neutering an animal can increase its lifespan by eliminating reproductive disorders and diseases. Neutering reduces the animal's desire to roam, reducing fighting and bite-related problems.

Respect and adhere to local ordinances governing animal control and licensure. Remember animal control ordinances and officers are necessary because a large percentage of the pet-owning public does not practice owner responsibility. Instead they allow their pets to become public nuisances and community health hazards.

Provide adequate exercise for your pet—like a fenced yard. The dog has been domesticated for nearly 10,000 years and depends on man for shelter, food, protection, and companionship. Given a preference, the animal would rather stay and exercise with its owner. The average life span of a pet that is allowed to run free is only one to two years.

Provide care for your pet during your vacation. Unfortunately many people leave their pets unattended with little food or water and subject to traumatic incidents while they are away from home.

Training your pet. Basic training for family living includes simple commands like "come", "sit" and "stay" which improves your pet's manners. This increases your pleasure of owning your pet.

If your animal is aggressive you should warn people that the animal may bite. It is also your responsibility to properly restrain those types of animals.

It is your responsibility to clean up after your pets. Pets should not be allowed to eliminate wastes in public areas. Waste materials should be disposed of immediately as they may be a source of disease for other animals and humans.

Many good aids, in the form of handbooks and pamphlets, are available on basic care, housebreaking, etc. Contact your local kennel club, animal shelter or veterinarian; nearly all these groups will have free literature available.

Owning a pet may be rewarding and pleasurable and can provide benefits which are important to a person's well being. All of us who own pets are aware of this and have an obligation to encourage and enhance responsible pet ownership. If we fulfill our responsibilities, we will continue to have the freedom of pet ownership in this country.