



Parenting Tips: Animal Safety

Are you considering getting a pet for your family? A family pet can be a wonderful experience for children. Having a pet can be a great way to teach children about responsibility. Pets can also provide love and affection, as well as lessons about empathy and about the life cycle – for example, reproduction and aging. Having a pet can be very rewarding for the entire family, yet there are important safety considerations to take into account when choosing and/or living with a pet.

Choosing an animal:

- Consider holding a Family Meeting to talk about what kind of pet you want to adopt. It's important to choose a pet that is appropriate for your family and lifestyle.
- Consider the age of your children. Infants and toddlers usually do not have the self-control and understanding to interact safely and carefully with animals. If you choose to have a pet while you have young children, safety needs to be a primary consideration.
- Take time to talk to all family members about expectations and responsibilities.
- Take a realistic look at your family's lifestyle. How much time does your family have to care for a pet?
- Find out how much money, space, care, and exercise the pet will need. In terms of cost, consider food, toys, bedding, and veterinary care.
- Assess the danger of having a pet, especially an animal that may not be child-safe.
- Talk to your doctor about the possibility of pet allergy tests to see whether anyone might be allergic to certain animals.
- Set up a consultation visit with a veterinarian, an animal breeder or other pet owners to talk about what you're looking for in a pet and to ask questions.
- Visit a local library or bookstore or use the Internet to research animals.
- Select the pet as a family.

Safety with your own animal:

Children 0-12 Months:

- When you bring a new baby into the home, introduce the new baby slowly to your dog or cat. Let your animal get used to the baby's unfamiliar scent. Allow your animal to

occasionally sniff something that the baby has been wrapped in, such as the baby's blanket or clothing.

- Dogs in particular will wish to sniff the baby; make sure to keep your child safe in the process.
- Children of this age should always be accompanied by an adult when around any pet or animal. Never leave your baby alone with any animal.
- Put a baby gate in the doorway to the baby's room to keep pets out of the room.
- Never force interaction between your pet and the baby, as this could lead to anxiety or injury.
- Consider taking your dog to obedience classes.
- Never allow pets to sleep with the baby.
- Wash hands after playing with or petting the animal.
- Spay or neuter your pet. This will help decrease aggression and other problems.
- Keep your pet's immunizations, preventative medication, flea and tick treatment and check-ups up-to-date.
- Due to the increased risk of disease from certain animals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that infants and children under the age of five should avoid contact with the following animals: reptiles, amphibians, baby chicks, ducklings, and petting zoo animals.

Children 1-5 Years Old:

- Children should be supervised when interacting with animals.
- Children's rooms may be kept off-limits to pets by putting a gate in the doorway.
- Wash hands after playing with animals.
- Teach children to always treat animals gently and with kindness.
- Avoid playing rough games, like wrestling with animals.
- Avoid approaching an animal that is eating, sleeping or taking care of its babies.
- Avoid kissing a pet.
- Never surprise, make loud noises, or sneak up on animals.
- Never try to take a toy, bone, or other treat from an animal.
- Never pull an animal's ears, tail, or feet, even when playing.
- Show your children the appropriate ways to touch and/or carry a pet.
- Teach your children appropriate ways to play with a pet.
- Teach your children to recognize and respect the signs that a pet wants to be left alone.
- Consider taking your dog to obedience classes.
- Never allow pets to sleep with your child.
- Spay or neuter your pet. This will help decrease aggression and other problems.
- Keep your pet's immunizations, preventative medication, flea and tick treatment and check-ups up-to-date.
- Due to the increased risk of disease from certain animals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that infants and children under the age of five should avoid contact with the following animals: reptiles, amphibians, baby chicks, ducklings, and petting zoo animals.

Children 5 Year olds and older:

- Wash hands after playing with animals.
- Teach children to always treat animals gently and with kindness.
- Avoid playing rough games, like wrestling with animals.
- Avoid approaching an animal that is eating, sleeping or taking care of its babies.
- Never surprise, make loud noises, or sneak up on animals.
- Never try to take a toy, bone, or other treat from an animal.
- Never pull an animal's ears, tail, or feet, even when playing.
- Show your children the appropriate ways to touch and/or carry a pet.
- Teach your children appropriate ways to play with a pet.
- Teach your children to recognize and respect the signs that a pet wants to be left alone.
- Consider taking your dog to obedience classes.
- Spay or neuter your pet. This will help decrease aggression and other problems.
- Keep your pet's immunizations, preventative medication, flea and tick treatment and check-ups up-to-date.
- Help children to learn the responsibilities involved in taking care of a pet, such as feeding the pet, grooming and bathing it, cleaning its living space, and walking it if needed.

Safety with strange pets or animals:

- Children should be supervised when interacting with strange animals.
- Ask permission from the owner before approaching an unfamiliar animal.
- Stand quietly and back away slowly if you see the strange animal acting aggressively.
- Never approach any wild animals, including feral cats, stray dogs, and birds.
- Avoid approaching or touching an animal that appears injured or sick.
- If visiting or staying at a farm, closely supervise children.
- Wash hands after playing with, petting, or feeding animals.

For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets>.