

How do I teach my child to care for our family pet?

Adopting a pet can be a wonderful experience for children and a good opportunity to teach them about responsibility and how to take care of another living thing. Parents are encouraged to talk with their children about the new addition to the family and involve them in choosing the pet. It's recommended that parents speak with their children about the treatment and care of the pet prior to bringing the pet home. Sometimes, completing a chart with each member of the family's responsibilities will aid with this process and is a fun way to teach accountability to children. Parents need to make sure that the chores associated with caring for the pet are age-appropriate. For instance, while older children may be capable of cleaning out a pet's cage, younger children may not be able to successfully do this and will need help.

In addition to caring for the pet, parents need to teach young children how to carefully handle small animals and affectionately pet cats and dogs. Parents are encouraged to allow their children to train and play with the family's pets so that the pets are bonded to the entire family versus the adults, who typically have a larger role in caring for them. Parents should expect that young children and even adolescents will need reminders for adequately caring for a pet. Following a few of these simple steps can make owning a pet an enjoyable family experience.