

# Choosing a Pet

Getting a new pet is a *big* decision. A lot of people see a cute little kitten or puppy, and right then, decide to get it as a pet, because it is so cute. They have not thought it through, learned about the needs of that pet, how much work it would be, or how much it would cost. If caring for the pet is more time or work than the owner thought, sometimes the pet's needs are not met, and it can get sick or become bored and lonely and start to dig, scratch, chew, and bark. Soon it may not be wanted anymore. Many unwanted pets will end up on the streets or surrendered to animal shelters. You need to learn how to choose a pet before you get one. Answer these questions before getting your pet:



## 1. Why do you want a pet?

If you are choosing a pet only because it is cute, or cuddly... STOP! You need to find out what it will be like when it grows up. It is important to like the way the animal looks, but it should not be the only reason to get a pet. Will it be too big for your home? Do you have enough time, and do you know how to train it to obey and behave? Are you patient to instruct it gently when it does something wrong?



You may want an animal to play with. Pets can be a lot of fun, but they are not toys. You can't take them out and pet them whenever you feel like it. Your pet may want to sleep when you want to play. Your dog may not want to play fetch, even though you do. Can you respect what your pet needs and wants? The best reason to adopt a pet is for companionship. Pets can be a wonderful part of your family that you will grow to love, but the way you treat your pet will influence how it treats you. Remember the Golden Rule: "Treat others (in this case your pet), the way you want to be treated!"

## 2. How much time do you have for a pet?

No pet can be ignored just because its owner is too busy or tired. How would you feel if your parents said they were too busy to make you dinner? Some pets, such as goldfish, can be very easy to care for, and need only a few minutes a day. Other pets need a lot of time every single day.



For example, dogs need food, water, exercise, and love. They must also be taken outside several times a day. Just as we need to use the washroom, so does your dog. Some dogs and cats need lots of grooming, not just to look nice, but to stay healthy. Do you have the time for all of this?

Most people can find a pet that can fit into their life. But, there are some other people who will not have time for any type of pet. These people may travel a lot, work long hours, or move often. If this sounds like your family, you should think of other ways to spend time with animals, such as helping at the Kitchener-Waterloo Humane Society.

### 3. What kind of pet can you afford?



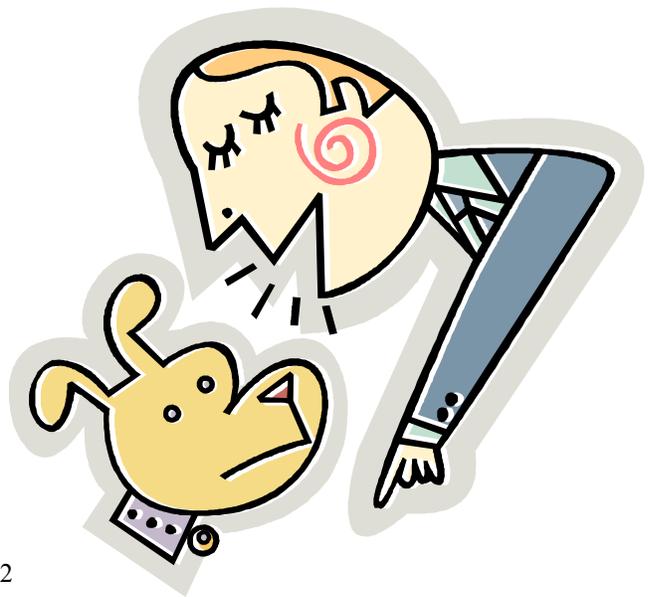
The price to buy or adopt your pet is a very small part of the cost that will be needed for that pet's lifetime. Other things you will have to pay for are: food, vaccines, spaying/neutering, vet check-ups, surgery or medicine, (if your pet gets sick), and supplies (such as a cage, litter, and toys). These costs can quickly add up!

You may find some cats, dogs and other pets that are listed as “free to a good home.” Are these pets really free? The Kitchener-Waterloo Humane Society charges an adoption fee, but this includes spaying/neutering, vaccines, a vet check-up, and trial pet insurance. Which do you think is the better value?

Usually, dogs, cats and some birds, like parrots, cost more than smaller animals such as gerbils, mice and guinea pigs. Any pet can cost a lot if it gets sick. You can save money by taking your pet to the vet once a year for a check-up instead of waiting until it is very sick.

### 4. Do you have patience?

Puppies chew on things, make puddles and messes. Some cats scratch furniture and yowl at night. Even good pets make messes sometimes - this may be fur on clothes and furniture, a litter box to be cleaned, or a bag of food ripped open by an excited animal. Just like you may upset your parents some days, your pet may upset you. Be caring and patient, on both good days and bad days.



## 5. Is your home suitable?

Do you live in an apartment building that has rules about pets? Would it be best to have a yard or nearby park where a dog can play? Should your yard have a fence to have this pet? Can you safe-proof your house for that pet?



## 6. What kind of pet suits your lifestyle?

Not every kind of pet is right for every person. Just like some people, some animals have different energy levels. It is important to find a pet that is a good match for you and your family. If you like to spend a lot of time outdoors, a dog may be a good pet for you. If you prefer to be indoors, a cat may be better. The ages of the person and animal are also important. You may have the energy for a puppy or kitten, but your grandparents may like an older, less active cat or dog.

## 7. How long of a commitment can you make?

When you adopt a pet, you must be willing to take care of it for its entire lifespan. Small animals such as gerbils and hamsters live 2 - 4 years. Dogs usually live 8 - 15 years (depending on the breed). Cats can live 15 - 20 years. Some birds can live to be 100! If you don't want your pet that long, who will take care of it when you no longer want to? It is hardest for Humane Societies to find homes for older animals, so a former pet may never have a home again.

## 8. Next Step: Research

Even after you have answered these questions and decided what type of pet you want, you will need to do more research to make sure that you are adopting the right kind of pet, and know how to care for it. There are many good people and places to give you information, such as:

- Veterinarians
- The Humane Society
- A good pet store
- Books
- Websites
- Other pet owners

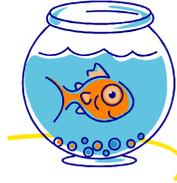
Always be sure that the information can be trusted. Not all information on the internet is true, and not all pet owners take proper care of their pets!



### Choosing the Right Pet Quiz

Use what you learned to help the following people choose the right pet. Write down which pets would be good choices, and which pets would be bad choices.

Choose from these pets: cat, dog, goldfish, hamster, parrot



Amy is 10. Her parents are willing to help pay for any emergency costs of a pet, but Amy must pay for regular costs, such as food. She must also take care of the pet herself, and keep it in her room.

Good choices for Amy:

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Bad choices for Amy:

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Brody's family has a big house, with a big yard. They like to spend a lot of time in their yard, and at the park, and enjoy being active. Brody's mother works outside the home for 3 hours each day.

Good choices for Brody:

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Bad choices for Brody:

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Both of Shelby's parents work full-time. When Shelby is finished school each day, she goes to a babysitter's house. After her parents pick her up, they have dinner, usually at home. In the evenings, Shelby goes to Girl Guides on Monday, swimming lessons on Tuesday, piano lesson on Wednesday, and soccer on Thursday. The family goes away to their cottage every weekend.

Good choices for Shelby:

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Bad choices for Shelby:

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Dave is 25, married, and has just bought a house. He does not plan to move, or change jobs. He would like a pet, but is allergic to pets with fur.

Good choices for Dave:

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Bad choices for Dave:

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Elaine lives in an apartment. Her building allows her to have any kind of pet. Her family spends most of their time at home.

Good choices for Elaine:

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Bad choices for Elaine:

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Francis saw some very cute puppies and kittens at the pet store. He thinks it would be a neat surprise for his sister's birthday present.

Good choices for Francis:

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Bad choices for Francis:

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## Pet Care

Once you have carefully chosen your pet, you must get ready for many new changes in your life. Your pet depends on you for its care. It cannot look after itself. As pet owners, we must be **“responsible.”** That means we must be committed to looking after our pet’s daily needs even *if we don't feel like it.*

### ***To be ‘responsible’ we need to:***

1. Find out what your new pet will need *before* you purchase your pet, and have everything ready for it when it arrives at your home. This usually means a trip to the pet store to buy what your new pet will need. Some pets need very special things for their care. Pets need food, bowls for food and water, a carrying crate, toys, collar, leash, tags, a bed, grooming supplies like brushes, combs, shampoo, flea treatment, tooth brush, and pet toothpaste. The workers at the pet store can help you with everything you will need.



2. If you have a dog, it will need to have a city license just in case your dog gets lost. You can purchase a dog license at the Humane Society, City offices, at most vet offices, or at some pet stores. Even cats that do not go outside should have a tag, because they may be let out accidentally. Microchips can be implanted in your pet. This ensures your pet can get home, even if it loses its tags.

3. It is important to take your pet to the vet for regular check-ups and vaccinations. You will need to do this every year to keep it healthy. If your pet is a cat, dog, or rabbit, it is important to have it spayed (for a female), or neutered (for a male), to keep your pet from having babies. Pets should be spayed and neutered since there are already too many animals without homes, If *your* pet has babies, there will be even more. Spaying and neutering is a very important part of being a responsible pet owner.



4. Once you have purchased your pet care supplies, pet tags, and taken it to the vet, now you are ready to begin your new life with your pet friend. Pets rely on you to provide daily care for their needs. This means you need to provide:

**Food:** Every kind of pet needs its own kind of food. A dog needs dog food, a cat needs cat food, gerbils need gerbil food, etc. It is important *not* to give your pets *people* food. Some people food could make your pets very sick or even die. Certain foods like chocolate, macadamia nuts, raisins, grapes, onions, and caffeine are like poison to dogs. If a dog is used to eating people food, it will



always beg for it and your dog could get fat. It is better if your pet eats the food that is meant just for that kind of animal, and that it be fed the right amount. Read the directions on the food bag and give your pet the right amount. Set a certain time in your

daily routine to feed and care for your pet. If care for your pet is part of your scheduled activities, it will be less likely to be missed.



**Water:** All animals need water to live. To be a responsible pet owner, every time your pet's dish or water bottle is empty, it needs to be re-filled. If the water has not been changed for a long time, change it. You wouldn't want to drink old stale water that probably has dirt in it! If your pet lives in your house, make sure its dish is full and that the lid of the toilet is down, so it won't be tempted to drink from it. When you're walking your pet, don't let it drink from puddles. Toilet water and water from puddles could make your pet sick.



**Shelter:** A shelter for your pet keeps your pet out of the heat in the summer, out of the cold, wind, rain and snow. A dog house may *not* be a good shelter if it is not made right. Most of the time, the best shelter for our pet is our own shelter: our house. It is important that our pet have its own place in our house, a bed where it feels secure and protected. We need to keep their bedding clean and dry and comfortable.



its daily needs.

**Love:** It's not enough to tell our pet we love it. We need to also show it. There are many ways we can show our pet love. We must be responsible in providing for all



We need to touch and pet it. Pets love to feel our touch and this helps your pet know it is loved. We need to talk often to our pets. Even though your pet can't understand everything we say, our pets love to hear our voices and it helps them know they are loved.

**5. Exercise:** If we have a dog, walking it is not only important to keep it healthy and happy, but the time we spend with it on daily walks help it to know it is loved. Your dog will look forward to its daily walk and this time will be one of the highlights of its day. (The daily walk helps *us* stay healthy too.) Your dog will



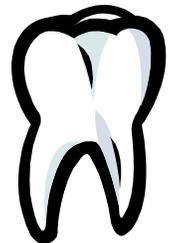
not be as bored. Boredom can lead to frustration which can lead to a dog misbehaving and getting into mischief. Even small animals (like a hamster), need to have exercise wheels in their cages to encourage them to exercise and stay healthy. One of the most important ways to show love to our pet is to play with it every day. Your pet loves to play, and it is fun for us as well.



**6. Grooming:** Not only does grooming make your pet **look** better, it makes them **feel** better. There is more to grooming than meets the eye. For example, we brush our teeth to keep them looking clean; but brushing also keeps our teeth



and gums healthy as it removes unwanted food and bacteria. The same thing happens when you brush your pet's teeth. Grooming serves two other purposes: first, it provides you with some quality time with your pet. Our pets love to spend time with us, and a good grooming session gives you the chance to enjoy some quiet, one-on-one time together. Secondly, grooming allows you to become familiar with your pet's physical condition and health. If you groom your pet regularly you can prevent a lot



of unwanted health hazards - tartar build-up on teeth, ear wax build-up, fur swallowed by cats or rabbits when bathing themselves, etc. Regular grooming can also alert you to more serious health problems such as lumps on the skin, under or overweight pets, and discharge from the eyes, ears and nose.



If you notice health problems, no matter how big or small, call your vet immediately. **Most** health issues can be treated. So the next time you dread giving Rover a bath or clipping Fluffy's claws, remember how good it will make them feel and how happy they will be to spend more time with you! Also, the sooner you start a regular grooming routine and stick to it, the more cooperative your pet will be.

## 7. Dog Training:

To be a responsible dog owner, you need to take the time to train your pet. Dogs are smart, but they can't figure out everything by themselves! You need to teach your dog the rules of your house. Many dogs who behave badly just don't understand the rules. You also need to be able to control your dog when you are around other people and dogs. Use simple words to tell your dog what you want it to do — it won't be able to understand big words or sentences. Be sure to give the commands in a clear, firm voice, but don't yell. You should sound serious - not like you are asking a question. Only give a command once, or your dog will learn that it doesn't have to listen the first time. If your pet does not follow the command, do not punish it, ignore the wrong response and reward when it obeys. There are dog training professionals who can help you train your dog.



**Rewards:** Your dog needs a reason to work on its training. The best rewards are: attention from you, treats, and toys. Different dogs will respond to different rewards; use what works best for your dog. Give a lot of rewards at first, and use less as your dog learns. Also, use jackpot rewards, which means giving a large reward at one time. Your dog will want to keep trying to get the jackpot. Jackpots only work if you don't give them very often!



**Time-outs:** Sometimes a dog behaves so badly that it needs a time-out. Put your dog in a room by itself, without any toys or people to give it attention. Try working at the training again in a few minutes when it settles down. Time-outs will teach your dog that misbehaving has consequences. Don't use too many time-outs or use them unfairly. Never punish your dog by hitting or yelling.



**Patience:** Training a dog takes a lot of time and effort. Some dogs will learn quickly, but others will take a long time. It is very important not to rush your dog, and let it learn at its own pace. Don't ever become angry with your dog or the training won't be fun for you or your pet. If you *do* get upset, take a break and try again later. Keep working on the training and your dog will catch on.

**Understand your Dog:** Dogs have lived with people for thousands of years, but are still like wild animals in some ways. In order to train your dog, you need to know why it acts the way it does, how it learns new things, and how to tell what it is thinking and feeling. Remember that your dog is unique - it is not the same as any other dog!



**Instincts:** Many things that dogs do are based on their instincts. An instinct is a behaviour or ability a dog is born with. Some of these behaviours are chewing, barking, sniffing, and digging. You can't train your dog to not do these things, since they are natural. You can teach your dog the rules for these behaviours. For example, if your dog likes to chew on shoes, you should teach it to chew on



bones or dog toys instead.

**Dog Training Classes:** The best way to train your dog is to take them to a dog training class. The class is not just to teach your dog to obey orders, but to teach you and your dog to communicate with each other. The class is just as important for you as it is for your dog!

