



## **Are You Ready for A Dog?**

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Becoming a dog owner is a big responsibility and commitment. The following is a list of questions that should be considered before making the decision to accept a dog into your family:

- Many parents want their children to enjoy the responsibility and unconditional love of a pet, but ultimately the dog is the responsibility of the adults in the household. Are you willing to take care of the dog if your child does not perform his or her duties? It is truly unfair to a dog to not meet its basic needs because a child isn't doing his or her duty.
- Where you will be in 1, 5, 10 or even 15 years? Will you be moving or experiencing a lifestyle change? Are you willing to take the dog with you? Will any lifestyle changes result in you surrendering the dog? Realize that it isn't fair to form a relationship with a dog if you won't be able to continue it for the duration of the dog's life.
- Will you be able to give your dog plenty of attention? Dogs are social animals; it is mental torture for a dog to be isolated from its family. Are you willing to commit to devoting time to the dog throughout its entire life, not just the first few months?
- Can you meet the dog's exercise needs?
- Will you commit to training your dog?
- Can you afford a dog? The approximate annual cost of caring for a dog is \$815; for puppies it is \$970.

If you *and the rest of your family* can answer yes to all the questions above, the next step is to research what kind of dog would be the best match for your family. Check the library for books on the topic, and/or consult the shelter staff.

## **Exercising Your Dog**

Just as obesity is rising in human populations, many dogs are missing out on vital exercise. To avoid high vet bills for obesity-related medical problems, please see to it that your dog gets enough exercise to fit its needs. Other reasons that exercise is important include:

- Behavior problems can be the result of a lack of exercise. Many of today's household breeds were bred to perform a job requiring a lot of physical stamina that these breeds still possess.
  - *Consider a herding dog: it was bred to run all day through fields herding sheep and then still have energy to play fetch with the kids. Many*

*behavior problems in herding breeds today are due to the dog's excess energy that has not been appropriately released through exercise.*

If you aren't able to give your dog adequate opportunity to use up its energy, it will find an alternative outlet. This alternative will probably not be to your liking. Talk to a dog trainer and your veterinarian if you have any questions about the exercise needs of your dog.

- Exercising your dog and playing together can strengthen the bond between you and your dog. By finding games that you both like to play you will be getting exercise, having fun, and building a better relationship with your dog!

### **Training Your Dog**

Raising a well-behaved dog requires work from the owner, much like raising a well-behaved child. The key to having a well-behaved dog is to practice correct dog training techniques:

- When your dog does something wrong *DON'T* hit it; this not only hurts your relationship with your dog, but often the dog doesn't understand why it is being punished and it may become aggressive.
- **INSTEAD:** Wait for your dog to do something that you like, such as sitting or lying down, and then reward the dog with a treat. Soon the dog will sit for you more often in hopes of receiving another cookie!
- **SHARE THE EXPERIENCE:** A dog training class is an excellent chance for your dog to socialize with other dogs and for you to be guided through the training of your dog by an experienced trainer.

### **Adopting A Shelter Dog**

Adopting a dog from a shelter can be an extremely rewarding experience. Benefits include:

- **OLDER DOGS:** An older dog is wonderful because it has most likely already lived in a household. It will not require numerous trips to the backyard in the middle of the night and a huge transition into your family's home. In addition, the energy level of an older dog is easier to handle. An older dog still has many years ahead of it, but it has already gone through its teenage rebellion and you will be able to concentrate on transitioning it into your home.
- **PUPPIES:** Although puppies are cute, like babies, they are a lot of work. If you want a puppy, you must be willing to get up in the middle of the night to allow it to go to the bathroom, and you must spend numerous hours training it. If this sounds like something you can handle, talk to shelter staff about adopting a puppy.
- **COSTS:** The bills for a dog in the first year alone are costly, but a shelter dog will already be spayed or neutered and may have its first shots. This is a definite plus!

Please consider adopting from a shelter. You can find a dog that is perfect for you. Shelter staff is experienced at counseling about what dogs will best fit your lifestyle.