



# PUPPY LOVE

We've never met a kid who hasn't wanted (read: *pleaded and begged*) to call a cat or dog his own. But are you ready to say yes? Read on to find out if now's the right time for your family ... and everything else you need to know from there.

BY ANDREA BARBALICH PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM LOWE

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before you start looking, make sure you'll be able to manage the time commitment once your new pet comes home. The daily requirements, from Emily Fromm, chief development officer at the Petfinder Foundation in Tucson:

# 1

Puppies will need to go out every hour until trained.

# 2

Kids should plan to spend two hours a day playing with the animal and giving it stimulation and exercise.

# 3

Puppies and kittens will need to be fed three times a day. They're hungry!

## You Can Do a Practice Run!

Parents need to observe their kids with animals before adopting, explains Kenny Lamberti, vice president of companion animals for the Humane Society of the United States. Try offering to pet-sit for a friend, or foster a dog or cat, suggests Rena Lafaille, administrative manager of the ASPCA Adoption Center in New York City. "Fostering provides the family with the experience of owning a pet while freeing up space in a shelter," she says. "It's a win-win." Stays can range from a few days to months, and many families wind up adopting their pets.

## AGE UP

We know puppies and kittens are so cute. But they're demanding too. That's why it's a great idea to consider an older pet, advises Fromm. "They need less stimulation, exercise, and patience than a puppy or kitten," she says. "They have much more impulse control, and they're better able to understand and fit into the rhythms of a family's daily life."

## MAKE A BUDGET

Yup, it's going to cost you some (very worth it!) dollars and cents.

**Adoption Day**  
\$50 to \$310 for a dog and \$60 to \$125 for a cat, estimates the Humane Society. This goes directly to the shelter or rescue group.

**The First Year**  
\$1,471 to \$2,008 for a dog, depending on size, and \$1,174 for a cat, estimates the ASPCA. This is for one-time expenses such as spaying or neutering, an initial vet exam, and supplies.

**Annually**  
\$809 for a cat and \$737 to \$1,040 for a dog, depending on size. Ongoing expenses include food, vet visits, litter, toys and treats, a license, and possibly pet insurance. (Costs might be lower or higher depending on where you live.)

## POP QUIZ!

What's the most important factor in choosing a pet?

- (A) Breed
- (B) Activity level
- (C) Size

If you went with "activity level," then you're right! Thought it was the breed? Many shelter pets are a mix of two or more breeds. So what the pet *looks like* may have little to do with his personality. Choose by activity level instead, to make sure the pet fits in well with your family's lifestyle.

**SHELTER OR RESCUE?** "You're saving a life both ways, and you can get a fabulous pet from either of these adoption options," Fromm says. But here's what to expect from each:

	Definition	Pros	Cons
<b>Shelter</b>	City, county, and nonprofit organizations that have facilities you can visit	Adoption is easier, faster, and less expensive.	Can't spend time with the pet in a home setting
<b>Rescue</b>	Organizations that don't have shelters; instead, pets are cared for in foster homes while they await adoption.	Families can observe and interact with the pet in a home environment; also, you get more information about the pet.	Adoption takes longer and may be more rigorous, with home visits and references required, and it's more expensive.

PROP/WARDROBE STYLING BY ANN LEWIS. GROOMING BY KELLY FORD/MARYELLE ARTISTRY.



**BFFS**  
 “The number-one thing pets need is companionship,” says Kenny Lamberti, of the Humane Society.

## VET THE VETS

Judy Morgan, D.V.M., a holistic vet in Clayton, NJ, suggests lining up a vet before adopting. “If something goes wrong and you don’t have one in mind, it’s a scramble.” Ask friends for recommendations and then call the vet to see if she’s accepting new patients. If time is tight, you should at least research the closest emergency services for animals.

If the animal doesn’t have complete medical records, you’ll want to schedule a vet appointment as soon as possible so the pet can be examined, vaccinated, spayed or neutered if necessary, and checked for parasites. “Intestinal parasites can be transmitted to children, and you want to make sure the pet doesn’t have them before you allow your kids to handle it,” Dr. Morgan says.

## FINALLY, HOME!

**Make It Familiar.**  
 If possible, bring home any items they used at the shelter or foster home, such as bedding or a favorite toy.

**Provide Quiet Time.**  
 Keep things relaxed for the first couple of weeks. “Pick up the pet when you know you’ll have a few days at home, and don’t invite people over right away to meet him,” Dr. Morgan advises.

**Limit His Roam.**  
 Fromm also recommends restricting your dog or cat to one room or a small area for the first day or two, then gradually expanding the area where he can go. “Animals can get overwhelmed when they have a big new space to explore,” she says.

## ADOPTION DAY!

Found your four-legged match? It’s paperwork time. They may ask you for:

- Personal references
- Veterinary plans
- Proof that your home allows pets, if renting
- Info about other pets
- Confirmation that all family members—including other pets—have met the animal
- Signed contract outlining your responsibilities as a pet owner, including everything from feeding the pet to providing veterinary care to promising that the animal will wear an ID tag

Once you’re approved, you’ll be given the pet’s veterinary records, and if the pet is already spayed or neutered, you’ll be free to take him home. This may happen within a few hours at a shelter. With a rescue group, it can take from two days to three weeks.

## NEW PETS NEED STUFF!

These are the must-haves for bringing home your cat or dog.

### DOGS



- Crate
- Leash
- Waste bags

### BOTH

- Bed
- Bowls for water and food
- Cleaning supplies
- Collar
- Dental-care products
- Food and treats
- Gate
- Grooming brush
- ID tag
- Nail clipper
- Toys

### CATS



- Litter box and scoop
- Litter
- Scratching post
- Sturdy carrier

## Play the Name Game

Many furry friends come with a name already, but no need to feel guilty if you change it: “Both cats and dogs can easily adapt,” Lafaille says. Have kids brainstorm the perfect moniker: Does the pet have a distinctive marking you can play off of? What about something from a favorite children’s book? Or what’s the wackiest name you can think of? Throw everything out there, and then let everyone vote. (Keep in mind: One- or two-syllable names are easier for both the animal and the kids.)

## DIVVY UP THE DUTIES

“We’ll do *all the work*.” Heard that one? Now help make it a reality by getting the kids to pitch in. Some chores that are appropriate for kids: changing the water, feeding (with supervision), playing, grooming, helping to bathe a dog, and taking a dog for a walk (when old enough). We suggest taking these ideas and making them into an interactive chore wheel! Download a template at [familyfunmag.com/petschorechart](http://familyfunmag.com/petschorechart).