

So You Got A Dog or Cat For Christmas!

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Many people may have obtained a companion animal as a gift this holiday season. For some of you it was a carefully planned decision to get a pet, everyone in the family was aware of it and you did your homework in making your decision. For the rest of you it came as a surprise and maybe even a shock. No matter how well you planned there are still surprises and problems in store for you in making your new pet a part of the family. Here are some things to think about that may make things easier for you.

In general, puppies and kittens are more difficult to deal with than adult animals because of housetraining issues, puppy and kitten playfulness that may lead to injuries or destruction and fears that can develop in young animals. Be aware that if you have a new young animal in your house you will have to deal with these behaviors.

Be sure your new family member is healthy by taking him or her to your veterinarian. If you don't have a regular veterinarian, contact the local veterinary medical association for a referral. Your veterinarian can not only treat illnesses but help to prevent them and give you valuable advice on general care, nutrition, and behavior. Veterinarians can also provide referrals to others that can help you with your pet, such as groomers, trainers, behaviorists, kennels and daycare facilities. Establish a long-term relationship with your veterinarian and your pet will be healthier and both of you will be happier.

Try not to expose your new critter to too much too soon. It takes most animals a few days to a few weeks to adjust to a new home, so give your animal a chance to settle in before you invite over the whole neighborhood to see her or before you take her for a ride on your new sled. Avoid things that tend to frighten your new pet and don't force shy animals to be around people or other animals if they choose not to. Fears and shyness in young animals are not uncommon but persistent fears may be warning signs of developing problems and should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian.

Be consistent with your expectations of your new animal. Establish your housetraining routine from the beginning, and don't assume that an older animal is necessarily housetrained. Be consistent, too, on other rules of the house such as where your pet sleeps, where in the house and yard she can go and which kinds of play and activities are tolerated and which are not. Allowing rough and tumble play over the holidays and then changing the rules so that it is not tolerated can be difficult for an animal to learn. Better to be consistent from the beginning.

Be patient with your new pet. It will take time for everyone in the house to adjust to this new living arrangement, so don't expect the pet to do everything right from the beginning. Also be patient with other family members and yourself. A new pet is a big adjustment for you as well!