



## How to help keep kids interested in their pets.

Pets are great for kids. We all know that it can teach them compassion and responsibility when they care for a small friend. It's certainly hard to resist those cute little faces, the guinea pigs running around, the lounging rabbits, hamsters and mice running in their wheels. But pets should not be an impulse purchase. We know that to be a responsible pet owner requires a proper understanding and attitude, some education and work, something kids may not quite grasp yet.

So how do we counter that impulse, and at the same time ensure that the kids will stay interested in their new pet?

- ❖ Have them do some research on the animal they want. Some parents have their kids write it up in a report. Have them find material on their origins and required upkeep. Doing this work can take the edge off the impulse and can help them understand the work needed to care for their pet. We have a great place to get started: check out our [list of care sheets](#). Read the care sheet with them then quiz them on things like diet, what they can and can't eat, and required grooming. And, as always, you can stop by at any time to talk about animals, their care and habitats.
- ❖ Write a contract. One of our favorite stories is of one of our young customers who wanted a fancy rat. To help convince her parents that she was ready for a pet, she wrote a contract, specifying what her chores were to be and even the penalties if she failed to do them.
- ❖ Have them do some work before getting them the pet. This is more physical and real than just doing some reading (although it works best if combined with the first tip. )*If they do the work before, they are more likely to keep doing it after they get their pet.* Another great story we heard was of a family that wanted a dog (especially the kids). Mom and Dad didn't think that the kids were ready, despite their protestations of "We'll help take care of him! We promise!" Finally the parents decided to make the kids prove their claims. They told the kids that they had to spend a month taking an imaginary dog for a long walk, each day, no matter how tired they were, what else they wanted to do, no matter the weather. This was a real test, as this was in the winter. They were not allowed to miss one walk, no matter the reason. The kids proved that they could follow through, and they were there looking for a new pet. Having them help with other pets in the house, taking care of younger siblings, and maintaining good



Rabbits are great companions, but make sure kids can devote the time to socialize them

grades shows that they are more responsible and are more likely to continue caring for their pet after they get it.

If any of these are too much for your kids, if they don't want to do research and a report, that indicates that it's more of an impulse, passing desire and you can say "No" without feeling guilty.

We see often the parents want to get rid of their pet because the kids won't take care of it anymore. People sometimes find, in their busy lives, they don't want to fight to make the kids care for the pet and it's easier to get rid of it. But we feel that there's nothing easier, and more worthwhile, than fostering that relationship. This is a good time to stop and remember you got the pet in the first place. We find that looking at the problem from a different point of view can be helpful. After all, there are a ton of things we have to do that we don't like. Caring for a pet is a great way to begin to teach your kids this lesson.

So how do you make an unwanted pet wanted again? Try some of these steps to keep your kids interested in their pets:

- ❖ Get the pet out of the child's room, basement or other area that keeps it away from the whole family. Have the pet out and with you when you are doing sit down family get together such as playing board games or watching a video. Use a playpen with a mat underneath as a safe corral for your pet, so they can spend time with the family and get more attention.
- ❖ Be a cheerleader; say only positive things about the pet and start assuming the handling and care of the family pet. Once a healthy routine is established periodically ask for some help here and there, such as asking the kids to give a quick treat to the family pet. It's a lot of fun to have your kids feed a guinea pig or rabbit fresh foods; when preparing dinner, have them feed the carrot tops or broccoli. Over time you will start seeing the personality of your pet and new found respect.
- ❖ Have them research any tricks they can teach their pet. Even the smallest of animals can learn to do something cute, and time spent by your kid teaching a pet tricks can revitalize their enthusiasm. Check out places like [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/) for some ideas.



This is the best accessory for keeping your kids interested in their pet.



- ❖ Get a harness or a see-through carrier and have the pet just sitting there at your side. You and your pet may need to get use to it, and over time the pet will enjoy the stimulus and the family appreciation for the pet will grow. Pets can create a common connection among family members.

Getting a pet for a child should be met with the understanding that the reason for doing so is to help teach the children to be better adults. Pets help teach children so many values, such as nurturing, discipline, patience, cleanliness, good nutrition, listening skills, and relationship building. They can encourage kids to learn more; researching a pet can teach them geography, biology, history, and animal conservation and husbandry. We can't think of anything else you buy can teach your children as many values – certainly no game system or smartphone can teach them so much.