

Madison Area fall/winter 2007/08 Pet Owner's Guide

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Your guide to everything pet-related in Madison!

Spot-Light Organization
**Wisconsin Academy
of Graduate Service
Dogs (WAGS)**
see page 7

**Are you a
Parrot Person?**
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**Why do Dogs
Eat Grass?**
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daycares • vets • retail • boarding • rescues and shelters • and tons more!

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Kids and Cats: Adding to your Family

By: Mary Ellen Schutz

So, you're adding to your family. Whether you're looking to add a cat/kitten to your crew or expecting a baby and have a feline family member already, integrating kids and cats takes a bit of planning and preparation. Here are some tips for a happy, loving experience.

FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN:

Consider why you are looking to add a pet to the family. Yes, children need to learn responsibility. And yes, helping to care for a pet can be a part of that lesson. However, responsibility for the care of a pet always belongs to adults, and for a cat, you're making a 15-to-20-year commitment. While your child is at college, Kitty will probably still live with you.

"Children can be forgetful and easily distracted and it is the cat who will suffer if they forget to put out fresh food or water or clean the litterbox. Even if they are conscientious about their chores, having to care for the cat, midst parental reminders and scoldings, can build a resentment toward the animal," says Cats International, a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to helping people better understand their feline companions.

Household tasks, like washing dishes, emptying waste baskets, and setting the table, are more effective responsibility-teaching tools and don't involve the welfare of a living creature.

Teach your children animal etiquette in terms they understand. Help them see things from the cat's point of view. Remembering to pet from head toward tail is easier when you explain that petting the other way "pulls Kitty's hair...Do you like it when someone pulls your hair"? Supporting the tummy and back feet happens more often when kids think about how it would feel to stand on a tall, wobbly box with nothing to hold onto.

Provide a safe haven. Your pet needs a place to go when she tires of play before your child does. Be sure that your child understands that when kitty goes into her space, she wants a break. "Sometimes, you just want to be by yourself, don't you? Kitty will come back to play when she's ready."

FOR FAMILIES EXPECTING A BABY:

Give your cat a chance to get used to the new look and feel of his territory well before baby comes home:

- Bring in the nursery in stages.
- Play a CD or tape of baby noises.
- Close the nursery door at times when baby will be sleeping.
- Invite babies to visit. Give both baby and cat your attention.

When baby arrives:

- The very first day, bring home an unwashed baby garment. Let your cat get used to the new arrival's scent.
- Don't wait until baby is asleep to pay attention to your pet; you don't want the cat competing with the baby for your affection.
- Provide supervised visitation only. Both baby and cat need to get used to each other.

Mary Ellen Schutz is the Youth Volunteer Coordinator for Angel's Wish, Inc., an all-volunteer animal welfare organization in Verona, Wisconsin, on the web at www.angelswish.org.