

# What is responsible pet ownership?

Pets protect us, motivate us and love us unconditionally. Their presence can make individuals and communities safer and stronger. In return, pet owners must be prepared for the lifelong commitment and responsibility that caring for a pet brings. This includes:

-  **Choosing the right pet.** It's important to choose a pet who fits into your life and whose personality will match well with what you can provide.
  - For example, a very active dog who needs to run a lot might not be a good fit for someone who lives in a small apartment or is gone at work all day.
  - Someone who wants a furry friend at home but doesn't want to have to take a dog for regular walks might prefer a cat.
-  **Providing regular basic care.** Before committing to a pet, be sure you can provide the daily care he or she will need.
  - Feeding an appropriate, quality diet and plenty of water.
  - Grooming regularly, including brushing their coat, brushing their teeth and trimming nails.
  - Giving exercise opportunities, such as getting out for walks every day if you have a dog or playing active games with toys if you have a cat.
  - Providing socialization, which applies especially to dogs who are very social creatures. They should be exposed to other dogs, monitored closely and taught the proper behavior.



**Giving consistent love and attention.** Just like us, pets need certain things in their lives to make them happy:

- Daily attention and care – be sure to set aside time every day to pay attention to your pet, whether taking a walk together, playing with toys or making your pet part of your own favorite activities.
- Love and praise – just like us, pets like to know we appreciate it when they've behaved well.
- Activity – pets get bored if they don't have activity for their minds and bodies. Toys and exercise help stimulate their minds and senses.
- Occasional treats – don't give pets too many treats, but do reward them once in a while with something they love.
- Space – like people, dogs or cats like their own safe space too. While pets often love to follow their people around and be near you, they need their own space too, such as a bed in a corner of a room.



**Training for good behavior.** Dogs especially need training to learn basic commands.

- Consider a formal training course or research online how to train your pet kindly and successfully.
- It's important to let pets know when they've done something wrong, but never lose your temper or punish a pet while angry. Training should be kind and systematic to help your pet learn.
- Reward pets with praise or a treat when they behave correctly, and always be consistent about praise or admonishment so he or she doesn't get confused.
- Be sure to play with your dog before and after training sessions to reinforce how much you care about him or her.
- Remember that pets sometimes need to blow off some steam. Giving them safe opportunities to get rid of their excess energy – such as time to run around and play at a dog park – can help encourage good behavior the rest of the day.

 **Health care for a healthy life.** By ensuring quality health care, you can potentially help your pet live a longer life.

- Take your pets for regular checkups with a veterinarian. Depending on what kind of pet you have and his or her age, your veterinarian will probably suggest that you do this once or twice a year.
- Get needed vaccinations and preventive care such as heartworm prevention.
- Take care to keep your pet's teeth healthy, both in consultation with your veterinarian and by brushing their teeth at home.
- Groom your pet on a regular basis to help minimize shedding and make sure you catch any issues like ticks, skin irritations, infections or other problems.
- Be sure you're feeding your pet the right amount of quality food and treats to keep him or her healthy while avoiding obesity.