

Pet Adoption Leads to Healthier Kids and Families

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As if the love and companionship of including pets in your family isn't rewarding enough, research indicates that furry family members benefit your children's health – socially, emotionally and medically.

- According to the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences](#), children raised with dogs and cats have a lower incidence of allergies, not only to pet dander, but also to pollen, grass, ragweed and dust mites. This is especially true if pets are present in the home from a child's infancy. Studies indicate that bacteria carried by the pets may actually reduce children's immune response:

“After adjusting for factors such as dust mite allergen levels, parental smoking, and current dog or cat ownership, the researchers found that children exposed to two or more dogs or cats during the first year of life were on average 66-77 percent less likely to have any allergic antibodies to common allergens, as compared with children exposed to only one or no pets during their first year.”

Children also learn responsibility and task-management through the care and feeding of pets, which will serve them throughout their lives. According to the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#), the love of a pet not only contributes to a child's confidence and self-esteem, it can help them build trusting relationships, greater empathy, and better communication skills with their fellow humans.

The Academy lists additional benefits:

- *Pets can be safe recipients of secrets and private thoughts--children often talk to their pets, like they do to their stuffed animals.*
- *Pets can provide lessons about life, including reproduction, birth, illnesses, accidents, death, and bereavement.*
- *Pets provide a connection to nature.*
- *Pets teach respect for other living things.*

Pet ownership is a responsibility that should be discussed and agreed upon by the entire family. If you are considering adding a pet (or another pet) to your family, please consider this adoption to be for the entire life of the pet. Factor the expenses of spay/neuter costs, veterinary bills and accessories into your budget, and ensure the safety of your pet with very young children (children under 3 or 4 should be monitored around pets, until they demonstrate gentle and appropriate handling of their pet).

There are a multitude of fur-babies waiting for loving homes! If you can accommodate the responsibilities of pet ownership, the benefits for your family and your children will be priceless.

Holly Marrow is a nurse and freelance journalist. Her two adult children were raised with multiple pets and she lives in Christiansburg with her two cats and two dogs – all rescued from local shelters.