

# BEFORE You Adopt a Cat...



## PLEASE READ

### HELPFUL INFORMATION INSIDE:

Thank you . . . . .	2
Common Myths About Shelter Pets . . . . .	3
Advantages to Adopting an Adult or Senior Cat . . . . .	5
Questions to Ask Yourself BEFORE Adopting a Cat . . . . .	6
Preparing Your Home for Your New Cat . . . . .	7
Expenses Involved in Caring for a Cat . . . . .	8
Plan AHEAD How to Introduce Your New Cat to Your Pets . . . . .	10
Kittens/Cats and Children . . . . .	12

**"Don't Breed or Buy  
While Homeless Pets Die!"**

Information compiled by WCASA

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# *Thank you...*

...for considering adopting a cat through the Winnebago County Animal Shelter (W.C.A.S.). By obtaining a cat through our shelter, you are saving a life.

Each hour, every day, over 3,000 dogs and cats are born in the U.S. Most of these are unwanted and many end up in shelters. Approximately five million are killed every year because there aren't enough homes for them. Although you can't save them all, you can be proud that you did at least save one (or more)!

Statistics indicate that a pet is lost every 30 seconds and at some point during their lives 1 in 5 companion animals will become lost. Less than 2% of the stray cats brought to shelters are claimed by their guardians.

Although adopting a cat can be an exciting and fun experience, it is also a long term commitment and responsibility. The W.C.A.S. wants to help you choose just the right cat for you, your family and your lifestyle. Here is important information to help you make an informed decision so you can make the right choice. It is always best to plan ahead for your new cat carefully rather than bringing home a new pet on a whim.



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# Common Myths About Shelter Pets

There are many misconceptions about the quality of animals found in rescue shelters. The stigma that shelter pets have been stuck with for many years is that they are “damaged goods.”

## **MYTH: Shelter pets are obviously not good pets, or else their original owners wouldn't have gotten rid of them.**

If the main reason why a pet gets brought to rescue shelters was because they were a \*bad\* pet, there would be thousands of empty shelters across the country. Animals are brought to shelters for a large variety of reasons, some of which are...

- Their owners have passed away
- An irresponsible owner didn't get their pets spayed or neutered, so they found themselves with a litter of babies that they could not keep or did not want
- The animal's owners were abusive or neglectful to the animal. The authorities have removed the pet from the harmful environment
- An animal was obtained by someone who did not take into consideration all of the responsibility that caring for that pet would entail. A good example of this would be someone who adopts a pet in an apartment complex that does not allow animals and then is subsequently forced to get rid of the pet.

## **MYTH: Animals from abusive homes will never be good pets because they have been mistreated for so long**

Most animals coming from abusive homes will typically make a full emotional recovery - with proper care and attention. In fact, many of them are so grateful to be rescued from their previous situation, they end up being more devoted and loyal than animals coming from non-abusive homes.

## **MYTH: You never know what you're getting with shelter pets**

Although its true that the medical history and temperament of an animal adopted from a rescue shelter are not always known, it is really no different than an animal you might get from a pet store.

## **MYTH: All animals in rescue shelters are sickly or unhealthy**

Once again, it certainly IS possible that a pet adopted from a shelter may have medical problems; however the majority of the animals that are adopted from shelters are perfectly healthy, and just need a good home. If anything, you're more likely to get an honest answer about an animal's medical problems from a shelter volunteer - who is clearly there because they deeply care about the animals - as opposed to a pet store owner or breeder who is only in for the money. Additionally, animals in shelters are typically treated much better than animals in pet stores which have often spent their short lives in cramped environments with little socializing and often, unsanitary conditions.

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**MYTH: Animals from shelters have trouble bonding to a new family.**

Of course animals miss their families and their old routines. Shelter animals often bond more strongly to a new family because of their experience of losing their previous one. They may have trouble being left alone at first, so adopt when you can spend a few days at home. Schedule short excursions so your new pet will feel secure knowing you will always come back. Dogs reunited with owners they have not seen in years can be overjoyed to see their old friends, but still prefer to stay with the new family they have come to love.

**MYTH: Older animals have trouble bonding to new people.**

Age does not affect a pet's ability to bond with a new family. Social animals, such as dogs, cats, horses and birds form new relationships throughout their lives with other animals including people. A very elderly animal may take longer to adjust to physical aspects of a new home (such as stairs or a dog door) than a younger dog, but emotional attachment will not be hampered by a pet's age.

**MYTH: Stray animals do not make good pets.**

There is a difference between stray animals and "feral" animals. Most strays had a family but got lost or were put outside to fend for themselves. Many strays are found wearing collars but no I.D. Strays that survive long enough to be rescued are usually more intelligent than the average pet. Most are so grateful for food and shelter they are happy to comply with house rules.

**MYTH: Adopting a second-hand pet is taking on someone else's problem.**

People give up pets for reasons as simple as "sheds hair" or "needs exercise." Since all dogs and cats shed and require exercise, these are not problem pets. People make mistakes when acquiring pets. Some people adopt a pet on impulse or are given a pet they do not want. They may become responsible for a loved one's pet after a family tragedy. When people give up a pet, guilt may cause them to hide the pet's worst behavior or exaggerate normal behavior to blame the pet for their unwillingness to meet the responsibility of caring for an animal. It is very difficult to evaluate a pet based on information from people who no longer want the pet.

**MYTH: Animals from the shelter have frequently been abused or have behavior problems that indicate abuse.**

Don't be fooled by an animal's shy or frightened behavior. Many animals cower and flinch when approached by strangers, especially tall or assertive people or excited children. This behavior is not an indication that the animal was abused. In fact, many animals that actually have been mistreated are outgoing and forgiving. Ask any animal control officer! Many young animals in shelters did not receive training or sufficient exercise. Some lack social skills. The best remedy for these pets is a new home.



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# Advantages to Adopting an Adult or Senior Cat

**K**ittens, although cute and moldable, require a lot of supervision, which may be difficult in many busy family environments. Homes with existing pets can sometimes be hazardous to a small fragile kitten, as opposed to an adult cat that will soon set boundaries and determine the pecking order with the other pets in the home. Following are the unique advantages to adopting an older cats.

## **What you see is what you get**

With an older cat you know what you're getting in terms of size, physical appearance, health and temperament. They have already developed their personalities, temperaments, and physical characteristics.

## **Low physical demands**

Fortunately older cats are not as demanding as some of their younger counterparts. Although they still need quality time in the form of attention and playtime, they may be more content to sleep and curl up at your feet rather than demand nonstop playtime.

## **Great for older people**

Older cats often make great companions for older people, who don't have the stamina to keep up with supervising a young, energetic kitten. Research proves that petting a cat and playing with it actually reduces stress.

## **Settles in much quicker**

Older cats settle in easily, because they've learned what it takes to get along with others and become part of a family.

## **Know what "no" means**

Older cats have learned what "no" means. If they hadn't learned it, they wouldn't have gotten to be "older" cats.

## **Give you more time for yourself**

Older cats leave you time for yourself, because they don't make the kinds of demands on your time and attention that kittens do.

## **Safer for small children than kittens**

Households with small children can also be dangerous for a young kitten. An adult cat can physically tolerate more handling from a child and are able to avoid a child that may be too rough. Also children often are looking for a kitten to snuggle with and hold, yet kittens are more interested in playing and bouncing about.

With all the superb qualities possessed by older cats, it is unfortunate that they are often overlooked. 84% of adopters are looking for a cat under one year of age. Before heading to the nearest kitten area in search of your next companion, take a moment to ponder the possibilities of an older cat. You may be surprised what (and who) you find!

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# Questions to Ask Yourself BEFORE Adopting a Cat/Kitten

**S**o you're thinking about adopting a cat? Cats can be a wonderful addition to your life. To be sure you are ready for a cat, take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

- Are you ready to make a commitment to a cat for his/her entire life (which could be 15+ years)?
- Have you checked your local laws as to whether registration of cats is required and if there are limitations on the number of cats you are allowed to have?
- If you live in an apartment, are cats allowed and what restrictions might there be? Can you afford the Pet Deposit you may have to pay?
- Will other pets in your home get along with a new one?
- Are you financially prepared for the cost of a veterinarian, quality cat food and supplies (kitty litter, scratching posts, toys), etc.? (See "Expenses" in this booklet)
- If you go on vacation, who will take care of your cat? Can you afford boarding fees?
- Do you have the patience and discipline to retrain your cat if it has bad habits?
- Can you tolerate a kitten or cat scratching on furniture or carpeting?
- Do you have the time and patience to train a cat to scratch on carpet-covered or rope-covered posts?
- Are you willing to keep the cat indoors?
- Do you or any family members have any known allergies to cats?
- Does shedding bother you?
- If you move, will you be sure to move ONLY to a place that allows pets?
- If you adopt a cat, will you be ready to keep a litter box in your home and clean it daily?
- Do ALL of your family members want a cat?
- Although all cats need regular grooming, long-haired cats require more. Do you have the time to do this?
- If you choose a kitten, are your children old enough to handle one? Although kittens are irresistible to them, they are not always a good choice for small children. Children can be rough unintentionally and kittens are very fragile. Some cats do not respond well to children so if you choose an older cat, ask the shelter volunteers. Also keep in mind that most kittens are not lap cats, they like to play, play, play!
- Are you always traveling? Is someone at home for a good part of the day, or is everyone always on the go? If your cat must spend most of its time alone, then you likely won't be able to provide it with a suitable home at this time. Contrary to popular belief, cats are very social animals and need companionship also.
- Are you interested in a cat or a kitten? Kittens are cute and they're wonderfully intriguing and a lot of work. If you do not have the time or the patience to care a new kitten, consider adopting an adult. Adult cats have plenty of love to give and will bond easily to their new people.

Please do not adopt a cat as a surprise gift. Many cats are turned into animal shelters every year because the recipient of the cat did not want it. Cats have thoughts and feelings and it is frightening and confusing to be dumped at a shelter. If you want to give a cat as a gift, please bring the recipient of the cat with you to choose one for themselves. Or ask if you can purchase a "pet gift certificate" that would allow the person to select a pet when they are ready.

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# Preparing Your Home for Your New Cat

**B**efore you bring your new friend home, it's best to be prepared to prevent unnecessary confusion and stress. Establish the rules. Decide who's responsible for what: grooming, feeding, cleaning litter, playtime, and so on. Also establish whether or not there will be areas that are "off-limits" for your new cat. Have all the necessary supplies ready. Cat-proof your home. Some other things to consider are:

- Lock away medications and household chemicals, such as cleansers, insecticide, and others. Animals are especially attracted to antifreeze; be sure to clean up spills immediately and keep the rest out of reach as even a small amount can be fatal. If possible, use nontoxic antifreeze. Antifreeze tastes sweet to pets and is the most common feline poison, causing kidney failure.
- Place houseplants out of reach. Many houseplants are poisonous to cats (Ivy, Philodendron, Dieffenbachia, Easter lily, Caladium, False Jerusalem cherry, Oleander, Azalea, Rhododendron, and Laurel to name a few.) . Some cats like to use houseplants as a litter box.
- Have separate areas for your new cat and any existing pets. Pets need to be introduced to one another slowly. Be sure you have an extra room or a kennel so that your pets can be separated until they have grown accustomed to each other.
- Tie electrical cords out of the way, if you can. Cats or kittens can chew on electrical cords - or even catch them while walking (or running!) around, causing lamps, TVs, radios, etc. to fall.
- Keep doors closed - this includes the doors to your washer and dryer, your closets, and the cupboards. Inquisitive cats/kittens can sneak in just about anywhere when you are not looking!
- Keep household trinkets out of your cat's reach. Stuff like garbage, medicine, pins, elastics, balls, bits of fabric and baby-bottle nipples, thread, needles, and so on should be placed out of the way.
- Close garage and appliance doors. A warm dryer or car engine may entice cats in search of a warm place to nap.
- Immediately place opened tin or aluminum cans behind closed doors or in containers with secure lids. The edges of these cans are extremely sharp and can cut or sever your cat's tongue.
- Set rodent traps out of a cat's reach.
- Shut the bathroom door when you run water in a bathtub. Close toilet lids, and make sure the fireplace is tightly screened.
- Cats may jump out of open windows and can be seriously injured in a fall. Cats often lean on screens as they nap so secure screens on all windows.

Make sure everyone knows how to **PROPERLY** handle your cat. Everyone should know how to safely pick up your pet. Also emphasize certain rules such as your cat should never be disturbed while eating or in the litterbox.

## Have these items on hand **BEFORE** adopting your new cat

When you bring your new cat home, you will want to spend as much quality time with it as possible in order to acclimate it to your home, your family members and what you expect of it. You won't have time to run to a store and get all the initial supplies. In fact, if you work outside of the home, it is best to obtain your new cat on a weekend when you have several days to bond with it.

- Kitty litter & litter tray
- Collar (with cat-safe clasp) and temporary ID tag
- Quality cat food
- Cage, room or confined area to keep it until it is gradually introduced to all family members and other pets
- Food and water bowls
- Scratching post(s)
- Toys

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# Expenses Involved in Caring for a Cat

**B**efore you decide to adopt a cat, take a look at the items below. Visit a pet store and talk to a vet to get exact costs. As a guardian of a cat, you have undertaken a significant long-term emotional and financial commitment! Although costs vary widely, on average, a healthy cat's annual expenses could range \$175-\$400 or so. Remember, your dollar investment will vary, depending on how old your kitty is when you obtain him or her, the area you live in, and the lifestyle your kitty leads. (Caviar and kitty condos add up quickly!)

An indoor-only cat will more likely have fewer illnesses and injuries and will live longer. Indoor cats live on an average 15 years whereas an outdoor cat's average life is approximately 3 years. Cats that roam outside are at risk of vehicles, predators, diseases, injuries, poisons, potential abuse, and becoming lost. Remember – having a pet is like having a child, it takes the same amount of love and responsibility.

## One Time Costs

- **W.A.C.S. adoption fees:** Cat 1+ years of age: \$40. Kitten under one year of age: \$85. These prices include a wellness examination, distemper combo vaccinations, one year rabies vaccination, microchip, one year registration, and spay/neuter services. Yearly cat license fee: \$20 for altered cat, \$30 for unaltered cat.
- **Declawing**, if desired, \$110-200. Only consider this as a very last resort and beware that behavioral problems can result from declawing. There are many ways to avoid this painful procedure. By simply learning how to train your cat to do its scratching at selected places (scratching posts), your kitty will be much happier and your furniture will stay intact!
- **Kitten shots** – If you have a kitten, it will require at least a couple of sets of shots until its immune system is fully developed. Once it matures it need only go to the vet once a year for a booster (barring any unforeseen medical conditions, of course). Office visit \$24 & up, plus shots \$15 & up
- **Collar, leash, and harness** – You can purchase a cat collar (\$5 & up) that has a safety clasp on it made to snap open in the event your cat gets stuck somewhere. If you plan to take your indoor cat out for walks, it's a good idea to have both a leash (\$8 & up) and a harness (\$9 & up). The harness will prevent your cat from slipping out of a collar. Cats can be very adept at escaping their collars.
- **Litter box and scooper** – Litter pans can be \$2 & up. Hooded litter trays can be \$15 & up. Scoopers are \$2 & up.
- **Water and food bowls** – Buy shallow food bowls because cats like to keep their whiskers clean. \$3.50 & up.
- **Scratching post(s)** – Give your cat an alternative to shredding your furniture and carpets! The more you have the better! \$20 & up.
- **Crate** – Good for car rides (vacations, moving day, trips to the vet, etc.) \$20 & up.
- **Brush/comb, and nail clippers** – \$15 & up for all.

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- **Identification tag** – Although the shelter will provide microchipping, it is imperative to have a visible ID tag or have it's name and your phone number embroidered on its collar for FAST identification and return if s/he is lost. \$5 & up.
  - **Cat bed** – This isn't a necessary expense at all; most cats are perfectly content to curl up on your bed, a comfy chair or your lap wherever you are! If you want to encourage kitty to sleep in her own bed, or if you just think she would like her own "private" spot, then there are many types of cat beds available. \$10 and up.

## Recurring Costs

- **Food** – Try to feed your cat primarily dry food; it's better for their teeth. You can also mix in a little canned food or provide canned food as an occasional treat. Annual cost to feed a cat is approx. \$240 to \$300 a year.
- **Kitty litter** – Look for high-quality kitty litter; lower-quality litter tends to produce a lot of dust, which kitty can breathe in when she's doing her business. \$8 & up for 20-35 lbs.
- **Annual vet visit** – Adult cats need an annual vaccinations. The vet can do a check-up at the same time. \$25 & up for basic visit/exam *plus* annual shots (rabies & distemper) \$25 & up.
- **Furball medication/formulas** – Cats are fastidiously clean and groom themselves constantly. Eventually, they swallow some of their fur, which can result in a buildup in their stomachs leading to the dreaded furball. Medication, specialized treats and food can help to alleviate and/or prevent furballs in your feline. \$3.50 & up.
- **Grooming** – Cats usually don't need professional grooming, especially if you brush them daily, but in case they do, a bath & brushing can cost \$30 & up. For regular nail trims, you can ask your vet or groomer to show you how to do it, or you can pay to have it done. Nail trim \$5-10
- **Toys and treats** – Keep your cat indoors and provide it with many toys to keep it entertained and happy. Although there are many great toys to buy in the store, cats most often enjoy just things around the house such as a box to get into, batting around plastic bottle tops, etc. Keep rotating the toys so your cat doesn't get bored. Avoid string, ribbon or rolls of yarn! Figure \$50 or more a year.
- **Boarding** – Most people prefer not to take their cats on vacations. Check with some local kennels to determine the cost of a night's stay. For a few extra dollars a day, some boarding places will give your cat "playtime" with individual attention. \$6 a day and up.
- **Dental Care** – Have your cat's teeth checked and cleaned regularly. Cats can get tarter easily and if not removed, can cause potentially serious and expensive problems. Basic dental cleaning \$100 & up.
- **Unforeseen medical costs** – Like people, your cat may sometimes get sick or have an accident. If you are worried about additional medical costs, you may want to look into purchasing pet insurance



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# Plan Ahead How to Introduce Your New Cat to Your Pets

Introducing a new pet into a home that already has a furry family member isn't always easy. Pets are like people; they each have their own personality and need time to get to know one another. This can take anywhere from a few days to several months before two animals are comfortable together.

Even with careful introductions, there may be an adjustment period after bringing a new pet home. Existing and new pets may hit it off from day one but they are just as likely to initially exhibit fear, depression or "jealousy," or they may even be mildly aggressive towards each other (all normal reactions). If you are not ready to cope with an almost inevitable, but generally temporary, adjustment period, please postpone adopting until you know you are ready and have the time.

First, set aside a room, if you can, for the new cat.

Although there are no hard and fast rules on how to introduce animals to one another, here are a few tips to help make introductions go smoothly:

1. Have more than one person present the first couple of times in case they need to be separated.
2. Give both pets equal attention.
3. Don't change the placement of your current pet's items unless absolutely necessary.
4. Put the new cat's food dish at least 2 ft. away from your old pet's dish starting out.
5. Try to give your new cat one room or area they can claim as their own.
6. If possible, pick a more neutral area to initially introduce your pets. A family room, a park, or somewhere neither pet has a claim to are ideal locations.
7. When pets need to be separated for a short time, make sure to treat both pets equally. Don't put one pet in your bedroom, and the other somewhere isolated.
8. Always keep an eye on how the relationship between both animals develops over time. Be ready to step in when necessary.
9. Have a few new toys set aside specifically for the new animal.
10. Remember to be patient and considerate of the feelings and needs of BOTH animals during this adjusting period. **Don't show favoritism.**

With a lot of love, patience, and care incorporating a new member into your family can be a rewarding and enriching experience. Remember: every friend was a stranger at some point in time.

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## Introducing new kitten or cat to established cat or cats:

Here are some simple suggestions to keep cat-to-cat introductions from being “hair raising”. Set up a room for the new kitten/cat before bringing it home. Your new arrival should be separated from the other cat initially. This will help each pet adjust slowly by sniffing each other under the door. Also, this will allow the new kitten/cat to get used to its new environment before being overwhelmed by the established cat. After a day or two, trade rooms. Give your new kitten/cat time to explore the rest of the house while the established cat explores the new addition’s domain. After putting the new kitten/cat back in the original room, keep the door ajar just enough so they can see each other while maintaining a safe separation. In a week or so allow them to meet under your supervision. To help speed acceptance, you can try rubbing a towel on your present cat and then rub that scent on to your new cat. This should help your cat accept the new one better.

Hissing and negative behavior is natural. Watch for signs of serious confrontations. You may need to limit exposure for a while. Allow them to slowly get to know each other, give them space. Use your judgment as to when to intervene but try to relax and they probably will too.

## Introducing new kitten or cat to established dog or dogs:

Keep in mind that not all dogs hate cats or vice versa, but they are generally, at the very least, suspicious and distrusting of each other initially. It is important to be very careful when introducing them, since each can do serious damage to the other. Approach introductions with patience (it can sometimes take several months for dogs and cats to live in harmony). **The way they are introduced initially is very important and can greatly affect the length of time until they are at ease with one another.** Just putting them together at the onset and hoping for the best is a mistake and can cause major setbacks. Confine the cat to a room where it feels comfortable with food, water and litter box. Start with the door closed so the animals can sniff each other under the door. The cat will know the dog is in the house and vice versa. Do this for several days, up to a week. Next, allow the cat and dog to see each other under your close supervision. This can be done with a heavy-duty baby gate wedged in the doorway. Keep the dog on a leash and if the dog barks or tries to go after the cat, correct the dog by sternly saying “NO!” and then distracting it (a toy works well). Use the same method if the cat tries to go after the dog - a stern “NO!” and then a distraction. Do this for at least a week. The pet’s reactions to each other should decrease over time. Then allow the cat out to be loose in the room while the dog is crated. Don’t react if the dog barks and is excited when it sees the cat in closer proximity. Give the dog a distraction in its crate (like a Kong with peanut butter or a favorite toy). Do this step for several days, but only while you are home with the interaction supervised and the dog crated. When the pet’s reactions have diminished to what you feel is a safe level of interest in each other, you can allow the dog and cat out together under your supervision. Again, any threatening actions by the dog and/or cat should immediately result in a stern NO! to the offender(s) and then a distraction. Keep a leash on the dog so you can grab it if it seriously threatens the cat. Do this exercise for several days. There will probably be some skirmishes, but let the dog and cat know that you are in charge of the interaction and don’t let it get out of hand. Always safely confine the cat in its room and/or place the dog in its crate away from the cat whenever you cannot supervise them. When you feel comfortable, you can remove the dog’s leash when they interact. Understand that while many dogs and cats safely live together, some may never be able to be left together unsupervised. To insure that neither gets hurt, trust your instincts, increase their interaction with each other gradually, and always err on the side of caution. **REMEMBER: Gradually introducing a new pet to existing pet(s) is the key.** Going too slowly is much better than proceeding too quickly (which could negatively impact your chances of success). Patience ALWAYS pays off!

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# Kittens/Cats and Children

It is essential that you explain carefully to your children how the new arrival should be treated. Kittens love to be stroked and cuddled and they can provide joy and entertainment for children, but gentleness of handling is **ESSENTIAL**. Kittens are not toys and need much care and attention. What can be an innocent game for a young child can cause distress or injury to an animal. Teach your children correct handling and how to recognize when the kitten is unhappy. Kittens/cats can be easily hurt or frightened, and when frightened, they may react with their teeth.

## How old should children be before they have a pet?

Some experts say that a child should be at least six or seven before having a pet, while others say that it depends on the maturity of the child. Do your children understand that animals are living creatures, which can be hurt if not handled properly? Do they see animals as toys, or as fellow beings to develop relationships with? Observe your children with other people's pets. **WATCH CAREFULLY** how they touch and hold the animals, and how they react when the animals don't do what the children want them to do.

Keep in mind that older animals are less excitable and may be accustomed to children's unexpected movements and to being mauled a bit. Younger animals, especially kittens, might react to the unexpected by biting or clawing.

## What is the best way to select a pet for a child?

After you've considered the child's age and maturity level, and what type of cat/kitten is best for your situation, let your child be part of the selection process. Bring the child with you to the shelter or Petsmart. Watch the interaction between your child and the kittens and cats, and be prepared to override the child's first choice if you think the animal doesn't have the right temperament to be with your child.

Cats have simple needs, and they're often (but not always) tolerant of children who are past the age of poking and squeezing them. Kittens and children under six years old aren't usually a good match. Children can hurt kittens until they learn how to handle animals gently, and kittens need to learn when not to use their claws. Spayed cats are often calmer and more predictable. Take advantage of the Adoption Counselors available at the shelter and Petsmart and ask them as many questions as you like. They are as anxious as you are to get YOU the most compatible pet possible.

With adult decision-making and supervision, children and pets can be wonderful together. The children learn responsibility and empathy, and the animals have a home and someone to love them back.

Consider also that when your children grow up and leave home, they might not be able to take their pets with them, leaving you as the main caregiver. Are **YOU** willing to keep the cat and care for him/her for the rest of its life?

