

Hardly Anyone Considers This When Choosing a New Pet

Ever feel nervous about making the wrong choice when adding a new pet to your household? Many people do. But here's something important to consider that most people don't consider. And it could make all the difference in the world between a good fit and a bad one.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Not every match is made in heaven, and not every human-animal bond is instantaneous
- Instead of expecting love at first sight when looking for a new pet to adopt, focus instead on all the things you can do for your new animal companion to ease her transition into a new life with you
- Important ways to develop a lasting relationship with your new pet include making a knowledgeable decision about the type of animal that best suits you, and nurturing the developing bond between you

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Finding the perfect dog or cat to add to your family is sometimes a matter of falling in love the moment you lay eyes on your new pet. More often, though, it's not so cut and dried — which can cause a potential pet parent to feel nervous about making the wrong choice.

To further complicate matters, shelters aren't the best environments in which to meet your future furry best friend. Most pets feel frightened and stressed in shelter situations, so it's unlikely your potential companion is able to put his best paw forward under such trying circumstances.

It's also important to remember that love at first sight isn't often an accurate measure of the depth of the bond that can develop between pet and guardian over time.

As an adopted dog or cat learns to feel safe and loved in a new home, his true character reveals itself, and is often very different from his "shelter personality." The following are five important tips for creating a mutually satisfying and long-lasting bond with your newly adopted pet.

No. 1 - Do Your Homework Before Choosing a New Pet

Especially if you're a first-time pet guardian, you'll need to do lots of research to understand whether a dog or cat is better suited for your activity level and lifestyle. The pet's age will also be a factor — puppies and kittens often require more effort and patience than adult dogs and cats.

Before you decide, talk with knowledgeable shelter employees about what type of pet best suits you. Allow them to point you in a direction, and keep your brain engaged as well your heart so that you can make the best choice for both you and the animal you adopt.

Relinquished pets usually come with information about their previous lifestyle and circumstances that can provide very beneficial clues going forward.

For instance, a young dog that grew up in a home with lots of kids will have a very different set of behaviors than an older lapdog that lived with a single senior or a middle-aged hunting dog that lived in a kennel outside.

Some shelter pets were strays, so their past circumstances are unknown, and some pets arrive completely untrained or with behavior problems. This isn't their fault — they depended on humans, and someone along the way let them down.

Because your prospective animal companion may come to you with baggage, you should be prepared to put in the time and effort required to help him succeed in your home. Behavior modification using a positive reward system is the key to encouraging good behavior.

You may be able to accomplish this on your own, or you may need the help of a veterinarian or an animal behavior specialist. Just please commit to do it. Be the one human in your pet's life who doesn't let him down.

If you plan to adopt a dog, to help her adjust to your home in the least stressful manner, consider getting a copy of "**A Sound Beginning**" prior to her arrival.

You can institute the book's tips and tricks (as well as use the calming and stress reducing music CD) immediately upon bringing your newest family member home.

No. 2 - For a New Pet Dog, Start Obedience Training on Day 1

As soon as your dog comes home with you — that very first day — you should begin training basic obedience commands like come, sit, stay, and down.

You might discover your dog can already follow basic commands. You might also find that you need to take it very slow, working on just one command a day or for a couple of days or weeks then moving on to another command.

Repeating a command over and over won't make your pup listen any better. If he doesn't seem to understand you, solicit the advice of a positive dog trainer to help you communicate more effectively.

Studies show that attending obedience classes with your dog builds his trust in you and strengthens the developing bond between you. It helps your canine companion learn desired behaviors, and it helps you understand why he behaves in certain ways.

If your dog is having trouble adjusting, however, it's a good idea to wait several weeks before enrolling in formal training classes outside your home.

It's also a good idea to assume your dog wasn't socialized by previous owners. At a minimum he isn't socialized to all the stimuli in his new life with you. It will be your responsibility to expose him to all the sights, sounds, smells, and other living creatures in his new environment.

Take care not to overwhelm him, though. Let him set the pace and use gentle encouragement if he's especially timid or shy.

No. 3 – For a New Pet Kitten, Enroll Her in Kitten Kindergarten

Socialization isn't just for dogs. Research shows that kittens also benefit from having positive experiences with lots of different people, animals, unfamiliar cats, new environments, and human handling.

Kitten kindergarten is designed specifically for kittens 8 to 15 weeks of age who have received their first set of kitten shots. This is the period during which they are most receptive and open to learning new things and bonding with other kitties and humans.

The classes offer young cats the opportunity to interact and play with people and other kittens. The goal of kitten kindergarten is to teach positive behaviors, which will help prevent the development of troublesome behaviors in the future.

Kittens who attend kindergarten during the critical developmental period of 8 to 15 weeks are more likely to be friendly and social adult cats. They are also better equipped to handle the everyday stresses of life, such as a change in their human's work schedule, or the arrival of a new member of the household.

No. 4 – Find a Veterinarian Whose Approach Aligns With Yours

In veterinary medicine, there are allopathic and holistic practitioners. Those who combine the two approaches are called integrative practitioners.

Allopathic veterinarians are Doctors of Veterinary Medicine (DVMs) traditionally trained in western, or conventional, medicine. The general approach of allopathic vets is to treat symptoms of illness or disease with drugs and/or surgery. The primary focus is on treating existing symptoms.

Holistic veterinarians are also DVMs. They receive the same training from the same institutions as allopathic vets; they receive the same licensing and certification. Then they go on to pursue additional training in alternative methods of healing, including herbs and nutritional supplements, chiropractic, acupuncture, homeopathy, and nutrition and movement therapy.

The focus of holistic veterinarians is to promote wellness and prevent health problems from developing. Integrative veterinarians bring the philosophies of both western and alternative medicine to their treatment of patients. Both types of medicine have practical application in the care of companion animals.

In your search for the right veterinarian, it's important to know which treatment approach you prefer for your pet. When you and your veterinarian operate as a team, you're more likely to schedule regular wellness checkups, and your pet will receive an optimal level of care.

No. 5 – Give Them Time to Adjust and Lots of Positive Attention

If you work full time and plan to bring your new pet home on a Saturday, then head back to the office on Monday, I'll be honest — you're asking for a problem. Especially if you've adopted a dog.

It's the very rare pet who can settle into a new life in less than 48 hours, or spend 8 to 10 hours alone in a strange new environment without going a little bonkers — especially if that pet is a dog with some baggage who has just been sprung from a shelter.

I recommend taking at least several days off from work to properly welcome your new pet home, and get her acclimated and into a consistent daily routine. Many pets who have been with their family for years don't cope well when left alone for many hours each day, so it's easy to imagine how difficult it is for a newly adopted shelter pet.

The more time you're able to spend with your new furry companion, giving her lots of positive attention and teaching her the rules and routines in her new forever home, the better the outcome for both of you.

Sources and References

[VetStreet](#)
