

Pets Are Good For Kids!

Dr. Ruth MacPete, DVM

Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

For more from [Dr. Ruth MacPete](#), find her on [Facebook](#) or at www.drruthpetvet.com!

As someone who grew up with animals and the mother of two young children, I have always believed that pets are good for kids. Now there is a growing body of scientific evidence proving what I have always known to be true. Yet despite this, most of us with kids and pets have experienced "the look." What I am referring to is the look you get from one of your friend's without animals when they see your dog lick your kid's face, or worse, the absolute terror on their face when your dog licks their kid's hands. We all have those friends, the non-animal people who just don't get it. As a veterinarian and animal lover who has always had a household of pets, I have endured many looks and comments. "You let the dog in the house around the kids?" "The cat sleeps in the bed?" "Aren't you afraid the dog is going to give them something?" Not only are most of these concerns unfounded, it turns out that having a pet around kids is actually good for their health.

So how are pets good for our kids? In addition to teaching them empathy, responsibility, and love, pets can make great friends and companions for children. Pets also show kids how to express love by petting, being gentle, hugging or kissing. Pets have been shown to help children overcome shyness, develop trust, and enhance their social skills. As if that wasn't enough, science has shown that pets also offer health benefits to children. A study by Dr. Gern from at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that infants that grow up with pets are less likely to develop asthma and allergies. He evaluated blood samples from infants after birth and then on their first birthday to look for changes in their immune system or evidence of allergic reactions. His research supported previous studies that have shown that allergies, eczema and asthma occur less frequently in children with pets. In addition, animals have been proven to help with stress, anxiety,

depression, autism, ADD and other psychological issues.

Our course, there are caveats. As much as I love and adore pets, I recognize that they are animals and they could harm a child because of food or toy aggression or if provoked. Even if you "know" your pet, supervise their interactions and make sure your pets don't show ANY signs of aggression. Likewise, teach your children to respect your pets: never allow them to tease or take away food or toys from pets. Also, exercise common sense: the most mild mannered labrador retriever can get rambunctious and could inadvertently hurt an infant. When it comes to children and pets, my maternal instincts always trump the animal lover in me and I always choose what is safest for my kids.

Besides having a well-behaved pet, you want to make sure they are healthy. Take your pet to the veterinarian for regular veterinary visits and yearly parasite checks (fecals). Keeping your pet on year round parasite preventatives will also ensure that your pet is healthy and will not spread anything to your family (diseases that can be passed from people to pets are called [zoonotic](#)). Once you know your pet is healthy and protected from internal and external parasites, you can relish the fact that your pet is actually good for your children.

Making sure your pets and kids behave well around one another and ensuring your pet is as healthy as possible will be well worth the effort. Consider the great benefits kids can reap from having pets in their lives. So next time someone without pets gives you "the look," just smile and know that your pets are actually good for your kids.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.