

REAL SIMPLE • family

Find time for
what matters:

71 unique strategies
for your (busy) life

kid-friendly dinners

bedtime chaos, conquered

instant stain fighters

gifts for all ages

tips from teachers

best backpacks

cool kid websites



PRINTED
U.S. POSTAGE &
FEES PAID
WASECA, MN
PERMIT NO. 122








choosing a kid's best friend

How to find the *right pet* for your family? Follow your animal instincts—or this guide to popular furry (and scaly) friends.

Finding a four-legged companion can get hairy. You have fond memories of your childhood pooch Popcorn but have conveniently forgotten those predawn walks he used to demand. Your kids are cat crazy, but with their allergies, they are barking—or, rather, meowing—up the wrong tree. And is a hamster the best choice for a sensitive six-year-old who won't understand when his short-lived pet has gone to the great exercise wheel in the sky? *Real Simple* offers pros and cons for the most popular breeds of dogs and cats—plus smaller pets, like turtles and fish—to help you fetch a winner.






written by
Teri Cettina
photograph by
Emily Nathan

dogs Big or small, the following popular breeds are all exceptionally good with children. But purebreds can be expensive, so consider one of the many dogs available at shelters. (Search for dogs in need at www.1-800-save-a-pet.com or www.petfinder.com.) And for more pet information, go to www.realsimple.com/pettips.

type of dog	why it's family-friendly	possible pet peeves	best for...
 <p>Labrador retriever (black, golden, or chocolate)</p>	<p>Labs are happy, sociable dogs who are at ease with kids of all ages. Your dog will gladly let a baby climb on it or run after tennis balls with a 12-year-old.</p>	<p>Labs shed year-round, so there's more hair to inflame allergies. (Note: People are allergic to the saliva on an animal's fur, not the fur itself. Shedding spreads the saliva throughout the house.)</p>	<p>A Frisbee lover. Labs need 30 to 60 minutes of high-energy exercise every day. "They are natural retrievers and love running after toys," says American Kennel Club spokesperson Lisa Peterson.</p>
 <p>Yorkshire terrier</p>	<p>Live in an apartment? Yorkies take up little space. They also live longer than big dogs (as most small breeds do)—up to 20 years. Young kids will be less likely to deal with the loss of a pet.</p>	<p>Yorkies are often too fragile for families with toddlers or preschoolers; their bones may break if the dog is dropped or squeezed too hard. They also tend to bark when they don't get attention.</p>	<p>A pint-size princess. A Yorkie's silky coat needs daily primping (read: combing) and a weekly shampoo. The dogs get plenty of exercise running around the house and are easily toted around town.</p>
 <p>German shepherd</p>	<p>Although big, German shepherds don't need a lot of outdoor space. Walking or running one for 30 minutes, twice a day, keeps the dog fit—good news for busy teenagers (and moms).</p>	<p>Guardian dogs like this one need to get to know people before they become friendly. They also might nip at kids' heels—to herd, not hurt—which comes from their instinct to round up livestock.</p>	<p>An older child who wants to show off his new dog's tricks. German shepherds are intelligent, loyal, and protective—perfect for a kid who wants a steadfast buddy and has the patience to train it.</p>
 <p>golden retriever</p>	<p>Bred to retrieve birds and ducks in their mouths without damaging them, golden retrievers are careful and tender. They rarely nip, and they tolerate lots of grabbing and hugging from kids.</p>	<p>A golden maintains its playful puppy attitude a bit longer than some breeds, so it's a fun-loving family member. However, the dog's energy may try your patience.</p>	<p>A playmate who isn't afraid of a little dirt. Golden retrievers can get messy (the long fur that hangs off the belly is a mud magnet), and they shed twice a year, but "they are eager to please," says Peterson.</p>
 <p>beagle</p>	<p>Beagles are sociable dogs who like to be part of a family, in on the action. And their expressive faces are the epitome of "puppy-dog eyes." (What kid could refuse walking him?)</p>	<p>The downside of the pack mentality? If left alone, a beagle will show off its trademark loud "baying and boing."</p>	<p>A curious child who isn't absent-minded. Beagles are scavengers, following their noses into the woods or the neighbor's garbage. Owners should keep them leashed—or be prepared to go on a hunt.</p>






cats

Some specialty breeds can be expensive, so consider adopting a stray (see below) or find a feline at www.1-800-save-a-pet.com or www.petfinder.com. Note to allergy sufferers: If you're allergic to one cat, you're probably allergic to all of them, even hairless breeds, since the allergy is to the cat's saliva or skin flakes, not fur.

type of cat	why it's family-friendly	possible pet peeves	best for...
 <p>Maine coon</p>	<p>Maine coons love attention (as opposed to more standoffish breeds) and follow their owners around, even waiting for them by the door. Their long coats rarely mat, so grooming isn't difficult.</p>	<p>These cats grow to almost 20 pounds and can get fat if you don't keep an eye on their food intake and activity level. Invest in some kitty toys.</p>	<p>A dog lover turned cat fanatic. "They're not as independent as some cats," says Carol Barbee, president of the American Cat Fanciers Association, so kids who want a playmate love them.</p>
 <p>ragamuffin or ragdoll</p>	<p>Both breeds get their names from their habit of relaxing like a limp ragdoll when picked up. They are ideal cuddlers and "soft-pawed," meaning they rarely use their claws when playing.</p>	<p>Because they are relatively new (the breeds originated in the 1960s) and popular, they are also expensive (\$600 to \$1,200). Their long coats need weekly grooming, probably by a grown-up.</p>	<p>A child who likes to carry her cat around like a favorite doll. These breeds will happily wear a dress, but consider choosing a neutered male (female cats of all breeds are quicker to anger).</p>
 <p>American shorthair</p>	<p>This breed has been around for generations. A hardy background makes them exceptionally healthy and even-tempered.</p>	<p>They look like ordinary stray cats but can be expensive (at least \$500). Paying for a purebred should guarantee certain calm personality traits, however. This breed is prone to obesity.</p>	<p>A multitasking kid with a houseful of pets. A shorthair's even disposition means it gets along with other animals. If your child is staging a dog, cat, and parakeet play, this cat should cooperate.</p>
 <p>Siamese</p>	<p>Siamese cats are highly social. They like to hang out with a family, don't hide under the bed when visitors arrive, and usually prefer playing to taking a nap on the windowsill.</p>	<p>Hide the antique vase. Siamese cats are active and might knock over valuables while playing in the house. Their constant meowing also sounds like a crying baby. (Just what you need, right?)</p>	<p>A spark plug who can't sit still. Siamese cats are always on the go, perfect for active children. Their short, tight coats are easy to brush, so there's less maintenance and more playtime.</p>
 <p>neighborhood stray</p>	<p>First of all, they're free. And adopting a stray can give your kids a lesson in compassion. Younger cats are easier to socialize; kittens should be 12 to 13 weeks old and weaned.</p>	<p>You can't be sure what you're getting. Stray cats may have illnesses or injuries from poor nutrition or living in the wild. Make sure you take the new addition to the vet for a full checkup.</p>	<p>A patient caregiver. Making a stray feel welcome takes time. Keep it in a small room, and allow one person at a time to visit. Gradually introduce new people over the course of a few days.</p>

other popular pets

When it comes to household creatures, the animal kingdom extends far beyond dogs and cats. All of the following live in a cage, a bowl, or an aquarium, making them good choices for small spaces and an easy-care option for first-time owners. Or maybe your kid just loves lizards.

type of pet	why it's family-friendly	possible pet peeves	best for...
 rabbit	Rabbits are affectionate and click their teeth when happy, so a child can feel gratified that her pet is enjoying the interaction. They can also be trained to use a litter box.	A rabbit's strong rear legs can give a child a powerful kick if he's not careful. And rabbits need room to run and burn off energy when they come out of their cages. They also chew electrical cords.	An affectionate child with a gentle touch. A rabbit may rub its head against you to initiate petting. Smaller breeds, like Mini Lops and Holland Lops (three to five pounds) are a good size for a child's lap.
 hamster or guinea pig	Each is a good, inexpensive pet for small spaces. Hamsters are better for kids with allergies, but guinea pigs are a bit friendlier and will curl up in a lap and snooze.	Hamsters are nocturnal, so buy a plastic, non-squeak wheel if the animal will be kept in a bedroom. They also bite—hard enough to draw blood. Guinea pigs whistle—cute at playtime; annoying at 2 A.M.	An older child who won't fall to pieces when his pet passes on. Neither hamsters nor guinea pigs live longer than three to five years; with hamsters, it's closer to two.
 fish	Get as simple or as complicated a system as you want—a single Siamese fighting fish in a bowl or a high-tech saltwater aquarium. Most kids can easily care for fish by themselves.	Not for kids who want to hold or touch. "And fish are addictive. Kids want more and want bigger, more expensive tanks," says Crystal Blackburn, manager of Beverly's Pet Center, in Pembroke Pines, Florida.	A kid who loves science. Fish often breed in tanks, and different species and plants create a cool ecosystem to observe. Consider saving larger tanks for teens who can handle the equipment.
 lizard or snake	These creatures are perfect for children who are dinosaur obsessed—or allergy-prone.	The setup is more expensive than those for fish or hamsters, as cold-blooded reptiles need special lights. You also run the risk of Seymour the Snake getting loose and into—yikes!—the laundry hamper.	A child with a stomach of steel. Many lizards and snakes eat live mice or rats. For a less Discovery Channel-ish experience, get a bearded dragon or a gecko; they eat plants and crickets.
 tortoise	For squeamish family members, tortoises are often more appealing than snakes or lizards. They are slow moving (so incapable of darting under the couch) and low-maintenance.	Turtles can carry salmonella, just like raw chicken, says Blackburn. Kids need to wash their hands after playing with the pet and definitely before eating.	A child with attachment issues. Box turtles, the most common tortoises, live up to 65 years; some breeds reach 150. This pet probably isn't going anywhere, even when your kid leaves for college.