

# Ask A Vet: The Gift of.....Commitment?

*Sunday, December 22, 2013*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I would like to get my 7 year old grandson a pet as a gift. What type of pet would you suggest?

Dear Reader,

Let's see...the best pet would have a low price tag, be low maintenance, wouldn't make a mess, and would be easy for a child to care for. In my opinion, the best pet to give as a gift is a stuffed animal.

In all seriousness, I would never recommend giving a pet as a gift to a child, especially if you have not discussed it with his parents. I would not give an animal as a gift to an adult unless they had expressed a desire for a pet. An animal of any kind is a long term commitment. It has been said that getting a pet is like having a child – there are a lot of financial, emotional and time concerns.

The unconditional love that comes from a pet can be wonderful, but it does come with responsibility. Who will care for the pet if your grandson forgets, or gets tired of the work involved in caring for it? Are you willing to take the animal into your house if there are allergy problems or other reasons the family can't keep the pet? If not, can it be returned to the place you got it from?

Does your grandson's family have the finances for a pet? A puppy or kitten can cost upwards of \$1000 in the first year of its life. This includes vet visits, vaccines, neutering, toys, food, flea/tick/heartworm medications and other supplies. Even small mammals such as hamsters and gerbils have costs that may not be in a family's budget. Bedding and proper housing, water bottles, and chew toys to keep teeth healthy can run more than \$100 to get started. Are you willing to help pay these costs if the family can't?

A time commitment is also involved in pet ownership. Does the family have time to potty/litter box train, attend obedience classes, care for a litter box daily, or clean a cage at least once a week? Time must be taken to socialize and bond with a new pet. This is important for small mammals as well as puppies and kittens.

If you feel strongly that you must give your grandson a pet, be certain you discuss it with his parents and make sure they feel he (and the family) can handle the financial and other commitments that come with a pet. Involve them in what kind of animal will fit into their family. Perhaps offer to prepay adoption fees at a local shelter and give a certificate indicating that you have done so. That way, the whole family can find a pet that fits their personality and lifestyle. If they decide not to adopt, you have made a donation to a worthy cause in their name.

-Dr. Teresa Alessandri