

Are You Ready?

As soon as you enter an animal shelter, the temptation to adopt will be very great. That's why it's so important to consider whether bringing an animal into your life is right for you before any adorable faces find their way into your heart.

Far too many animals in this country are initially loved and then neglected or abandoned over time because owners decide -- too late -- that caring for pets is more responsibility than they actually want.

The truth is, adopting a companion animal is a big step -- one that will affect your lifestyle for many years. Have you thought about how a pet will be completely dependent on you for his or her entire life? What will happen if you decide to move? And have you considered whether your lifestyle and personality would make you a better dog owner or cat owner?

How Long is a Lifetime?

Knowing that most dogs, with good care, can live to be 15 years or older, and most cats can live to be 18 years or older, it's critical that you consider where you will be 15 to 18 years from now.

- What major changes might happen to you during a pet's lifetime? Marriage? Children? Are you willing to continue spending the time, energy and money to care for your pet when taking on new responsibilities like these? What will you do if your spouse or children can't get along with the pet?
- If you're getting a pet for children you have now, how old will they be in 15 to 18 years? Will you still want this animal after the kids have grown up and moved out?
- Have you previously owned a pet that didn't live with you for 10 or more years? If so, what happened? What will you do differently with this animal to prevent the same thing from happening again?

Going the Distance

"We're moving" is one of the most common explanations given when owners leave their pets at a shelter. You can imagine how hard it is on an animal to be left behind. Before you adopt a companion animal, consider these factors.

Renting and pets

If you are a renter, it can be very difficult to find a landlord who will allow pets. If you own a pet, you'll have to restrict your choice of apartments to those where animals are allowed, and an extra damage deposit may be required. A dog or cat that is neutered, tagged and well-behaved may help get a negative landlord in a positive mood. However,

you must be careful that your cat doesn't shred the drapes or scratch the walls, or that your dog doesn't annoy the neighbors with constant barking.

Expenses

Moving with a pet can be expensive. If you don't have a place to live lined up, you may have to board your animal at a kennel in the new area while you look around. If you fly to your destination, air freight charges, the cost of a sturdy pet carrier and the expense of a visit to the veterinarian for a health certificate all add up.

The hard truth

If you don't want to deal with the difficulties or expense of moving with your pet, don't adopt one in the first place. Save yourself the guilt and heartbreak of leaving part of the family behind, and save an animal the sadness and confusion of being rejected.

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