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Are you really ready for a family pet this holiday season?

As the holidays approach, love is in the air and a wish to give a very special gift to friends and family members. It's called "the family pet." And though our intentions are in the right place, is it really the right thing to do?

Gail Kasper, founder of Pawtographs and a spokesperson for several national rescues, states, "Unless you are part of the family that will be taking care of the pet and are willing to take on the responsibility of that pet, a live animal should never be given as a gift. It is a personal choice and there are many unknowns to be considered."

Gail suggests taking the following test where an "unknown" response to any of the listed questions is a definite indicator that giving a pet is not the right option.

TEST:

1. Is the pet owner ready to share the next 6 to 10 to 20 years of their lives with this new friend? (It is a life investment.)
2. Will they be just as excited to get a pet "after" the holidays as "on" the holiday itself? (It seems to be so much fun to watch your children open the present...until the responsibility hits.)
3. Have they budgeted the money for vaccines, flea and tick treatments, trips to the veterinarian, dog grooming, toys, food, water/food bowls and beds, crate, leashes, collars/harness, and possible dog sitters or doggie day care? (Start-up pet care costs an average of \$1000. This is within the first six months.)
4. Have they thought about who will come to their home and let the pet out during the course of the day while they are work? (The pet will need a walk and pottie break.)
5. Have they considered who will walk and feed the pet morning and night, regardless of the weather? (It gets mighty cold out there.)
6. Have you considered the personality of the potential pet owner and the type of animal or dog that would best suit them? (A more sedentary life may suggest a Basset Hound vs a Labrador.)
7. Have you asked if the potential pet owner has any allergies or medical conditions that would prevent them from owning a specific pet? (This challenge can make for a very short stay for the new pet.)
8. Will they have the time to play with their new pet friend in the morning and in the evening? (Are they a workaholic?)
9. Are they prepared for the unexpected, trips to the vet, sickness, torn blankets and eaten shoes? (Are they flexible?)
10. Does the potential pet owner "want" a dog or a cat? (This is "most" important.)
11. Is the potential pet owner willing to make the investment in training? (If there are challenges, the first option is not to send the new pet to the shelter, it is to train them. Is the new owner willing to make this commitment?)

THE SOLUTION: When it comes to giving the gift of “life” to a friend or family member, opt to give a gift certificate to your friend or family member to adopt a pet from a shelter after the holiday season when you and your new family can adjust to a more sedentary routine.

If you are considering a pet, are you willing to take on the responsibility yourself, if your child or partner defaults? Perform this test, with your children, and find out.

- Every morning get up at 6 am (or at least 30 minutes prior to when your day would typically start.) Regardless of the cold or the weather, take everyone out for a morning walk.
- When returning, along with your children, have them fill a bowl with any type of food or other small objects to signify feeding the animal. Also, have them empty and refill the water bowl.
- Before school or work, along with your children, take another 15 minute walk around the block.
- (Calculate, and add to your expenses, the cost for someone to walk your dog mid-day or if relevant, add the costs of doggie day care.)
- When returning from work, after a long day, along with your children, take another 15-minute walk around the block. Perform this same task before bed.
- Then, take 30 minutes to play with your kids. This would be time to give your pet the love and attention that it needs.

This test should be completed everyday for 3 weeks. If you miss even a day, you have failed the test. Of course, this doesn't mean that you are not ready for a dog, as there are fence options that you might consider to help ease some of the burden, but there can never be a day that the animal is not fed or clean water is not poured.

Regardless of who would like to own a pet, Kasper strongly suggests considering a rescue and saving a life. A good rescue will help you pick out the best pet for your family needs. Kasper also recommends “not” getting a pet involved with your family during the holidays. Kasper says, “a new pet needs time for adjustment in a quite environment that will provide a routine and establish stability for your new pet. There is so much excitement, activity, and guests during the holiday season which places unnecessary stress on your new pet.”

Bio

Professional Speaker Gail Kasper is an internationally renowned Life Strategist, author, in-demand television personality, and currently the reigning Ms. Cont'l America 2007. Ranked in the top 12% in the country as a Professional Speaker, according to National Speaker Association statistics, Gail has served as a Contributing Editor to the national magazine, Success, and is the co-author, along with Stephen Covey and Brian Tracy, of the book Mission Possible and author of the audio CD programs Make a Decision to Win and Likeable You. Gail provides individuals with personal and professional etiquette advice whether it involves solutions to workplace dilemmas or provides individuals with

advice that will improve their relationships and increase their productivity and results at home. Earning the ranks of an in-demand television personality, Gail hosts The Philadelphia Visitors Channel and has been the Host of the "Ask Gail" segment on Comcast CN8 Your Morning show. Her television portfolio has been complemented by numerous appearances on network affiliates such as ABC, FOX, CW11, and CBS where she was the former co-host of the Emmy award-winning America's TVJobNetwork. She is also a member of the National Speakers Association.

But success didn't come easy for Gail. Her beginnings were humbling, where at the age of 19, she moved to California alone with no job, no car, and no place to call home. Driven to success, Gail repeatedly spent her free time learning new skills at various jobs and transitioned from secretarial positions to management to president and business owner, where in the middle of bankruptcy, she took a speaking business from infancy, where she could barely pay the bills with a \$17,000 income, to ranking within the top 12% of speakers across the country and becoming a credible source for the television media. She is resilient and when faced with life's challenges, stays focused and seeks out solutions.

As a certified speaker and trainer, Gail has become a role model to both adults and students with a speaking program portfolio that touches every person from the front line employee to the president of the company. Her strategies have earned her an outstanding reputation where she has been recognized by ABC as a "Time Management" expert and applauded by organizations across the country for her return-on-investment sales program, Selling Success. As a Life Coach, Gail is known for her ability to read people and can easily identify a person's strengths as well as any obstacles that would prevent them from achieving a goal. Multi-million dollar companies, top CEOs, associations, Ivy League universities, professional sports teams and athletes have adopted Gail's recommendations with marked results.

As the founder and executive director of the Make a Decision to Win Foundation, Gail volunteers her time to empower adults and students to find the greatness within themselves. As the owner of two rescued Basset Hounds, Apollo and Winslow, Gail is the founder of Pawtographs,TM a foundation where the animal raises money and awareness for animal rescue by signing their paw print on a photograph and then selling it. Gail recently went to Capital Hill where she was successful in pushing forward House Bill #749 to create a National Animal Rescue Day.