

A puppy in Santa's sack? Probably not, say parents

23 December 2019



(HealthDay)—Pets may be on your child's holiday wish list, but if you've nixed the idea, you're not alone.

Forty-two percent of American [parents](#) say they wouldn't allow their [child](#) to receive a pet as a holiday gift. The same number say maybe, and only 1 in 6 say they'd approve, a new survey finds.

Just 15% of parents said they've given their child a pet as a gift, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health and the University of Michigan found.

The main reasons parents believe it's a good idea for children to have pets include: fun and companionship (63%); teaching responsibility (57%), because they had one as a child (39%); and protection (30%).

"Some families see great benefits in getting their child a pet, such as teaching responsibility and valuable life lessons like reliability, compassion

and patience," poll co-director and pediatrician Dr. Gary Freed said in a university news release.

"But adding a new pet should not be an impulsive purchase. Families should carefully consider the decision to have a pet as well as what kind of pet is right for them. Parents should make sure a new pet fits their [family's](#) lifestyle and that everyone is prepared for the new responsibilities," Freed said.

In families without pets, the main reasons for not wanting a pet were the hassle (62%); pet allergies (55%); and cost (48%). Others said the children were not ready for the responsibility or might not be safe with a pet.

The most common age parents say is appropriate for a child to assume responsibility is 8 for feeding the pet; 9 for washing, brushing or cleaning up after the pet; and 10 for walking the pet, according to the survey of more than 1,700 parents. Participants had at least one child aged 5-18.

Two-thirds of parents said their family has a pet and 16% said they had one in the past.

The most common pets? Dogs (76%), cats (41%), fish, birds, and reptiles (24%), and [small mammals](#) such as rabbits or guinea pigs (9%).

More information: The American Veterinary Medical Association offers advice on [selecting a pet for your family](#).

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APA citation: A puppy in Santa's sack? Probably not, say parents (2019, December 23) retrieved 26 May 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-12-puppy-santa-parents.html>

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