

Dear Counselling Corner:

Okay, this is a tough one and we are at a loss. Our children want a pet, so badly! We told them that if they did all of their chores and homework for a month that we would get one. They DID and now we are backed into a corner and I don't know what I was thinking. I never had a pet growing up and I am sure that there must be benefits, but all I see right now is the pet causing a whole lot of extra work, mess and costing a lot of money. We have agreed to get a pet but are now a bit nervous and really need some guidance.

Mom and Dad Backed into a Corner

Dear Mom and Dad

You are correct. A pet does require care, which will take some of your time, energy and money and this will vary depending on the type of pet you choose. However, there are also so many benefits of owning a pet! Studies have shown that having a pet keeps us company and helps us to feel safe. Research has also shown that pets can lower our stress levels, improve our immune systems, and can even prevent our kids from developing allergies in later life! Owning a pet is a great way to teach kids responsibility by providing them with opportunities to learn practical caring skills as well as developing a greater sense of empathy. Kids can also build on executive functioning skills such as: organization; planning; problem solving; multi-tasking and collaboration. A pet can also be especially beneficial for children with social and emotional learning challenges. Please see the following website for more information:

<https://www.animalfriends.co.uk/dog/dog-blog/10-benefits-of-owning-a-pet/>

But first, when choosing a pet, there are many things to consider. Does anyone have any allergies in your family? What is your space like? If you are renting, are there any restrictions on owning a pet? How busy is your family? How would a pet fit in? Dogs need daily and regular walks, and many cats need to be entertained. Keep in mind that kittens and puppies will require more time than older pets. Consider the financial costs of a pet and choose one which works within your budget. For example, smaller pets such as a hamster, may be more affordable than caring for a dog or a cat.

Check out these websites for more information and ideas when choosing a pet:

<https://www.onehealth.org/blog/tips-for-choosing-the-right-pet-for-your-home-and-lifestyle>

<https://hollandlakevet.com/10-questions-to-ask-yourself-to-help-choose-the-perfect-pet/>

I have had pets throughout my life including turtles, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, cats, dogs and even a horse! I currently have two younger cats and cannot imagine not having my furry companions as they add laughter, joy, and regular entertainment to my life. They also provide regular stories for me to share with some of our Porter Street students, which are now becoming known as the 'Cori Stories' (named after my newest cat). Best of luck!

Please contact me at hchang@sd43.bc.ca if you have any questions or concerns about your child.

The Counselling Corner is intended to offer some helpful ideas, encouragement, and insight on a variety of topics to support your child's social and emotional learning.

Harriette Chang
School Counsellor