

# Pawsitive Press

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[Kids and Dogs By: Dr. Sophia Yin](#)

## Fur Babies and Kids

**By: Dr. Christen Woodley**

For a lot of families our fur babies are our children, our four-legged children that is. Many households also have children of the two legged variety, and the combination of both can lead to a learning experience for all. There are many positive lessons that can be learned from having a pet; Lessons such as responsibility, empathy, situation awareness, gentle touch, loss and unconditional love. On the converse, children and pets can inadvertently raise some risks for each other also.



When introducing a pet into the home, it is always advised to do your homework first! Make sure to consider the age and size of the children and the pet. The needs of pets can vary, such as how much exercise or space they require, how hyperactive they may be, or even whether they get along well with other dogs or cats that may already be established in the house.



The size of pet you pick can also depend on if it will be living with a very young or small child, an immune compromised or frail family member, or living in an apartment versus in a home with fenced yard. If bringing your new pet home into a house with a baby or vice versa, I advise making sure there is round the clock supervision of interactions. It is often best to not force an interaction in the beginning, rather letting the pet hear the sounds of the baby, maybe smell something of theirs, and begin to recognize the baby as a member of the family. To avoid possible jealousy issues, also make sure to spend quality one on one time with each of them.



Once you do introduce your pet to your child and give them permission to pet, make sure to praise your child and your pet when they exhibit gentle approaches without running toward or jumping, and gentle touch when the pet is open to it. While supervising for the safety of your child, you also need to be an advocate for your pet. Often children may not always practice calm approaches, gentle touches, or respect your pet's time of rest. They also may be too young or inexperienced to recognize signs that a pet may be fearful or un-accepting of their advances. The signs of a pet that is fearful or not wanting to be pet can be cowering, tucked tail, tucked ears, panting, refusing treats, a moon or whale eye look (the shape of the top white of their eye that is visible), even yawning believe it or not!

Always make sure that children wash their hands well after petting the pets. Dogs and cats can sometimes have parasites such as roundworms and hookworms, which are predominantly transferred via fecal material. Pets may ingest these worms from the feces of other animals



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## Fur Babies/Kids Cont'd

or soils infected with eggs. These parasites can also infect humans if ingested, in some instances even causing blindness. It is advisable to pick up all stools after your dog goes to the bathroom, clean your cat's litterbox frequently, and always have good sanitation and hand washing habits for everyone in the house.



There are also risks that children can pose to your pet, though often be it inadvertently. Try and teach your child strict routines about closing doors to the outside behind them and keeping fences and gates closed. Many pets will try and dart out the door to go with the family and can therefore be at risk of trauma such as hit by car, drowning if pool access, or simply becoming lost. In some instances even something so harmless as a child's toy, a Lego for instance, can cause a gastrointestinal obstruction if eaten by your cat or dog. Strings, rubberbands, and other common household items can also cause blockages that can sadly sometimes be fatal if not discovered and treated in a timely manner. If your pet has a history of pancreatitis or a sensitive stomach, foods your child may so generously share may cause an issue such as vomit or diarrhea. For instance,

treats such as peaches or avocados can be harmful due to the pit center than a pet may swallow. Even sugar free gum that contains xylitol can be very harmful if your pet was to ingest it.

The key for child pet interaction is supervision and teaching from a young age to respect each other's space, read the body language of your pet, and take precautions in your environment to avoid known hazards. This way hopefully your two-legged and four-legged kids can grow up happy and healthy together.



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## 6 SAFETY TIPS FOR KIDS & PETS

- 1 Give them space!**  
Some animals do not like to be hugged! Do not disturb pets when they are eating or sleeping.
- 2 Play Nice!**  
Always be calm and gentle when meeting a new pet. Never hit, poke, or squeeze animals.
- 3 Be Considerate!**  
Pets can get scared or anxious. If they do not want to play, give them time to get used to you.
- 4 Don't Force them to Share!**  
Never pull a toy or bone out of their mouth, some pets get bothered when their things are taken!
- 5 Don't be Loud!**  
Animals have sensitive ears, and loud noises like screaming can frighten or even hurt them.
- 6 Show Respect!**  
Pets have feelings just like humans do. Treat them the same way you want people to treat you!



### What is heartworm disease?

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal disease in pets in the United States and many other parts of the world. It is caused by foot-long worms (heartworms) that live in the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of affected pets, causing severe lung disease, heart failure and damage to other organs in the body. Heartworm disease affects dogs, cats and ferrets, but heartworms also live in other mammal species, including wolves, coyotes, foxes, sea lions and—in rare instances—humans. Because wild species such as foxes and coyotes live in proximity to many urban areas, they are considered important carriers of the disease.



### How is heartworm disease transmitted from one pet to another?

The mosquito plays an essential role in the heartworm life cycle. Adult female heartworms living in an infected dog, fox, coyote, or wolf produce microscopic baby worms called microfilaria that circulate in the bloodstream. When a mosquito bites and takes a blood meal from an infected animal, it picks up these baby worms, which develop and mature into “infective stage” larvae over a period of 10 to 14 days. Then, when the infected mosquito bites another dog, cat, or susceptible wild animal, the infective larvae are deposited onto the surface of the animal's skin and enter the new host through the mosquito's bite wound. Once inside a new host, it takes approximately 6 months for the larvae to mature into adult heartworms. Once mature, heartworms can live for 5 to 7 years in dogs and up to 2 or 3 years in cats. Because of the longevity of these worms, each mosquito season can lead to an increasing number of worms in an infected pet.

### When should my pet be tested?

Testing procedures and timing differ somewhat between dogs and cats.

**Dogs.** All dogs should be tested annually for heartworm infection, and this can usually be done during a routine visit for preventive care. Following are guidelines on testing and timing:

- Puppies under 7 months of age can be started on heartworm prevention without a heartworm test (it takes at least 6 months for a dog to test positive after it has been infected), but should be tested 6 months after your initial visit, tested again 6 months later and yearly after that to ensure they are heartworm-free.
- Adult dogs over 7 months of age and previously not on a preventive need to be tested prior to starting heartworm prevention. They, too, need to be tested 6 months and 12 months later and annually after that.
- You need to consult your veterinarian, and immediately re-start your dog on monthly preventive—then retest your dog 6 months later. The reason for re-testing is that heartworms must be approximately 7 months old before the infection can be diagnosed.

Annual testing is necessary, even when dogs are on heartworm prevention year-round, to ensure that the prevention program is working. Heartworm medications are highly effective, but dogs can still become infected. If you miss just one dose of a monthly medication—or give it late—it can leave your dog unprotected. Even if you give the medication as recommended, your dog may spit out or vomit a heartworm pill—or rub off a topical medication. Heartworm preventives are highly effective, but not 100 percent effective. If you don't get your dog tested, you won't know your dog needs treatment.

**Cats.** Heartworm infection in cats is harder to detect than in dogs, because cats are much less likely than dogs to have adult heartworms. The preferred method for screening cats includes the use of both an antigen and an antibody test (the “antibody” test detects exposure to heartworm larvae). Your veterinarian may also use x-rays or ultrasound to look for heartworm infection. Cats should be tested before being put on prevention and re-tested as the veterinarian deems appropriate to document continued exposure and risk. Because there is no approved treatment for heartworm infection in cats, prevention is critical.

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