



Child Care and Pets

Children love pets and pets love children. There are many benefits to having a pet as a part of the learning environment of your child care home or center.

Pets are good companions for children and can be especially helpful with shy boys and girls. Children can touch and talk to pets. They can share love and affection. Pets also give children a chance to learn how to treat and take care of others.

However, when bringing a pet into the child care setting, you need to follow guidelines to protect the health and safety of the children.

If you already have a pet in your child care setting, be sure to inform parents before they enroll their child. If you plan to add a pet, notify all parents first. Some children have allergies that require them to be in a location away from animals. Other children may be afraid of certain kinds of animals.

Child care providers should always be present when the children are playing with or taking care of a pet. It's important to take the time to teach children how to interact appropriately with a pet. This preventive step is necessary to reduce the risks associated with having pets in the child care setting.

Children need to learn:

- how to approach the pet,
- how to act around the pet,
- how to play with the pet,
- how to feed the pet,
- how to stay away from a pet's mouth, beak, or claws,
- when to leave a pet alone, and
- how to share a pet.

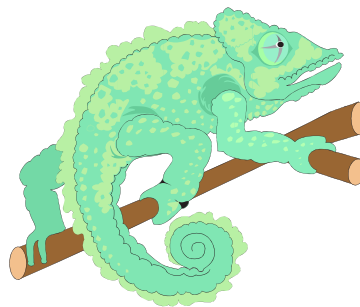
Pet Selection

Start by choosing a pet in good health. It should show no evidence of carrying a disease and be friendly towards children.

While no pet is perfect, there are some that are more suitable to a child care home or center than others. When choosing pets, keep in mind possible allergic reactions some children may have.

Dogs or cats may be suitable but should be immunized for any disease that can be transmitted to people. They should also be maintained on a flea, tick, and worm control program. Keep pets free from internal and external parasites. Remember, fleas can bite children as well as animals. Place records of immunizations in a safe place.

Furry animals may pick up and transport fungus spores through their coats.



Iguanas and turtles are not appropriate pets for child care settings. All reptiles carry salmonella. Small reptiles like turtles and iguanas can easily transmit salmonella to children.

Exotic pets such as snakes, spiders, and tropical fish are not good choices. Neither are ferrets and wild or dangerous animals.

Birds of the parrot family (parakeet, lovebird, etc.) should not be kept in a center. If infected, these birds can transmit an airborne respiratory illness to people.

If you are unsure as to whether or not a particular pet is appropriate, check with your local veterinarian. The health department also can give you guidance on regulations for pets in the child care setting.



Location

The area where the pet is kept should be enclosed. Pets should not be allowed to roam freely throughout the child care area.

Animals and fowl are prohibited from food preparation, food storage, and eating areas. Their food supply should be kept out of the reach of children. This will discourage children from snacking on the pet food. Also, pet food can become contaminated by standing at room temperature, or by animals, insects, or people.

Sanitation

Everyone, children and adults, should wash their hands after handling pets, pet foods, or pet wastes. Thorough handwashing with soap for at least 10 seconds using warm, running water has been effective in preventing disease transmission.

Keep the pets clean. Cats and dogs lick themselves to keep clean so try to discourage pets from licking the children and vice versa. Also change soiled diapers immediately to avoid unwanted behavior on the part of the pets.

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The living quarters of a pet should be kept squeaky clean. Dispose of animal waste immediately.

Animal cages should be of an approved type with removable bottoms for easy cleaning.

Do not keep animal litter boxes where the children can get to them. Empty them each day. Young children are likely to put anything into their mouths and cat feces may contain organisms that can be transmitted to people. Keep the sandbox covered when not in use to keep cats from using it as a litter box.

Clean up animal feces in the yard immediately. Infected dogs and cats can transmit roundworms to children through feces.

Remember, animals can be a source of illness for people and people may be a source of illness for animals. Following basic sanitation practices are essential to maintain the safest possible environment for both the pets and the children in your care.

Immediate Action

If a child is bitten or scratched while playing with a pet, act immediately. Thoroughly clean and dress the wound. Then consult a doctor for further action. Remove the pet from contact with children until you know what happened. Be sure to notify the parents of any incidents with a pet.

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