# Get your child a pet to teach values of sharing and caring

**Source: Kartik Bajoria, Educator & Moderator**

In this era of nuclear families that have firmly replaced the traditional Indian joint family, kids that are being born and raised in households with no siblings and limited family members stand the risk of growing into fairly myopic, self-centered individuals. Qualities such as sharing, being accommodating and sensitivity that children would imbibe organically by cohabiting with cousins and other family members, now have to be inculcated in other, more creative ways. What’s the answer? In my view, it is pets!

**Build immunity, unless your child is allergic**

The vast majority of the food we consume nowadays is genetically modified, processed and full of chemicals. Add to that a degraded environment with pollutants that we are breathing in, drinking and consuming. All this does not bode well for a child’s immunity. Especially in larger cities and urban centers, one finds kids with multiple health issues ranging from respiratory problems to stomach bugs. From the moment children are born, their bodies, systems and immunity takes constant beating. Having pets at home makes a child’s immune system robust from the get-go.

To all the people who say that kids should be kept away from pets or vice versa, there are countless examples (except for children who are allergic to pet hair, etc), where kids who have grown up with and around pets build a much more resilient immune system that holds them in good stead going forward in combating a world that is waging a war on their bodies.

## Learning to share

Having pets at home also makes children develop a sense of sharing naturally. That a child would have to share space, toys, food and most importantly, the attention of the parents and caregivers then becomes second nature. It is what the child grows up having known. While single children tend to become a bit spoilt, having pets teaches them the vital values of cohabiting and not taking anything and everything for granted. A deeply fundamental and important life value that kids must develop, can be simply passed on to them by having pets at home.

## Respect for all

It is a well-established fact that children learn by observation. Their behaviour patterns mirror what and how they see their parents or others at home conducting themselves. When there are pets at home, children observe parents caring for these animals. This instills a deep sense of respect for any and all species among children. When they grow up seeing their own parents being caring, loving and sensitive towards animals, children imbibe the same values and behavioural patterns. In a world where there is a severe paucity of sensitive individuals, it is an extremely good idea and an important goal for parents to try to bring up children to become aware, loving, respectful adults. A large part of this can be achieved by having pets at home.

## Learning to be expressive

Children who grow up in nuclear families where both parents are busy working tend to have a deficit of social interaction. They end up interacting mostly with house-staff and that is the extent of their interaction. Having pets at home solicits interaction with kids. Because pets express love and show it so freely and in such an unguarded manner, the primal instincts of a child are also brought to the fore. This develops a generally attitude in the child, making them uninhibited and choosing to express freely. This pattern then extends itself to other aspects of the child’s overall expression and engagement as well. The chances of a child being unable to interact, and be an introvert, are greatly reduced by having pets at home.

## Getting active

Perhaps the most fundamental advantage of having pets at home is that kids get exercise. As kids grow older, they indulge in many activities with their pets. From playing inside the house to throwing a ball or Frisbee in the park or garden, to taking the pet for a walk; there are any numbers of situation that ensure the kids stay active, and therefore healthy. As a parent, one will rarely have to engineer activities that expend all that energy children possess if there are pets at home because most of that pent up excitement will be employed constructively with the pets. It leads to healthier, happier pets and children.

## Building bonds

Finally, there is the most beautiful benefit of kids growing up with pets. And that is the value, understanding, appreciation, and natural leaning towards relationships and friendships. When a child grows up with a pet from his or her formative years, the deep bond that develops between human and animal, itself is wonderful; it is also a precursor to a lifelong positive view on relationships. A child is very likely to be positively predisposed towards building lasting relationships in his or her life, thanks to that early initiation into developing bonds. Especially in today’s world, we could use more people who are lovers, rather than just doers!

Pets are an absolutely joyful addition to any family. To be able to share in that unhinged joy brings bountiful pluses to a young child. And I can only urge more parents to take the plunge, and expose their children to pets, as early as possible.

***Pet play is the best play!***