THINKING OF ADOPTING A PET but aren’t sure if your child is ready? No matter how mature you think your child is, you must be willing to provide constant supervision and prepared to assume the role of caretaker if your child is unable to handle the responsibility. Consider starting out “small” and adopting a little critter such as a mouse, rat, guinea pig, hamster or goldfish. You can move up to larger animals, such as a dog or cat, once your child has proven that he or she is ready to handle the commitment.

Following are some suggestions for tasks your child can do to help take care of the family pet.

Children 5 Years or Younger

Toddlers are typically in the ME-ME-ME stage of development. It is hard for them to understand the needs of others, including pets. They can be awkward or clumsy, which may injure or irritate pets. Never leave a child of this age and a pet unsupervised!

Suggested tasks for toddlers:
- Pour pre-measured dry food into a bowl.
- Praise a pet who has done something good.
- Offer the pet a treat or toy.

Children 5 to 7 Years

Children at this age are becoming more responsible and may be able to help with the basic care of pets. They should not, however, be held solely responsible for the care of a pet. This is a good age to begin teaching kids to respect animals in order to avoid potential injury.

Suggested tasks for young children:
- Clean and refill water bowl.
- Throw a ball for a dog to fetch, or trail a toy for a cat to chase.
- Accompany you to obedience or socialization classes to learn commands.

Children 8 to 12 Years

Depending on the maturity level of the child, you can begin expecting them to take on some of the basic caretaking duties. They are old enough to empathize and understand that pets have feelings and needs and rely on humans to care for them.

Suggested tasks for older children:
- Be responsible for daily feedings (may need some reminders).
- Brush and/or bathe a dog or cat.
- Hold a pet’s leash on a family walk.
- Be assigned to “poop patrol” in the backyard or “litterbox patrol” in the house.
Teens

Teenagers should be mature enough to handle the responsibility of caring for pets. Make sure that teenaged friends are treating your pets with respect, too.

**Suggested tasks for teens:**
- Feed, groom, and exercise pets with few reminders.
- Participate in activities, such as training and agility.
- Accompany parents on veterinary visits.

For more information, please visit [www.azhumane.org](http://www.azhumane.org)