

Proof Positive: Cats are Good For Kids

If you're a parent, you know that the times when you look and feel and sound like your own parents – on their worst days – are inevitable. You try to stop it, but there it is, coming right out of your mouth, and at full volume: “Am I talking to the wall?” “Not while you're living in this house, you won't!” or worst of all, the completely frazzled, “Because I said so!”

And that's one of the reasons our kids can benefit from pets.



We all need a little unconditional love, but it's better yet if we can get a small share of the blind, deaf and dumb variety of adoration and approval seldom offered by any two-legged creature. It's the kind we get from companion animals, most of all dogs and cats. The greatest benefit of a good kid/pet relationship is the security a child feels in the pet's love. No matter how bad the day, how low the grade,



or how entirely inappropriate the table manners, a four-legged friend loves you all the same. He'll be grounded with you; and he won't mind at all, because you, beloved child, are with him.

Pet Smarts? According to Kansas State University sociologist Robert Poresky, the quality of the home environment for a child is the most influential factor in increasing a child's intelligence scores, but adding a relationship with a pet to a well-established home life is a significant factor in facilitating cognitive and social development. “Generally, we see some increases in IQ scores and measures of cognitive functioning,” he says. “And if we look at empathy, the understanding of other people's feelings, children who interact with pets score higher on our measurements.”



Professor Poresky notes that when selecting a pet for a child, parents need to look at a couple of important factors. “If you're dealing with children, you want a pet that's relatively calm and well-behaved, and that has a history of being able to get along with kids,” Poresky says. “And if you are going to get

a pet for a young child, it has to be one that's not going to knock the kid over.” Poresky points out that age is also important when placing the responsibility of a pet on a child. “Young kids, I'm not sure they are ready to take on the responsibility of a pet,” he says. While they may benefit from the companionship, they shouldn't be expected to be its primary caretaker. Poresky's findings may be especially important for “only” children, particularly those who may not get much social interaction with other kids.



To anyone who's ever felt warmed, heartened or just better during the bad times because of a pet's love, Poresky's claim isn't really news. It's simply confirmation of a heartfelt conviction.

