



"Children and Pets"

**By Kit Belcher, Executive Director
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Are you thinking of adopting a pet, but are not sure that your child is ready? In any case, no matter how mature you think your child is, you will ultimately need to be willing to provide constant supervision and/or be prepared to assume the role of the caretaker, if your child is unable to handle the responsibility. One way to prepare your child to take full responsibility and commitment in the care of a pet is to start out with something small such as a hamster, mouse, guinea pig or even a goldfish. Once your child has proven that they are ready and able to handle a pet, and understands the responsibility and commitment involved, than move up to larger animals such as cats and dogs. They can also learn how to care for animals by volunteering at a local Humane Society close to their home. Volunteering is not only fun and exciting, but very rewarding...especially for an animal without a home of it's very own. It is important for children to begin learning animal care at an early age.

Toddlers are in a "ME-ME-ME" stage of development. They do not understand basic cares for themselves, let alone pets. They are awkward and clumsy and may hurt a pet, so always be present with the child and pet. Children Ages 5-7 are becoming more responsible and may be able to help with the basic cares of a pet, but should never be solely responsible for a pet. At this age, they should learn to respect animals to avoid injuries. Children 8 to 12 are old enough to understand that pets have feelings and needs, and rely on humans to care for them. If they are relatively mature, you will be able to allow them to take on some of the basic caretaking duties. Teens should be mature enough to handle the responsibility of caring for pets. It is important that their friends are taught to respect your pets too.

A few tasks for your children according to age categories could be as follows:

If your child is a toddler:

- * Pour pre-measured dry food into a bowl.**
- * Praise a pet who has done something good.**
- * Offer the pet a treat or toy.**

If your child is 5 to 7 yrs old:

- * Clean and refill a water bowl.
- * Throw a ball for a dog to fetch, or drag a toy for a cat to chase.
- * Attend an obedience or socialization class with a parent and pet to learn training commands.

If your child is 8-12 yrs old:

- * Be responsible for a daily feeding (may need occasional reminders)
- * Brush and/or bathe a dog or cat.
- * Hold a pet's leash while you take a family walk.
- * Be on "poop patrol" or "litterbox patrol".

If your child is a teen:

- * Feed, groom or exercise your pet
- * Participate in activities or training exercises and agility.
- * Accompany a parent and pet to a veterinary visit.

At Beltrami Humane Society, we offer a number of opportunities for family members ages 14 and above to assist in a few of the basic cares of our animals. Any volunteers interested in helping out at the Humane Society are required to go through our Volunteer Training. Training is offered each 2nd Saturday of the month, 1-2 p.m in the Shelter Board Room. Pick up and complete your Volunteer Application prior to, or on the day of the training. Volunteers can participate in walking, grooming or bathing a dog, kitty socialization or grooming, helping with shelter cleaning or organization, laundry, popcan recycling, working on fund raising committees, helping with data processing or mailings, and even become a board member. We welcome your help!

If you are interested in a cat or dog adoption, visit our website photo gallery at www.beltramihumane.com or look us up on www.petfinder.com. You can see our "Pets of the Month" at your local Pamida Store, listen to KKBJ Mix 103 (early show) and hear about our pet(s) of the week, or even stop into your friendly Walmart Store and see pictures of our pets at the end of the pet aisles as we are participants of the "Very Best Pet Network". Visit us at 1612 Carr Lake Rd SE, Bemidji, MN to see this week's features -- "Captain" & "Sparky" who are waiting for "pets and hugs". Call us at (218) 751-7910 for information. Our hours of operation are Tuesdays through Saturdays, 12:00 - 5:30 p.m.

April brings "Easter Baskets" for our special animals at the shelter. With each donation of \$10.00, you can provide a special cat or dog with a basket of treats and/or toys over the Easter holiday. Mail your checks to: Beltrami Humane Society, P.O. Box 1903; Bemidji, MN 56619. In turn, you will receive an acknowledgement of your donation at the shelter, a thank-you, and a beautiful picture of your sponsored pet. All donations are tax deductible.

Shelter Wishes: Small cat litter boxes, scoops, clay cat litter, kitten chow, dog leashes, dog treats (biscuits) , puppy chow, dog yard poop-scoops, garbage bags (33+ gallon) & any type of cleaning supplies. Thank you very much!