

MEDIA RELEASE

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Purrfect pets for little people

Infant facial characteristics - large eyes, round cheeks and a large forehead - have been found to create a powerful bonding effect when they are present in the facial features of pets according to a 2011 study just published in the journal, *Ethology*¹.

“These characteristics are known to evoke a nurturing response and, interestingly, the research showed that women gave higher ratings than men for pets with infant features. Owners who were more strongly attached to their pets also showed stronger preferences for pets with infant features,” says celebrity Veterinarian, Dr Katrina Warren.

“It is important that there is a strong bond between pet and owner because our pets rely on us for everything in their lives; but the temperament of your pet and suitability for your lifestyle is much more important than the way your pet looks,” Dr Warren says.

“Children have a special bond with pets and research has shown that they will rank pets more highly than people in some instances² so it is particularly important to choose your pet carefully if there are young children in your family.

“I know from my own experience with Mr Fox, my Maine Coon, that the right cat makes a great pet for children. Cats are relatively easy to care for and happy to spend time playing simple games or just sharing time together. However, the temperaments of cats do vary from the quiet and relaxed nature of a Birman through to the highly energetic Siamese; with proper socialisation making a big difference to all breeds of cats.

“Australia’s most widely owned cat is, in fact, the moggie but there can be a lot of variety in the appearance and personality of these popular pets so it may be worth considering adopting a cat rather than a kitten if you are considering a moggie, especially if you have young children. By five months onward you will start to see the personality of a cat so any time from this age onwards is a great time to adopt,” says Dr Warren.

Dr Warren says there are some important questions you should consider before you decide on the purrfect pet for your family.

¹ 1 Preferences for infant facial features in pet dogs and cats, Archer J and Monton S, *Ethology* March 2011

² Children’s representations of pets in their social networks, McNicholas J and Collis GM, *Child Care Health Development* 2001

- What sort of household do you have? If everyone in the house is out during the day at school or work, it may be a good idea to have two cats as they can keep each other company.
- What sort of cat do you want? Cats come in a range of sizes, coat types and personalities and each requires different types of care. Coat length is particularly important as long haired cats require a lot of grooming and it is the kind of task that needs to be undertaken by an adult. If you are considering a purebred cat, look into the temperament of the breed as they vary a great deal and some are better suited to children than others.
- How active will my cat be? Cats are better off kept indoors and a cat that is calm and not very active is best for this environment but active cats can be happy indoors as long as they have plenty of opportunity to play and contact with their family.
- What will your future lifestyle be? A well-cared for cat can live to well over 15 years of age so consider how the needs of your family will change over that period and how you will care for your cat. For example, in a house where older children are constantly coming and going, it may be worth having an exterior cat enclosure so your cat can enjoy time outside while still being safely contained within an enclosure.

“Cats make great pets and pets have been shown to influence human development in many different ways. With proper planning and care, a cat will form a lifelong bond with your family,” says Dr Warren.

For more information on choosing a cat to suit your lifestyle go to Selectapet on www.petnet.com.au

(ENDS)

Issued on behalf of the Petcare Information and Advisory Service

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Australia – A nation of pet lovers

Australia is a nation of pet lovers. It is estimated that 63% of Australian households have some type of pet with 53% of households owning a dog or a cat.

Over many years, Australian and international research has shown that owning pets can help improve a person’s mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, help children learn about responsibility, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.

The Petcare Information & Advisory Service (PIAS) provides non-commercial information on socially responsible pet ownership. PIAS’ website: www.petnet.com.au is suitable for children, although PIAS encourages parents to supervise any online access by their children.

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