

POINTERS FOR PARENTS

Pets Help Teach Children Life Lessons

(NAPSA)—Walking the dog can be an important step towards a child learning responsibility. So can feeding the cat, taking care of a horse or just about any other task involved in caring for a pet. Try these tips for helping children learn from caring for their pets:

Age Matters

Try to choose a pet that's appropriate for your child's age group. Generally, children under 10 are too young to handle dogs and cats, so you may want to opt for a hamster or a fish instead. If you have horses, teach your child about stable safety at an early age.

Time To Learn

Talk with your child about the type of pet you have and encourage him to read a book or two about it. If you have a dog, explain why it's important to properly feed, groom and care for the animal. Be sure your child understands the responsibility associated with owning a pet.

Pay Attention To Pets

The more your child thinks about pets, the more likely she is to understand what it means to take care of one. Encourage "pet time," where your child and pet play together. You can even have a family night where you watch a movie such as "Flicka" together. The inspiring, coming-of-age story focuses on headstrong, 16-year-old Katy McLaughlin (played by Alison Lohman). All she longs for is to work on her family's mountainside horse ranch—but her father (played by country star Tim McGraw) insists she finish boarding school first. So when Katy finds a mustang in the hills, she sets out to tame the horse and



Pets can help teach children responsibility.

prove she can one day take over the struggling ranch. When tragedy strikes, the family learns to pull together to restore its hope. The film, recently released by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment LLC on DVD, focuses on issues such as responsibility, honesty and family.

Set A Schedule

Work with your child to set up a caretaking schedule for your pet. Assign specific tasks at certain times, such as morning walks or washing and brushing the horse every other evening. Also, bring your child with you when you take your animal to the vet. That can be a learning opportunity and it can help your child understand the importance of maintaining a pet's health.

Exercise Is Wise

Encourage your child to take your dog for frequent walks—even when he's not scheduled for one. Talk to your child about the importance of exercise for him and his pet. Your child may soon see that walking the dog is a fun way to spend time with your pet while staying healthy.

For more information, visit www.fox.com.