

Top Tips for Adopting Out Pets as Gifts

While we normally think of pets as gifts happening around the December holidays, they can work beautifully for Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas in July, birthdays—you get the idea!

In fact, "Closing the door on a potential adoption is as counterproductive an activity as I can imagine," says Dylan Moore, Santa Fe Animal Shelter and Humane Society's adoption manager.



However, it seems like at just about any gift-giving time of the year, the media reminds shoppers to avoid giving pets as gifts. The good news?

This is a great opportunity to chip away at the myth, like Wisconsin Humane Society President Anne Reed did in a radio interview. Here's some wisdom from Wisconsin:

- **Correct gently.** What if an interviewer starts off by asking why it's NOT a good idea to surprise someone with a puppy on Mother's Day or Father's Day? Here's how Reed handled it: "Well, I'm going to take a little different approach. Sometimes surprises aren't the right idea; sometimes they are the right idea." Her response set a respectful, positive tone and made the listener want to learn more.

- **Share the research.** Studies done by the ASPCA and others have shown no correlation between getting an animal as a gift and an owner's love and attachment to the pet—even if that pet was a surprise gift—and no increased risk of relinquishment for dogs and cats received as gifts.
- **Share tips for gifts that are surprises.** Make sure adopters think about not just the specific care needs for the animal, but about the gift recipient and what would be most satisfying to them (i.e. Grandma's older kitty died recently, but does that really mean she'd do best with a kitten?)
- **Share ideas for gifts that are not surprises.** Things can be pretty hectic when the family's gathered together for a special day, so sometimes that's not the best moment to bring an animal home. How about a gift "preview" card, and the new pet comes home when things have calmed down? There's also the option of involving the gift recipient in the adoption process. (When you bring Mom into the shelter to help choose her pet, she gets that special moment of falling in love.)

The Logistics of Third-Party Adoptions



Guiding the Giver

- The approach to assisting gift givers varies from agency to agency, but the overall goal is the same: to make effective matches.
- In addition to pairing gift givers with adoption counselors, Arizona Humane Society (AHS) in Phoenix, AZ, provides them with a helpful list of considerations to ponder before selecting a pet for a loved one. The list includes things like asking givers about the recipient's allergy status, activity level and available time and resources for a pet.
- Adoption counselors at Jacksonville Humane Society (JHS) in Jacksonville, FL, ask givers if they would consider keeping the animal if the person receiving the gift is unable to do so.



Recording the Adoption

- Some agencies use the same adoption paperwork they use for regular adoptions— simply making notations in the file that the adoption is a gift.
- At JHS they process the paperwork in the name of the person who is doing the adoption, and then ask that the new owner contact them so they can do a transfer of ownership. The microchip can be assigned to either the adopter or owner, depending on the timing.
- At AHS, staff members created a process for inputting gift adoptions into the agency's Chameleon data base. The process works great because the gift giver and the recipient both get a personal ID number so that both always appear in the system.

Building Relationships

- Follow-up is a priority for AHS since the agency has a 100% adoption satisfaction guarantee, promising new owners a full refund if they need to return a pet.
- AHS does Valentine's Day and Mother's Day Kitty-grams where one staff member acts as the adoption matchmaker, assisting each giver individually to really help lead them through the process. That same staff person delivers the kitten and establishes the ongoing relationship with the gift recipient.
- Animal Rescue League Shelter and Wildlife Center in Pittsburgh, PA, supports pets as gifts and has an unwritten adoption requirement that new owners send in photos, updates, drawings from the kids, etc.