

Give Puppies Responsibly, Experts Say

American Humane suggests dogs and cats don't always make the best holiday gifts.

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For those people who are considering giving pets as presents this holiday season, most would agree that there's nothing cuter. However, selecting a dog requires work, and while some urge proper planning, others suggest that a puppy or kitten is never a good surprise to find under the Christmas tree.

According to counselors at Petland stores, giving a pet as a holiday gift is a unique and good idea, but it requires careful thought and research. Dan Star of Petland in Hoffman Estates, Ill., said that Christmas Day is not the best day to introduce a dog into a new home.

"Young pets are like babies," he said. "They need some time and extra attention just to adjust to a family routine."

Because the holidays involve many visitors or activities away from home, this leaves little time to spend caring for a new pet, he said. Therefore, he recommends introducing a new pet into the household days before or after the holiday.

According to the American Humane Association (AHA), pets as gifts can often lead to a lonely cat or dog facing an uncertain future at the local animal shelter. For that reason, the organization dedicated to protecting animals and humans does not support giving a pet as a surprise gift, said Marie Belew Wheatley, president and CEO.

"The holidays are stressful for everyone, including animals," she said. "By surprising people with a pet, you are assuming they have the financial, emotional, and time resources necessary to care for an animal, as well as the desire to care for a living being for the long term."

For those looking for the ideal pet for a friend or family member, American Humane offers the following advice: Picking a pet is personal. The choice should not be made by anyone other than those who will care for the pet. Pets, especially puppies and kittens, require time, energy, and money. It can be overwhelming, particularly when it's a surprise. Before buying or adopting a dog or cat, take time to look into different breeds, how to give an animal a safe home, and the time commitment of owning a pet. Because many dogs and cats can live 15 years, the pet becomes part of the family. It's important to ensure that everyone in the house is willing to provide a healthy environment for the pet. The holidays aren't a vacation for new pets. Children can confuse proper treatment of an animal with the excitement of new toys around the holiday. Pets need a place where they can feel comfortable and start to acclimate to their new home. A less-hecktic time of year is probably a wiser time to add a pet.