

# Be a dog's best friend

BY ALIKI NASSOUFIS

**H**AVING a dog as a pet is an idea that appeals to almost every child. The animal makes a wonderful playmate and constant companion.

But while children dream of having a dog, parents must be the ones who understand the responsibilities of owning one because the work often falls on them.

"A dog is always there, likes to be cuddled and doesn't scold the way parents do when the report card isn't good," said Udo Kopernik, spokesman for the German dog owners' association, adding that unlike a sibling, a dog will never reveal secrets.

The adults in the family most likely will understand why a child wants to have a dog and will see the advantages as they can learn responsibility and tolerance for the needs of others.

But at the same time, they have to seriously think about it because of the amount of responsibility involved.

A dog should not be selected solely for the child, rather it should be selected as a pet for the entire family.

People thinking about getting a dog should think about what breed they would like to bring into their family.

Parents with children older than three should look for a dog that isn't bothered by being petted or tugged at around the ears as a child that age might do.

"A large dog generally is a good fit because they are very patient, very laidback and have a relative high anger threshold," said Kopernik.

Breeds such as golden retrievers, Bernese mountain dogs and Newfoundlanders are examples.

If dogs that belong to those breeds are too large, a beagle should be considered. "That is a dog that stands out due to its enormous compatibility," said Kopernik.

A beagle participates in a number of things, however, it has a passion for

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hunting and can be a glutton.

Other dogs that are suitable for children include bearded collies and German shepherds.

"They develop a close bond with people and have no great affinity to the wilderness and hunting, which are advantages," said Kopernik.

Poodles are another good breed. "They are intelligent, playful and build strong ties to people."

Before getting a dog, a few other things are important to consider.

Parents should ask themselves whether they can meet the needs of an animal for its entire life, said Bina Lunzer, an animal trainer in Austria.

A dog must go outdoors several times a day and they can live to be 20 years old. A family's situation can change considerably in this amount of time.

Who in the family should take over the duty of obedience training?

Parents should also realise that children aren't able to care for a dog on their own, dog trainer Katharina Schlegl-Kofler said.

"Small children can brush a dog, clean its dish or teach him tricks," she said.

The older the child gets, the more responsibility he or she can assume but young people have to go to school and do homework and larger dogs can be too powerful for a child to take for a walk.

In light of all the work that goes into owning a dog, parents shouldn't get one just for the sake of their child.

"Someone who has always wanted a dog and was never able to have one, can see it as an opportunity to get one," said Lunzer.

"If that's not the case and you just want to acquire a dog out of love for your child, then don't do it. You are not doing your child, yourself or the dog any favours." - dpa