

Good companions

For some kids, pets are their best friends, writes **PARSHATHY. J. NATH**



Maragadham Periyamayagi
Class 11, Adwaith GNS MHSS

Maggie's mini zoo is what Maragadham would like to call her future home. The 16-year-old already has four cockatiels and four dogs in her house. "One day I will buy an elephant too. They are so gentle and loving." The cows in her neighbourhood are her friends too. On hot afternoons, she gives them water. "And they sway their heads in gratitude," she swears.

She has more animal friends than human, says Maragadham. "I am a bit of a loner. My best friend is my pet dog Bruce. If I fight with my friends or anyone at home, I hug him tight and weep. He understands me perfectly. And he licks my face, making me feel happy." The street dogs in her neighbourhood are her buddies. When Maragadham returns from school, they escort her home. She feeds them and gives them water to drink. "They are my real friends. I fully understand what they are trying to tell me."

Mini Vasudevan, the founder of Humane Animal Society, dog shelter shares her opinion on why children bond with animals, the importance of an animal in a child's life and a few tips parents must keep in mind while adopting a pet.

How pets contribute to your child's growth

Studies have shown that children, who grow up with animals, tend to be more compassionate.

They have better social skills

Developing positive feelings about pets can contribute to a child's self-esteem

It helps in nurturing trusting relationships with humans, in future.



Sriranjani Seshadri
Class 10, Vidya Niketan Public School

Ten-year-old Sriranjani longed for a baby rabbit. So her parents took her to a pet shop. Unfortunately all rabbits were sold out. But she found a cuddly animal that looked exactly like a rabbit. It was a guinea pig! "I want her," she declared.

And that's how Bonku, the guinea pig became a member of their house, five years ago. Now, Sriranjani is in her 10th standard and Bonku passed away this February. "I was sad. But we all knew she was going to die. So, we were prepared," she says.

Her pet used to love to sleep and eat all the time. "He was very choosy about vegetables. His favourite was capsicum," she fondly remembers. Every day with Bonku was memorable she says.

Sriranjani also has love birds. She is sure they talk to her when she goes close to their cage. "They whistle at me and it makes me feel so good."

Shraveen Bharanitharan
Class 11, Vidya Niketan,
Vilankurichi

They have stood with him during good and bad times. For Shraveen, his two pet German shepherd dogs, Jimmy and Rennie, are his best buddies. He shares all goodies with them. "Once I got low marks in my Tamil exam and I was sad. My dog licked my face as if comforting me and I was happy again. I also made up my mind to study better," he says. Shraveen is fiercely protective about all animals. He stops his friends from throwing stones at dogs. He has inculcated many values from them, he says. "Even if I beat them they never turn their back on me. I learnt about forgiveness after spending time with them."

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Parents should not neglect pets. The children learn to be a responsible pet parent by observing their parents' behaviour
- Some children may be rough or even be abusive with the animal. Such behaviour should be checked and corrected by parents and elders
- Children below four or five years should not be left unsupervised with a pet
- Family members should give enough thought before buying pets. Adding a pet to the family should not be an impulsive decision pandering to your child's passing fancy
- Parents should be cautious about having aggressive animals as pets. Exotic and unusual animals may be difficult to care for