Children should not be left alone or allowed to sleep with an animal.

Ensure that you and your child always wash hands with soap and water after handling pets.

Teach your child not to pull on the ears and tail of animals, or pinch, squeeze, or make loud noises. He or she should never disturb a dog while it is resting, sleeping, eating, or playing with a favorite toy.

Teach your child to never approach strange dogs or animals. He or she should never reach through a fence to pet a dog.

Don't allow your pets to lick your child's face or any cuts or scratches.

Gradually increase your child's responsibility for pet care, but remember you remain the number-one caregiver.

Mistreating an animal — tugging a tail or playing too rough — usually stems from curiosity or exuberance. Be sure to safeguard your animal's welfare and help your child understand the animal's needs.

Plan carefully for a new pet so you can commit to caring for it throughout its lifetime. Unfortunately, pets given to shelters are most likely to come from families with kids.

Learn all you can about the training, feeding, and care of your pet by reading books or pamphlets from your vet or by watching videos.