

# Purrfect bonding time for kids

4/1/13



- Absolutely no table food
- Grooming — coat, eyes, ears
- Onions, lilies and chocolates are toxic to them
- Keep household-cleaning liquids away
- Ensure apartments are cat compliant with mesh and grill

Yamini Nair | TNN

**Bangalore:** Pets are a huge responsibility and come with high-maintenance cost. Many parents face a problem when their kids want a pet at home but they can't afford one just because they don't have the time to take care of it.

Such parents are relieved if their little ones bond with a pet in a safe and sanitized environment without being saddled by having to own or maintain them. The Persian cat pet-therapy programme for kids launched by advertising professional Rehana Mohammed Shakir does just that.

A therapy session lasts for an hour and a half and introduces kids to Persian cats, helps them understand the pets, and how to feed and groom them too. The cats can be surrogate pets for children whose parents are not willing to bring one home.

"It's a recreational and learning programme to encourage love and respect for animals through Persian cats. It intends to help the child see them as 'little intelligent people' with distinct personalities and emotional needs," says Rehana.

"Most parents would love to bring home a Persian cat but are unsure about the care and responsibilities involved and how the child will interact with the pet. This forum allows the child to have the opportunity to experience the joy of having a pet, without responsibilities," adds Rehana. She is the proud owner of Scheryzade, Perizaad, Sherzaad, Shahryar, Khwasha, Ncor, Qamruddin and kittens Toffee, Zafran and Chiquita.

The cat therapy has several takers now. "My daughter was sad that she couldn't keep a pet at home. This programme came as a good alternative," says freelance painter Sadhana Mishra.

Sadhana's 11-year-old daughter Shuchi feels it is a treat to be with Persian cats. "Toffee is very cute and sud-



**MAN'S BEST FRIEND:** A therapy session introduces children to Persian cats, helps them understand the pets, and how to feed and groom them as well

## ACROSS GENERATIONS

**Zubin Shekary**, chartered accountant and a senior partner with PPMG, says, "It's really refreshing and a great relief from stress. The cats are well groomed, clean and well-behaved too. They understand children well. It was a fabulous experience." His eight-year-old daughter Aryana found them "very sweet" and is looking forward to the next session.

## EXPERTSPEAK

**A child always craves for unconditional love.** Animals can give that. There have been instances of traumatized children bonding with animals even when they were reluctant to speak to adults. They get unconditional acceptance from animals which rarely happens with people who are judgmental. Also, non-verbal communication works positively with kids.

**Meera Ravi** | CHILD COUNSELLOR

dly. I learned how to hold cats and feed them too. It's fun and not scary at all," says Shuchi.

Seema Shastry, a full-time mommy of two children, agrees. "My kids are crazy about animals," she says. Her 7-year-old daughter Keiya likes Toffee the best. "I like Zafran too as he's like Toffee," she adds.

The interaction and engagement exercises designed for children in the age group of 5 to 13 years are such that the

cat is seen not merely as an animal, but as a person too. "The aim is to make kids more sensitive to animals," says Rehana who runs the programme at her home on Wind Tunnel Road.

Rehana has been involved in breeding, rearing and nurturing cats for over a decade. "They made me more compassionate and tolerant. Cats don't adapt till you learn to be more adaptable," she says.