

For Ages
4-7

Tails Are Not for Pulling

Elizabeth Verdick

Illustrated by Marieka Heinlen



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents. Although they probably wouldn't describe themselves as pet lovers, they were kind enough to indulge my childhood passion for all things furry, and to let me adopt hamsters, cats, and one (very misunderstood) dog.

To my mom, who faithfully shopped for pet food and took my animals to all their vet appointments; and to my dad, who has never outgrown his enthusiasm for visiting zoos, wildlife centers, or animal sanctuaries throughout the world.

—E.V.

For Tiny and Milo, and for Patrick,
even though he isn't a "cat person."

—M.H.

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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

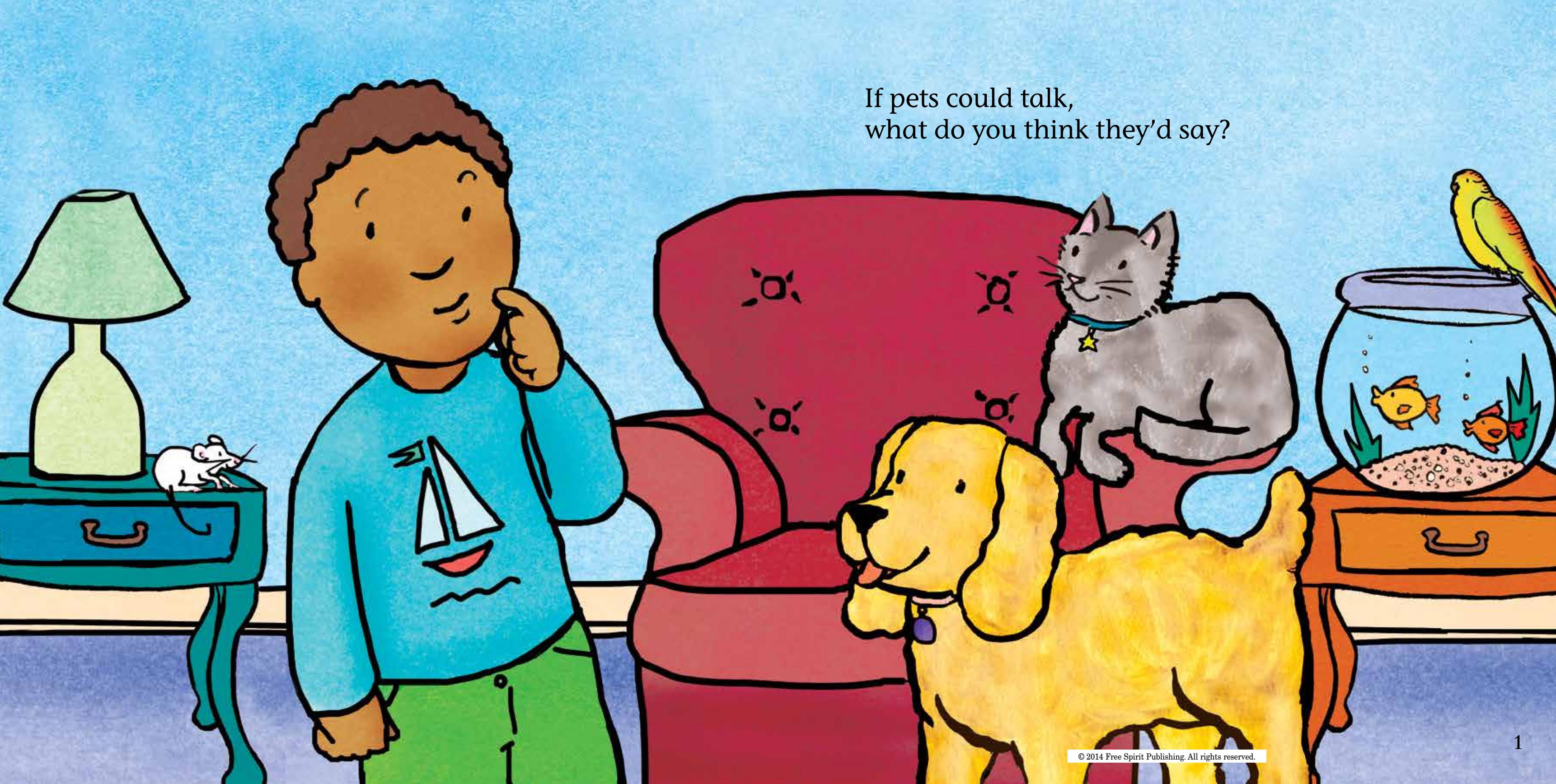
Like many of you, I have pets I love. My family includes not only my husband and children, but also a small dog named Sunny, whose personality fits his name, two regal cats (Cleopatra and Zella), and a friendly, squeaky guinea pig called Gus. We share our home with these pets because they bring so many wonderful things to our lives: warmth, laughter, fun, and a bit of the unexpected. We once found Sunny standing on the kitchen table, where he had managed to eat someone's leftover snack but didn't know how to get down. We have watched Cleopatra parade along the side of the tub while the children are bathing, only to lose her balance and fall in with a big splash. And we have learned that our guinea pig will vibrate, chirp, and even do a "popcorn" dance of jumps and hops. Studies have shown that pets can help bring a smile to your face, as well as reduce anxiety and promote feelings of peace. More simply, pets can help us all learn to be more loving people.

If you're a parent who has animals in the home, a teacher with a classroom pet, or a therapist whose work includes a service dog, you have probably seen the magical moments that can happen between children and animals. It's heartwarming to see a child petting or hugging an animal while saying, "I love you." Or to watch as a child learns about the daily care and feeding of a pet. Or to observe as a child reaches out to an animal and becomes more motivated and builds new skills as a result. Caring, kindness, empathy, responsibility, and a respect for all living creatures—these are just a few of the things that animals help teach.

Tails Are Not for Pulling can help children understand that although animals may not have words, they communicate. Paying attention to an animal's cues—a joyful bark, a scary growl, a swishing tail—can help a child understand what the animal is "saying" and what an appropriate response may be. Most importantly, this book is about showing children how to love a pet gently—because pets are for loving, after all.

~Elizabeth

If pets could talk,
what do you think they'd say?





Meow?

Woof!



Chirp!

Squeak
squeak

Glub glub...

Being a Friend to Animals

Critter Care

“Should My Child Have a Pet?” (Some Answers for Parents)

Many parents struggle with this question, and it's especially tricky when you're looking into the eyes of a young child who's eager (and pleading) for a pet. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind:

- 🐾 **Observe your child interacting with other pets first.** Praise the positive interactions; gently correct the not-so-positive ones. Model how to pick up an animal, hold it carefully, and touch it gently. Make sure your child knows where on the body the pet accepts being touched.
- 🐾 **Think about starting small.** In general, larger animals require more care and live longer than smaller pets do, so an animal like a cat or a dog is a big commitment. Good starter pets for some families include goldfish or rodents.
- 🐾 **Choose wisely.** Getting a pet is a formative experience for children, and you'll want it to be as positive as possible. Think about your child's age, preferences, personality, and level of responsibility. What pet might truly be the best fit?
- 🐾 **Make sure the timing is right.** The holiday season is usually not a great time to bring home the newest member of your family. Try to pick a time when things are calmer and less rushed.
- 🐾 **Consider adoption.** So many wonderful animals are waiting in shelters for a family to come in and adopt them! And this includes not only cats and dogs, but also birds, guinea pigs, bunnies, hamsters . . . the list goes on.
- 🐾 **Research your options.** Many families are surprised to discover the expense and time commitment pets entail. Ask a local animal shelter or veterinarian for information, or check under Pet Adoption Information at the

“Pets” Web page of the Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org/pets).

- 🐾 **Have a good backup plan.** Some families realize too late that their child has an allergy, or the pet they've chosen is sick, or they can't afford the extra expense of pet ownership. It's important to know ahead of time what you'll do if for some reason you can't keep the pet—and how you'll explain this to your child.
- 🐾 **Keep a watchful eye.** Don't assume that your child and the pet will always treat each other well. Young children need help learning how to show respect for animals, and how to recognize when an animal may be saying, “Hands off, please.” If your child teases the pet, talk about how animals get scared or confused when they're mistreated. You might say, “Pets are our friends. Friends don't tease.” For more about animal “talk,” see page 33.

A Word About Unusual Pets

Hedgehogs, chinchillas, reptiles, amphibians, and tarantulas are fascinating, but creatures like these need special care, special diets—and special consideration before buying. There may be unforeseen housing and health concerns (for example, reptiles carry salmonella bacteria), as well as laws or regulations about owning exotic pets where you live. Never take in animals from the wild (instead, purchase domesticated pets born and bred in good facilities).

Kindness to Animals

All children—the youngest ones included—need to learn that animals are living, feeling beings. Even toddlers can understand that pets feel the difference between gentle and rough touches. Here are some ideas for modeling ways to handle a pet kindly:

- 🐾 For very young children, you can demonstrate on a stuffed animal, showing how to pet it slowly, quietly, and gently. In a group setting, you may want to ask an adult (for example, a parent or a therapist who works with a service animal) to bring a live pet to help give children a lesson in treating animals gently.
- 🐾 For children between the ages of two and three, you may want to take the lesson further by asking them to imagine what the pet feels. At this age, most children can begin to empathize in simple ways. They can relate to “Ouch, hitting hurts” or “Touch gently, please.” They can imagine how a pet might feel if he or she is squeezed too tightly or dropped on the floor. Encourage young children to ask themselves: “Would I like it?”
- 🐾 For children ages four to six, you can suggest that they “put themselves in the pet's ‘paws.’” How would it feel to be a pet that is pushed, pulled, poked, hit, kicked, or stepped on? Talk about kindness, fairness, and respect for living things. Around this age, many children are learning about the importance of treating others the way they want to be treated—and they can learn to apply this concept to animals as well as people. Because their understanding of fairness is growing, they can begin to talk about how pets deserve to be treated: with kindness, caring, and love.
- 🐾 Depending on the children's ages and maturity, they may (or may not) be ready to talk about why it's wrong to hurt animals. Use your own judgment about this. You could keep it as simple as, “It's not okay to hurt a pet.” Or, go further by saying, “Animals have feelings too.” Of course, that statement is open to interpretation, and you'll need to consider your own point of view. While most people agree that animals can feel pain or show fear as humans do, not all accept the idea that animals have feelings like happiness, sadness, or anger. On the other hand, some people believe very strongly that animals have feelings and deserve to be treated in a manner that honors that principle. Your own beliefs about this can guide how you teach the children in your care.

- 🐾 Children may naturally personify what a pet is feeling: “She's happy to see me,” or “He's sad because we didn't feed him.” At the same time, they may ask questions like, “Do animals get mad like people do?” or “Does a pet feel love?” You might answer with your own question: “What do you think?” Children often have their own answers, but are seeking reassurance or looking for a chance to share their views.

A Word About Animal Cruelty

Sadly, animal cruelty happens—but one of the most effective tools for preventing it is in your hands as a parent or an educator. Children who are taught about kindness and responsibility toward animals and all living creatures are learning one of life's most important lessons. They are more likely to treat animals humanely, to stick up for an animal that is being hurt, or to report potential incidents of animal neglect or harm.

With young children, you'll want to be careful about how you address this topic, as a little information can go a long way. Many children become very upset if they hear detailed stories about an animal that has been hurt. Instead, you may wish to limit the discussion to why it's important for animals to receive the proper care and to be treated with kindness.

Let older children know that, at times, some people are mean to animals—and that it's not okay. Also explain that sometimes people haven't yet learned the right way to treat an animal and may hurt the animal accidentally. Help children understand that they can tell a trusted adult (such as a parent, a teacher, a childcare provider, a babysitter, or another caregiver) if they see an animal that looks hurt or sick. Make sure children realize that it's not a good idea to try to help the animal *themselves*—the best and safest choice is always to go to a grownup for help.