

English-Spanish  
Inglés-Español

For Ages 4-7  
De 4 a 7 años

# Tails Are Not for Pulling

La cola de las mascotas no es para jalarla

Elizabeth Verdick

Ilustrado por  
Marieka Heinlen



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free spirit

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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.

## Dedicatoria

Este libro está dedicado a mis padres. Aunque seguramente ellos no se describirían como amantes de las mascotas, tuvieron la bondad de consentir mi pasión por todo tipo de criaturas peludas durante mi infancia y me permitieron tener hámsteres, gatos y un perro (muy incomprendido).

A mi madre, que religiosamente se encargaba de comprar el alimento para mis mascotas y de llevarlas a todas sus citas con el veterinario; y a mi padre, que nunca perdió el entusiasmo por visitar zoológicos, centros de vida silvestre y santuarios de animales de todo el mundo.

—E. V.

Para Tiny y Milo, y para Patrick, aunque no sea "amante de los gatos".

—M. H.

If pets could talk, what do you think they'd say?  
Si las mascotas hablaran, ¿qué crees que dirían?





Meow?  
¡Miau?

Woof!  
¡Guau!



Squeak  
squeak  
¡h, ih, ih

Chirp!  
¡Pío, pío!

Glub glub...  
Glup, glup...

## 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 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 positive interactions; gently correct the not-so-positive ones. Model how to pick up an animal, hold it carefully, and touch it gently.

**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. Think about the time and resources your family has to invest in a pet too. What pet might truly be the best fit?

**Consider adoption.** So many wonderful animals are waiting in shelters! 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 research online.

**Have a good backup plan.** Some families realize too late that their child has an allergy or the pet they’ve chosen is sick. It’s important to know ahead of time what you’ll do if you can’t keep the pet—and how you’ll explain this to your child.

**Keep a watchful eye.** Young children need help learning how to show respect for animals, and how to recognize when an animal is saying, “Hands off.” 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.”

### Kindness to Animals

All children need to learn that animals are living, feeling beings. Here are some ideas for modeling ways to handle a pet kindly.

**For very young children,** demonstrate on a stuffed animal, showing how to pet it slowly, quietly, and 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 if squeezed too tightly or dropped on the floor. Encourage young children to ask themselves: “Would I like it?”

**For children ages four to six,** 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.

**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 judgment. You could keep it as simple as, “It’s not okay to hurt a pet.”

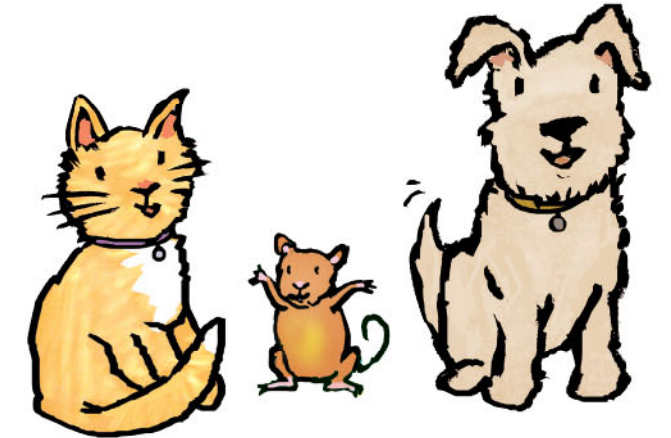
**Children may naturally personify what a pet is feeling:** “She’s happy to see me.” At the same time, they may ask questions like, “Do animals get mad like people do?” You might answer with your own question: “What do you think?” Children often have their own answers, but are looking for a chance to 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. Children who are taught about kindness and responsibility toward animals and all living creatures 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, address this topic carefully, as a little information can go a long way. You may wish to limit the discussion to why it’s important for animals to receive the proper care and be treated with kindness.

Let older children know that, at times, some people are mean to animals—and that it’s not okay. Help children understand that they can tell a trusted adult 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.



## Animal “Talk,” Tales, and Tails

### How do animals “talk”?

Animals can’t speak using words, but we can teach children to listen to the many other ways they communicate. Ask children to come up with ways different animals use their “voices” (barking, meowing, chirping, squeaking, and more). What might these sounds mean? Demonstrate how an animal noise could mean very different things depending on the situation. For example, some barks are joyful; some are a warning. Help children learn to distinguish the difference.



Animals talk with their bodies too. An animal’s body language can give important clues about what the animal might do next. For example, a dog that is wagging her tail is probably excited and ready to play. But a cat that is switching his tail back and forth may be saying, “Back off.” Help children understand this kind of body language so they’re more aware of when it’s safe to approach an animal. Be sure to give examples of how a specific pet may “talk” with the body, tail, ears, whiskers, nose, feathers, or nails.

### When the Teeth Do the Talking

Even the gentlest pets have been known to bite or scratch. They may do this when they’re excited, scared, provoked,

or by accident. Let children know that hurting the animal back is never a good response. The Humane Society of the United States recommends reporting any bites to the local animal control.

### Amazing-but-True Tales

Find books about animal heroes to read to children, or clip photographs and stories from magazines and newspapers. Share these inspiring tales.

### Amazing Animal Tails

Show pictures of different animals so children can study the variety of tails. (You don’t have to limit this activity to only domestic animals.) Which has the longest tail? The curliest? The most colorful? Talk about the many ways tails “talk”: by wagging, waving, bristling, ruffling—what else?

We especially want to thank Becky Bishop, executive director of Reading with Rover, and veterinarian and “Animal Doctor” columnist Michael Fox, D.Sc., Ph.D., B.Vet.Med., MRCVS. We appreciate your expertise and encouragement!