

Baby Talk

Get the lowdown on how to help kids and cats mesh into one happy household.

Sandy Robins

Monica Venzlaff of Irvine, Calif., endorses Wright's theory. However, she believes the success of a toddler-cat relationship depends a lot on the cat's demeanor. Her son Luke was 2 years old when the family adopted Clark, a full-grown cat.

Clark has a wonderful, friendly nature and reacts that way to everyone around him, including Luke, she said. We had another cat before Clark, and from the beginning we taught Luke to be gentle and loving. He sees how we treat the cat and does the same. Consequently, they have a wonderful relationship, and Clark will let Luke lie all over him. When he's had enough, he will let Luke know. Clark has smacked him a couple of times. That's when I step in and tell him the game is over and to now leave him alone. It works.

According to Wendy Christiansen, author of *The Humane Society of the United States Complete Guide to Cat Care*, when teaching young children to interact with cats, spell out the following: A cat is not a toy. How to read cat body language indicating annoyance, anger or fear. How to recognize when the cat wants to be left alone. Never hold a cat against its will or corner it. Never bother a cat when it's sleeping, eating or using the litterbox.

Invest time in developing the bond between your child and your pet. It's worth it. By carefully monitoring a child's accessibility to the family cat from the very beginning, you could be introducing your baby to its very first friend.