

Pet Hates or Animal Magic?

They say you shouldn't work with children or animals. So that leaves parents with a 50 per cent chance of chaos. Add pets to the mix, and is it mayhem or magic that prevails?

Words by Alana Kirk-Gillham

For us it wasn't a decision. My cats came first. They used to come first in every sense of the word, but now they just come first in the chronological order of things. Sam was my first baby – glossy, black and glorious. His place on my bed, however, was quickly usurped by my husband, and his spot on my lap swiftly replaced by a bouncing baby. Sam took to the girls with surprising generosity. When I was pregnant he lay on my stomach and purred for hours – I'm convinced he knew there was a baby in there. He did the same with my second pregnancy and I'm sure that's why they love his purring now. As we all pile into my bed in the morning for a quick read of *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, he jumps up too, assured of his place nestled between me and his girls. He purrs and rolls over as they pull his tail and stroke his back. My other cat, however, is not so kind. He hates them. With an unbridled passion. He leaves the room as soon as a squeal is screamed and wouldn't be seen dead within a 200-foot radius of the two tortuous toddlers. And so lessons are learnt from both. With Sam, my girls learn how to be gentle and loving and are discovering the delights of a mutually adoring relationship with an animal. With Smeagal, they learn to be wary and

respectful – both have had scratches down their faces to learn that one! They tormented something that didn't want to play, and they felt the consequences – a painful lesson, but an important one to learn all the same.

We then got two fish called Dora and Boots. Daisy was delighted with her morning task of dropping food into their tank (my husband less so with his weekly tank-cleaning chore). Sadly, we arrived down to breakfast one morning to discover poor Boots had met a sad demise (Dora clearly hadn't been fed enough and took a large chunk out of her partner). I was very anxious how Daisy would cope with the loss as we ceremoniously flushed our poor gold friend down the toilet. 'Boots dead' she would say with a solemn

nod of her head, and cheerfully moved on. We replaced him with Boots (she saw no reason to call him anything else!) and both are lasting well. Every morning we watch them as we eat our cornflakes, and they are as much a part of the family as Sam and Smeagal. Just not so cuddly. Daisy and Poppy are also best friends with the dog next door and knock on his door just to say hello. They have learned about love and loss. They have learned how to care and feed. And importantly they understand they're not the only thing in the universe that needs attention!

We're now contemplating a dog of our own. And another baby. Mayhem and madness may prevail, but when I see their faces light up when Sam comes to play, it's pure magic. Animal magic. *

