

**When is the right time to buy a pony for my child?**



Taking on ownership of such a large, long lived, expensive to keep animal such as a pony or a horse should not be something that is done on a whim. You need to be absolutely sure that your child is really keen. You also need to be sure that the rest of the family are happy about what a horse or pony in the family may mean in terms of expense and time. Therefore a lot of thought should go into deciding whether to take such an important step.

Considerations include whether you have the time, money and real commitment needed to give a horse or pony a good home. If your child loses interest it is not as simple as them deciding that they want to give up ballet for example. In this case there is no real harm done, apart from the expense of buying the ballet gear. When an animal is concerned it is much more complicated – the horse or pony will need to be sold or rehomed. A horse or pony is a living breathing animal and it is irresponsible to take on ownership without thinking it through. Many children at some time or another express the desire to own a horse/pony but many grow out of that desire sooner or later. It is better to wait until a child is very very keen before buying a horse or pony.



Owning a pony can be a wonderful experience for a child but it must be remembered that owning a pony is a huge responsibility.

One of the factors to consider is that it is difficult to combine owning a horse or pony with having other interests because of the time involved with horse/pony ownership. So keep in mind that if your child takes up ownership it may be difficult for them to be involved in other hobbies. It is a commitment every day of the animals life, often for several hours a day! It may also mean other family members having to accept compromise because of that commitment. For example going away regularly as a family may no longer be possible as arrangements will have to be made at these times for the care of the horse or pony.

If a child expresses an interest in horses, start with riding lessons at a reputable riding school to see how interested your child is. A child must be keen enough to want to be involved with all aspects of taking care of an animal, not just the parts that are

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the most fun such as riding in the case of horses. A good riding school should offer courses in horse/pony care so that people who are thinking of buying one can learn something about what is involved before they decide to buy. A local Pony Club can also be a good source of information. Some Pony Clubs offer courses for families who are just starting out.

Before committing to buying a horse or pony, look at other options such as sharing or loaning one, that way some of the costs and long term commitments may be reduced.



Small ponies often become 'unwanted' and end up at rescue centres such as these at the World Horse Welfare centre.

Owning a horse or pony is very time consuming and expensive so you need to make sure that you have budgeted enough time and money before buying. The younger the child the more the parents will need to be involved with caring for the pony so keep this in mind also. If you do not own your own land then you will need to agist the pony which will mean travelling every day (sometimes twice a day) to take care of the pony.

Knowledge and skill are required both to buy a good horse/pony for a child and again to sell if required if your child decides that they do not want to carry on riding. It can be

very difficult to rehome or sell a horse/pony – especially if a child has lost interest and/or the horse/pony is not suitable. In many cases a very good horse or pony gets passed on through no fault of their own. When a horse or pony is sold there is always the chance that they may end up yet again with inexperienced owners. There are many welfare issues associated with this pattern of 'moving on' unwanted ponies in particular (because children grow out of them quite quickly) including stress, the development of behavioural issues and being at high risk of developing laminitis (because inexperienced owners do not have enough knowledge to understand this dangerous condition and by the time they do it is usually too late).

So you should **only** buy your child a horse or pony when they have demonstrated a full commitment to the responsibilities of ownership and when you and the rest of the family understand the financial, time and energy obligations needed to maintain this responsibility. There are other ways that children can get involved with horses or ponies – it is best to explore these before taking on the big step of actual ownership.

See our publication [A horse is a horse - of course 2011](#) for information about horse behaviour. All horse owners should understand horse behaviour and how this relates to the way that we keep them, train them and work them.

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