

Do Siberian Huskies Make Good Family Pets?

From the adorable animated *Balto* to the comedy *Snow Dogs* to the heart-wrenching story of *Eight Below*, Siberian Huskies are movie stars. They also appear in countless YouTube videos. There are videos of Siberians whose vocalizations sound like the words “I love you.” There are howling Siberians appearing to converse with adorable babbling babies. And there are packs of Siberians howling together for the sheer joy of it.

But beneath their cute and appealing media image, what are these dogs really like? Would a Siberian be a good addition to your family? The short answer is that it depends on your family. Important considerations include how old your children are, what other animals are part of the family already, and what sorts of activities your family enjoys. Read on to discover if a Sibe could become a beloved and happy family member in your particular household.

Part of the Pack

Siberian huskies and kids are a natural and nearly irresistible combination. Sibes love kids, and kids love these furry, good-natured dogs. The American Kennel Club describes the breed as “friendly and gentle, but also alert and outgoing.” These traits mean most Sibes are eager to play with children and instinctively gentle in doing so.

Parents who know these facts about Siberians may rightly identify the breed as good for families. However, it's important to note that not all Sibes are right for households with small children. These are medium-size dogs, usually weighing around 40 or 50 pounds, and they are very energetic and playful. The enthusiastic antics of a Sibe, especially one who is still a puppy or a young adult, can intimidate or overwhelm younger children.

Sibes are also known for getting along well with other dogs and for being trusting of people, even strangers. A 2010 study at the University of Pennsylvania examined 30 breeds and identified Siberians as one of three breeds that exhibited no stranger-directed aggression. That means Sibes will be welcoming when your family, your friends, or your child's friends come over to visit. As long-time Sibe owners can tell you, they will also be friendly to the mail carrier, the cable-repair person, and anyone else who comes into your home. Sibes do not make good watchdogs, but you won't have to fear aggressive behavior from them.

In the popular imagination, fueled by Hollywood, Siberians are still closely associated with their origins as sled dogs. On film, they're most often seen in groups, working closely with each other and with people. Their sledding background is still an important part of the Siberian's temperament. They are not loners. They crave plenty of interaction and togetherness. If they're left alone too much, Sibes can be destructive to your belongings and can suffer from separation anxiety. So Siberian Huskies are best for families who can spend a lot of time with them.

Sibes are also well-suited to multi-dog households. Sibes will bond with all sorts of other dogs, big or small, but they are especially fond of each other. Many owners end up with two or more Siberians. On the other hand, most Sibes are not suitable choices for households that include cats or other small pets. The breed has a very high prey drive, a strong instinct to chase and possibly harm small animals that behave like prey by running away. Every generalization has exceptions, of course. There are many stories about Sibes living peacefully with cats from the time they were small puppies and who have come to regard the felines as close friends. In general, however, it is not recommended to have Sibes with cats,

rabbits, ferrets, or other small animals.

Work Hard, Play Harder

When you're thinking about getting a purebred dog, it's important to honestly assess your lifestyle and ask whether it's a good fit for that type of dog. Siberians are sweet, affectionate dogs. If allowed, they will cuddle on the couch with you while you watch a movie or snuggle up to you in your bed. However, they are very active dogs with a lot of energy to expend. Before they're ready to cuddle, they need ample exercise to tire them out.

If your lifestyle is very sedentary, your Siberian could get bored and destructive to items in your home. Daily walks or runs are great for Sibes. If you have a backyard and you are committed to playing with the dog every day, that can also satisfy the Sibe's need for exercise. Keep in mind that Siberians are adept escape artists. They need 6-foot fences as well as close supervision whenever they're outdoors. They also love to run and must not be given opportunities to run away. Outside of securely fenced areas, you must keep your Sibe on a leash at all times.

Siberians are intelligent working dogs. They thrive on purposeful activity. While neighborhood walks and games of chase in the backyard may satisfy the basic need for exercise, Sibes are also quite willing to get involved in more goal-oriented activities. These dogs are well-suited to agility competitions and perfect for activities like urban mushing.

Though there are exceptions, Sibes are not a natural choice for obedience competitions. They are very trainable and respond well to praise and other positive reinforcement. Nevertheless Sibes are willful and spirited dogs. Even well-trained Sibes will occasionally ignore a command or talk back, by woo-woeing and howling at you, instead of immediately obeying.

If your family enjoys camping, hiking, and other outdoor activities, a Siberian Husky might be the perfect companion. Siberians were bred for working outdoors and for traveling long distances. They have low-maintenance, weather-resistant coats that require only a weekly brushing. Many, though not all, Siberians also enjoy water, whether it's an ocean, a river, or a mud puddle. These characteristics can make them excellent partners for outdoor adventures.

Making the Right Choice for Your Family

Before you add any purebred dog to your family, it's important to research the breed as well as carefully select a specific dog. If you're thinking of buying a puppy, a good breeder, one who cares deeply about the overall health of the breed as well as the happiness of each puppy she places, can help you make the right selection. Puppies should stay with breeders until at least 8 weeks of age. By that time, the breeder can assess a puppy's personality and can tell you how it might fit in with the adults, children, and other animals in your household.

If you're thinking about adopting an older dog, seek the expert advice of a breed rescue group. The people who volunteer with these groups have extensive knowledge gained from long-term experience with Siberians. They tend to keep each Sibe in foster care long enough to learn the individual dog's suitability for homes with small children, additional pets, and less active lifestyles.

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