Grace Roessler Quoted in Pet Lifestyles Magazine, "The Experts Weigh In – Should you Get a Dog "If" You Are Going Through a Divorce?"

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Grace Roessler, a Partner at the Massachusetts law firm of Mirick O'Connell tells Pet Lifestyles Magazine, "As a dog owner, I usually support adding a furry friend to the family, but as a divorce attorney, I advise my clients against getting a dog in the middle of divorce from a practical perspective, because some families cannot afford the additional time and money required for a dog when the family splits into two households."

According to The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), owners should expect to spend about $2,896 (plus adoption fees) the first year of owning a dog and approximately $1,866 every year after that. These numbers do not consider additional expenses such as vet bills, medications, regular grooming, doggy day care/boarding, professional training, toys, crates, and treats. Forbes.com reports adoption costs can range from under $100 for mixed breeds and soar to $13,000 for purebred or designer dogs.

When parents are going through a divorce and overwhelmed trying to settle custody, a visitation plan, the financials, status of the marital home, and other unresolved matters, it's vital to make sure the family's new furry addition is at the top of the list too. They will need a detailed list of everything that is involved with taking care of the pet.

"The ideal set-up," Attorney Daryl Weinman of Texas based firm Weinman & Associates tells PLM, "Is for both parties to agree to letting the dog go back and forth with children at all times because this arrangement creates stability and a sense of comfort when going from home to another. However," she adds, "If you and your ex-spouse are moving to separate residences, make sure to find out if you can have a pet because if you can't, finding another affordable place could pose a problem especially if your custody/parenting agreement requires you to live within



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a certain radius from the children."

Another biggie people don't consider are the possible legalities that could result from co-ownership.
"If the parties intend to share the dog post-divorce and co-own the dog by law," Roessler says, "most want to add the dog into the divorce agreement to include a visitation schedule plus a division of financial responsibilities. However," Roessler adds, "many states will not approve those provisions in a divorce agreement because a dog is still considered property so, if you want to try and get the money back you laid out for expenses, you will have to go to small claims court to plead your case."

Currently only six states have pet custody laws (Alaska, California, Illinois, Maine, New Hampshire and New York), which means the court looks at the best interest of the pet, similar to how they look at the best interest of a child. The laws in other states view the pet as a belonging such as the material stuff inside the house, which is why depending on where you live in the country this could possibly get tricky.

Weinman says, "When it comes to pets in a divorce, I don't usually advise nor am I in favor of too many provisions like these because the more rules there are, the more problems they can cause since each party can interpret the rules differently and find ways to give the other party a hard time."

This doesn't mean you shouldn't get your kids a dog. Rebecca Frino, a Partner at the New Jersey law firm of Mandelbaum Barrett tells PLM, "Divorce generally adds significant stress, and studies show that dogs not only reduce stress, anxiety, depression and ease loneliness but because children are particularly affected by divorce, a dog may be a source of joy during a really challenging time."

Mardi Winder-Adams, a Transitional Divorce Coach and lifetime dog owner agrees. She tells, PLM, "Having a dog offers children companionship, a friendship of unconditional love, allows children to take on the responsibility of caring for another living thing, encourages kids to engage in daily exercise and socialize with others, which can be helpful when you are going through a shift in the family."

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