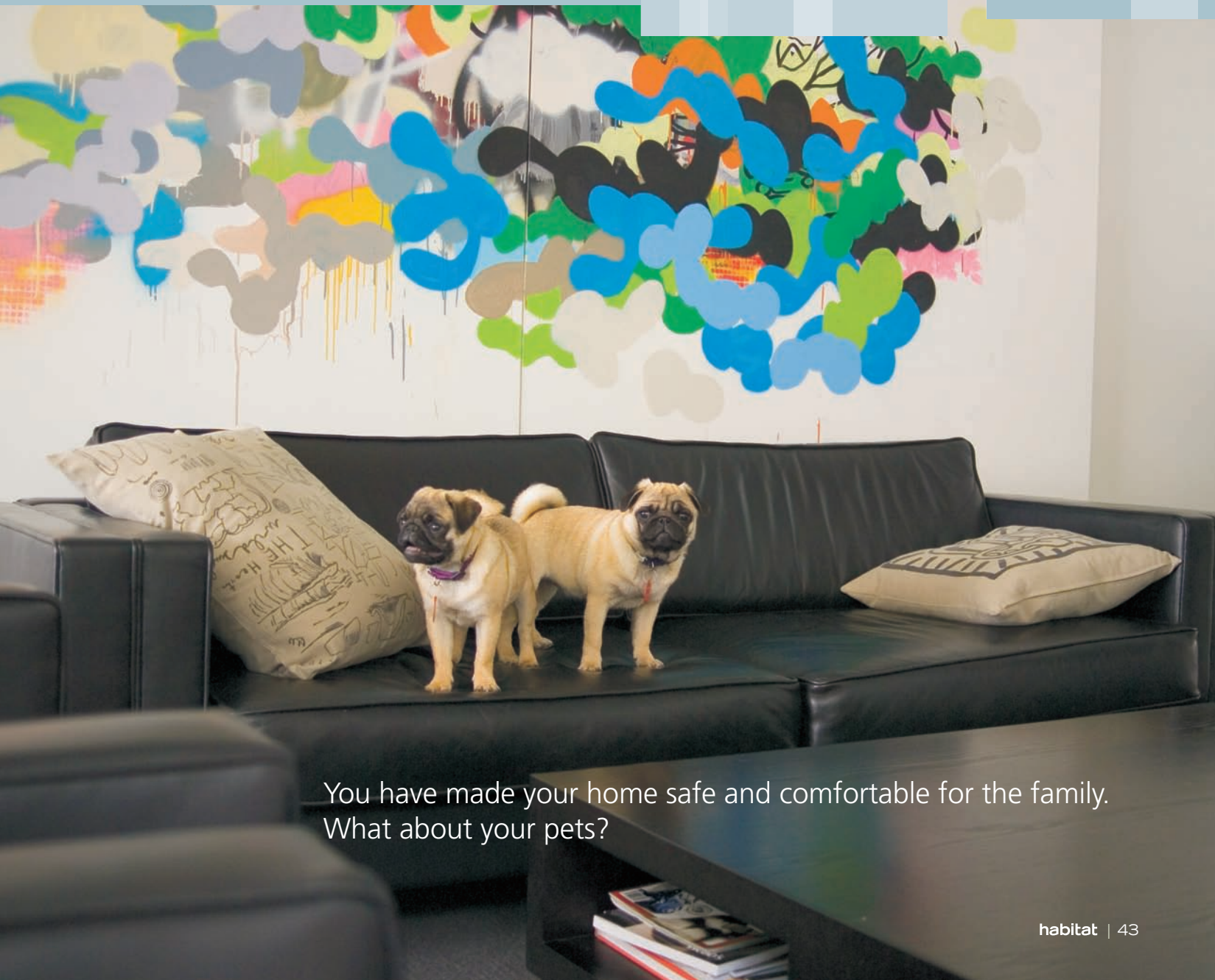


# living with the animals



You have made your home safe and comfortable for the family.  
What about your pets?



When you host family, friends, or neighbours for lunch or dinner, you want to make sure they enjoy a safe and comfortable environment. The same concern should extend to your pets. Putting in a bit of effort can help them feel protected and happy around the house, but exactly what needs doing depends on the pet you choose.

Let's start with a few tips relating to safety for man's best friend. Tracy Dunn, customer services manager for the Auckland SPCA Animal Village, says that one of the worst dangers for puppies is chewing on electrical cords. Wherever possible, fasten down or tuck away any long, fun-to-play-with stretches of flex. Replace frayed cords and, if you do actually see your dog chewing a cord, stop him, discourage the behaviour, and offer a toy as an alternative.

Other chewing dangers for curious canines include poisons, especially rat or snail bait, and small items that can cause damage if swallowed. Tracy suggests that dog-owners keep indigestible temptations, such as golf balls or fishing sinkers, out of reach of their pups. Apply the same principle to your favourite ornaments, batteries, or anything else small that could be swallowed. Even that yellow, fuzzy dog fave, the tennis ball, can be a danger if Fido is left alone with it.

"Dogs can tear tennis balls to pieces, and swallow the netting that covers the outside and the rubber inside," Tracy says.

To prevent your dog from eating what he shouldn't, have a crawl around your home at pet level. Move anything

potentially dangerous, or particularly valuable to you, out of the dog's reach. You'll also need to keep rubbish in a lidded bin or other pet-proof container. Chicken, pork and chop bones in the rubbish are a particular danger, as they break into small fragments that can be fatal if swallowed.

Keep the lid down on the toilet, too, especially if you use a clip-on automatic cleaner. And what if, despite best efforts, your dog does swallow something he shouldn't?

"Get to the vet or an after-hours vet clinic immediately," Tracy advises. "This is especially crucial if poison is ingested, as treatment needs to be administered within a very specific timeframe."

If a puppy's mouth is not getting him in danger, the next likely culprit is his energy level. An energetic puppy and a flight of stairs can be a particularly bad combination.

"A puppy's bone structure is not fully developed, especially with large-breed dogs," Tracy explains. "They need to be stopped from running up and down stairs at speed. They can miss steps quite easily, and fall and break legs or damage joints when they're little."

You may need to consider child-gates for the stairs, or discourage your puppy from running up and down if he must use the stairs.

For cats, many of the same concerns apply. They, too, get themselves into trouble by swallowing dangerous or indigestible items left lying around the home. They may be particularly skilled at slicing open bin bags and

Use a waterborne enamel in high pet-use areas for maximum durability and ease of cleaning. Choose from Resene Enamacryl (gloss), Resene Lustacryl (semi-gloss) or Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen (low sheen).

Two things to think about in a pet-friendly home: make sure your pets aren't going to set your burglar alarm going – choose a model that operates above a given height or has a specific body mass tolerance. Also, make sure your pet is safe at night. Has your cat got a cat door sensor on its collar, and is the property well fenced for the dog?

finding bones or other hazards, so keep rubbish out of claw-reach. Also, be aware that cats are particularly likely to do themselves a mischief by swallowing fishhooks that taste or smell of fish, so these need to be washed thoroughly and packed away.

If your pet preference is for feathered friends, safety considerations are quite different. The first thing to consider may be danger from other pets.

“Cats have to learn to tolerate and accept a bird, and dogs, too,” says Pam Howlett of SPCA Birdwing.

Before letting your bird loose in a room, Pam advises considering which things a bird might accidentally knock over.

“If you’re going to have your bird out loose, you need to keep it and your possessions safe,” she says.

Birds also need shelter from the hot sun, and they should never be kept in a draft, as they can catch a chill.

Like dogs, birds may swallow dangerous objects, such as staples, pins or hair clips. Another ingestible danger for birds includes pot plants, some of which can be poisonous. This also applies to cats and dogs, so check with your garden centre or search online for a list of plants that are dangerous to pets at [www.vetservice.co.nz](http://www.vetservice.co.nz).

For a bird on the wing, mirrors and windows can spell trouble. You can help them see these as obstacles, not opportunities, by putting up decals, closing the blinds, or removing mirrors. It’s also important to check that windows and doors are closed, before you set your bird loose in the house.

“So often, people lose a pet if someone has inadvertently left a door or window open,” Pam says.

Owners themselves can be a serious threat to a bird’s safety.

“Birds can come up behind you very quietly. Be aware of where they are, because you could turn around and stand on them.”

Pam says many owners have lost their pets in this way. A bird’s stealth can also be trouble around closing or sliding doors; be sure you don’t accidentally close a door on your unsuspecting pet.

Bearing all that in mind, keeping your pet safe seems complex enough, but possible. However, just like a person, your pet could be perfectly safe and totally miserable. Providing for its comfort and stimulation at home is a basic kindness.

Let’s begin with sleeping quarters. For cats, it really doesn’t matter what you do.

“Cats are very self-reliant,” Tracy Dunn says. “You can buy all the beds in world, but your cat will still curl up in paper bag. It’s a good idea, though, to make sure they can easily come and go, and this is as simple as installing a cat door.”

Dogs, however, need the security of a well-defined place of their own.

“Especially for puppies, we recommend a specific bed for the dog, in a specific place in the house. You should teach your dog to go there when told, and that space should be off limits to children,” Tracy says.

This helps a dog to understand its place in the family, and also gives it room to retreat from noisy kids or other stresses.



Birds require the same consideration. Pam Howlett recommends putting a bird's cage against a wall on one side.

"It's best not to have people able to walk on all sides of the cage," she says. "That leaves the bird feeling it has nowhere to go if it gets a sudden fright."

Your pet also needs exercise and activities, especially if you're at work all day.

"What you do with your dog when you're not there is hugely important to its well-being," Tracy says.

Fail to deliver and there's a good chance your pup will find something to do on his own, shredding your slippers or something equally un-amusing, especially if it is less than six months old. A good walk in the morning and at night will help burn off excess energy and lessen the likelihood of separation anxiety in puppies. Tracy also advises that dog toys designed to hold food inside, which the dog must work to get at, can keep dogs of any age busy and out of trouble.

If your dog spends the day outside, provide a tyre hung from a tree, a pet-safe bone, or other toys in the yard. Favourite toys for cats include anything hanging on a string, especially on elastic. Birds also appreciate plenty of toys and perches on different levels inside their cages.

Lastly, make sure your home is a place where you spend quality time with your pet.

"There's nothing that replaces human interaction," Tracy says. "It's important that when you do come home, you interact with your animal and make it part of the entire family." **H**

## and then there are the humans...

Sharing the family home with the family animals is a balancing act. People are responsible for looking after their pets' needs, but they need to look after their own as well. Here are a few tips on making your pet's home safe and comfortable for people.

**Children** – Sometimes, offspring and pets don't mix as well as we might like. Pets may lose patience with a child; in the worst case, scratching or biting. To help keep conflict to a minimum, make sure pets have a quiet place to retreat to in the home. Teaching children a few basic rules about respecting your pet will also help keep them both safe.

In general, it's great for children to learn to live with pets, but very young children and infants must always be supervised with any animal. Cats have been known to climb into a baby's cot – a nice, warm spot – and may suffocate an infant powerless to move the weight. To keep your baby safe, close the nursery door.

**Barking dogs** – This can sometimes be a problem when moving a dog from a rural environment to the city.

"A dog that may have spent most of its life being allowed to bark or run on a large property won't understand why it's now being reprimanded for barking," says Tracy Dunn of the Auckland SPCA.

To help a dog work through issues with excessive barking, seek help from a canine behaviourist. You can also find some tips from experts online at: [www.rspcanz.org.nz](http://www.rspcanz.org.nz).

**Allergies** – If at all possible, and depending on the allergy, it's best to avoid the situation of a pet and an allergic person sharing a home. The pet can't do anything to reduce the allergic reaction, and the person with the allergy may suffer discomfort or even debilitating effects. It is almost impossible to keep an area of the house sterile when a cat, for example, is in residence, but vacuuming and dusting, and keeping pets off the bed, may help ease aggravation of allergies.