



Pets are PAWsitively Empowering

Leading with Technical Expertise - White Paper

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The happiness that a companion animal exhibits when we walk in the door can only be described as pure joy and excitement, and let’s be honest, it is absolutely mutual! A pet’s love is unconditional and their pleasing nature reflects the loyalty they feel towards the people in their lives. Not only do animals enrich our lives and provide us with companionship, they also play an important role in the health and emotional well-being of children, adults and seniors.

The loving action of petting a cat or dog, giving a playful scratch behind their ears, reinforcing behaviors such as “giving a paw” or “high-five”, or simply sitting closely together can have calming effects on people of all ages. Equally as beneficial, human-animal interactions decrease the “stress” hormone **cortisol** and increase the “love” hormone **oxytocin**.

The mutually beneficial relationship between pets and people for a happier, healthier life is defined as the Human-Animal Bond, with a significant amount of research supporting this relationship. The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI) recognizes that companion animals can be wonderful sources of comfort, joy and support and has recently published the **Top Five Benefits of the Human-Animal Bond** (<https://habri.org/blog/top-5-benefits-of-the-human-animal-bond/>)⁽¹⁾:

- 1 Pets Alleviate Stress**
- 2 Pets Fight Depression**
- 3 Pets Address Social Isolation & Loneliness**
- 4 Pets Improve Physical Fitness & Encourage Activity**
- 5 Pets Facilitate Healing & Resiliency**

How do pets impact our children? The emotional power of a pet can help young children build and strengthen self-esteem, enhance social skills and reduce the feeling of loneliness⁽²⁾. Research by the University of Liverpool, funded by the WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition, showed that household pets can help support emotional, educational and social development in young children⁽³⁾. Specifically, the study reported that critical ages for the impact of pet ownership on self-esteem appear to be greatest for children under 6, preadolescents and adolescents. Learning to handle and deal with stress can help children cope with stressful scenarios as teenagers and adults.



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These benefits can reach beyond children that struggle with self-esteem and insecurities. Animal interactions can enable children to better cope with conditions such as autism and attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)^(3,4). Specifically with ADHD, one study found that children who read to animals displayed better social skills, more sharing, cooperation and volunteering. In addition, many showed fewer behavioral problems⁽⁴⁾. What is even more remarkable is that pets can be very present and have the intuitive sense that their “human” needs companionship and love.

Caring for an animal can help children learn about taking responsibility and being accountable for the care of another. Whether it is taking the dog for a walk, playing catch in the backyard or ensuring their pet’s water bowl is full, encouraging a sense of ownership and responsibility can help foster life

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lessons for a child.

Stay-at-home restrictions and social distancing measures has led to the development of a special closeness with our pets. The relationship and status pets have established in our lives and in our homes have further solidified we are no longer pet owners, we are **pet parents**. The American Pet Products Association (APPA) studied how behaviors, attitudes and lifestyles have changed as a result of the pandemic with their 4-part series COVID-19 Pulse Study of Pet Ownership.

This study revealed pet ownership remains resilient in the face of a global pandemic, a continued testament to the importance of pets in our lives⁽⁵⁾. In fact, 11% of those surveyed got a new pet at some point during the pandemic.

The results of this survey truly demonstrated the strength and impact of the human-animal bond:

- 73% of pet parents agree pets bring family members closer together



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- 72% of pet parents across all demographics agreed spending time with their pet helps reduce stress and increase their sense of well-being
- 70% said they spend more time with their pet as they have been social distancing from others
- 39% said they exercise more with their pets

At any age or stage of life, the companionship of a pet can open a doorway to improved mental and physical health. The power of a pet is certainly strong, most of all, the love and joy they bring us and our children.

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