



**TORONTO  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY**

like no  
other.

## WHAT IS THE HUMAN ANIMAL BOND?

Establishing a relationship of care and trust

## Definition

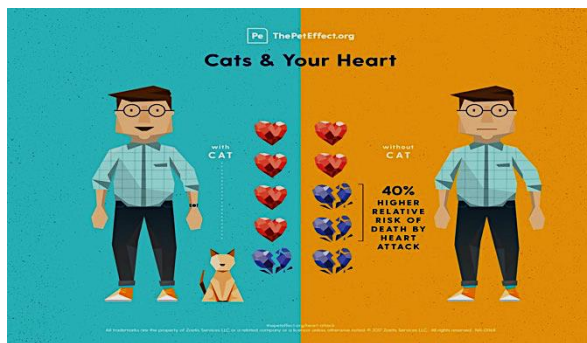
"The human animal bond as the relationship between people, animals, and their environment. The team should focus on providing education, resources and support to clients, the public and other professionals in order to create, enhance and sustain an ethical and mutually satisfying relationship between animals and people. When a positive bond has formed, not only do pets make us feel good, but now there is scientific evidence that they are good for our physical health as well" (Miller, L. 2009).

## The importance of the human-animal bond to people

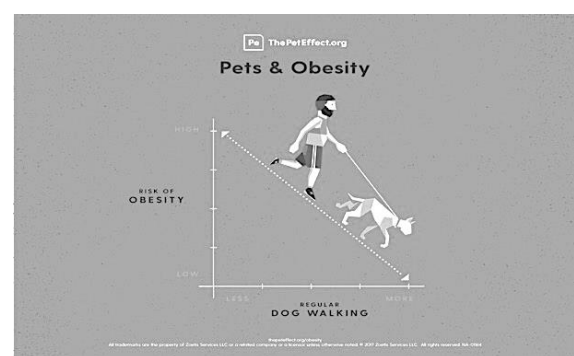
### Pet ownership benefits to Adults/adolescents

Much of the content in this document is acquired from The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI). HABRI reports the following benefits:

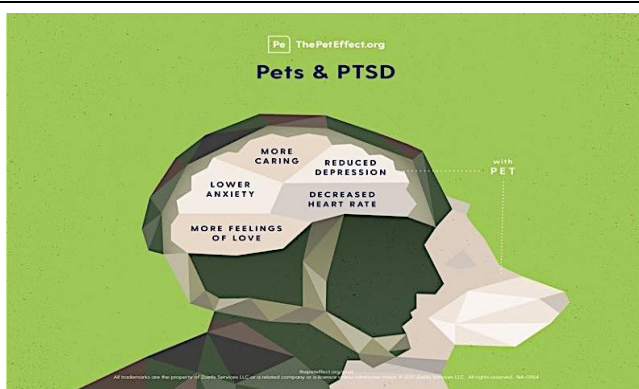
1. Emotional support for older adults, cancer and mental health, PTSD individuals which can reduce stress, depression, anxiety, loneliness and improve overall quality of life as well as mood by:
  - Providing opportunities for interactions with neighbours and giving a perception of friendliness.
  - Providing a sense of meaning, security and routine for a person's life.
  - Providing distraction from distressing symptoms such as suicidal thoughts.
  - Providing non-judgemental support
2. Dog owners engaged in significantly more minutes per week of physical activity than non-dog owners. This too resulted in reduced incidence of obesity.
3. Dog/cat owners showed a reduced incidence of hypertension, stroke and heart attacks.



Heart disease is the second leading cause of death. (Canada.ca, 2016)



27% of Canadians are obese (Stats Canada, 2018)



Over 2 million people in Canada aged 15 and over have a mental health-related disability

## **Pet ownership benefits to Childhood health and development**

### **Allergies**

HABRI, 2018 states: "Scientific research has demonstrated the positive impact of early exposure to pets on the development of allergies and asthma later in life."

- In a study of lifetime dog and cat exposure and sensitization, teenagers who lived with a cat during the first year of their life had a 48% lower risk of cat allergy than their peers.
- Prenatal exposure to dogs can influence immune development and thereby attenuate the development of atopy (the genetic tendency to develop allergic diseases) in at-risk children."

### **Education**

- May increase motivation to read as natural incentive.
- Pets do not laugh, criticize thereby allowing children to read at own pace.
- Can reduce stressful reactions whilst performing a stressful task.
- May help aggressive children develop nurturing tendencies.

### **Mental health well-being, emotional and cognitive development**

- HABRI (2020) discussed a study of children aged 7-12 showed presence of a pet dog significantly reduced perceived stress levels compared to presence of other children and a parent. The result of the study may be explained by dogs being non-judgmental and accepting since socially related anxiety issues mainly arise from the feeling of being judged/evaluated. At this age, children tend to engage more in comparing themselves to others and incorporating other's feedback into their sense of self. Pet ownership therefore helps improve self-esteem and enables children to create more positive images of themselves
- Linked to empathy and positive attitudes towards animals
- May increase emotional expression and control in children by helping them learn to express and understand non-verbal communication.
- Promotes healthy social development
- May prevent the progression of emotional problems into mental and behavioural disorders.
- Coping strategy for loneliness in vulnerable youth

### **The importance of the human-animal bond to pets**

In addition to unconditional love and companionship pets give to their owners, the above section shows the numerous ways that the human-animal bond benefits human health. As more research is conducted, likely more benefits of this powerful relationship will be revealed. For a mutually beneficial relationship, pet-owners should ensure that the needs of their pets be met. Pet-owners must meet their basic needs of food, water, shelter, and welfare. What happens if the bond never forms or fails? The consequences may be tragic for the animals, resulting in abandonment, relinquishment, or abuse.

We believe that all animals should enjoy, as a minimum, five essential freedoms, which were first described by the Farm Animal Welfare Council of the UK in 1965.

The Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst.
2. Freedom from pain, injury and disease.
3. Freedom from distress.
4. Freedom from discomfort.
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.





## Ways to build and preserve the human-animal bond

As illustrated in the previous sections, the human-animal bond provides many impactful benefits to both people and the animals as such building and preserving the relationship becomes crucial for the two. "People will often tolerate many types of problems and hardships to keep their pets when a strong bond has formed. The team should be familiar with the issues that increase the risk of relinquishment of pets to shelters and be prepared to intervene on behalf of their patients and other animals to restore the bond when the appropriate opportunity presents itself. (Millier, L., 2009).

Top reasons dogs and cats are relinquished to shelters (Miller, L. 2009):

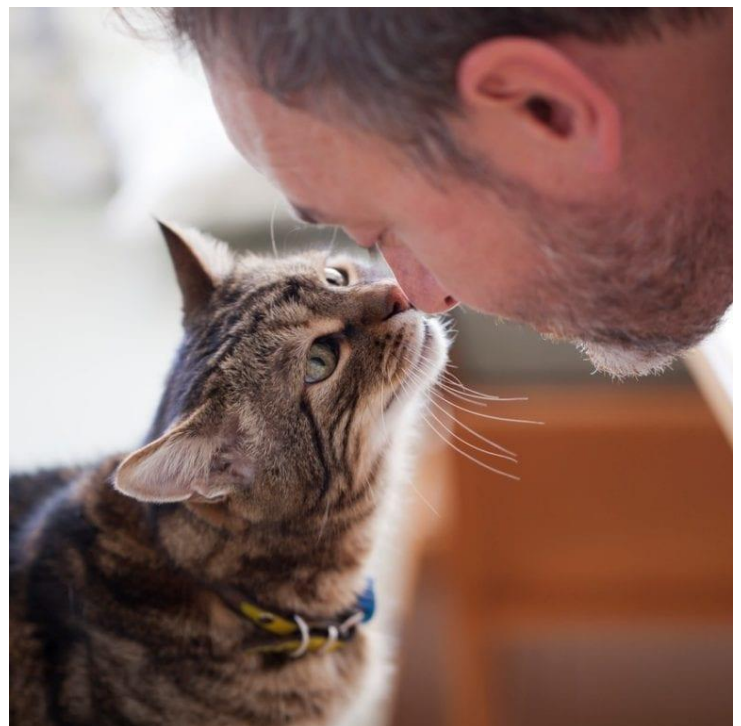
1. Moving
2. Landlord issues
3. Cost of pet maintenance
4. No time for the pet
5. Inadequate facilities
6. Too many pets in the home
7. Pet illness
8. Personal Problems
9. Biting
10. No homes for littermates
11. Allergies
12. House soiling
13. Doesn't get along with other pets

## Breaking the human-animal bond has-helping clients cope

"Adams, Bonnett and Meek (2000) surveyed pet owners who had lost their cat or dog within the last 43 days. This study indicated that approximately 30% of the clients experienced a severe grief response. This involved the full range of grief response such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, preoccupied with thoughts of the deceased pet, and loss of meaning." (CVO, 2007).

When a pet dies or needs to be relinquished, the degree of emotion experienced by highly attached owners may equal the loss of a close relative. The team may help the owner cope by communicating well and showing empathy. Some techniques are provided below ((Hashim, M., 2017).

- "It seems like you are feeling..."
- "I wonder if you are feeling..."
- "Some people would feel... in this situation."
- "I can see that this makes you feel..."
- "I can understand how that might upset you."
- "I can understand why you would be... given what you are going through."
- "I can imagine what that would feel like."
- "I can't imagine what that would feel like!"
- "I know someone who had a similar experience. It is not easy."
- "This has been a hard time for you."
- "That makes sense to me."
- "It must be a lot of stress to deal with..."
- "I respect your courage to keep a positive attitude in spite of your difficulties."
- "It sounds like a lot to deal with."
- "You have been through a lot."
- "You did the right thing by coming in."



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