

A HelpGuide guest article

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How Dogs Boost the Mental Health of Children, Adults, and the Elderly

We adopt dogs because they bring us joy. They bring energy to every room they enter. They give us structure and routine. Their cute faces brighten our mornings.



But did you know that the psychological benefits of owning a dog are far more in-depth and surprising than we first thought?

It's not just about the adorable selfies and cuddles we get. Dogs fundamentally uplift our

mental and emotional health in ways we couldn't imagine, at every stage of our lives.

Here are just a few ways our lovable canines strengthen and support our mental health in childhood, adulthood and later years.

Dogs help children with anxiety

The incredible effects of dogs on the mental health of children are well-researched and science-backed. A pediatric study done by Australian researchers found that children aged 3-5 years old with dogs at home were more sociable and well-behaved than their peers without dogs at home. Naturally, being more socially adjusted can play a role in a child's overall well-being and sense of self.

One of the most surprising benefits dogs have for children is reducing childhood anxiety. Studies show that interacting with dogs on a regular basis boosts mood and eases the stress of children like few other things can replicate. So you can rest assured, even if you think you have the wildest dog on your hands, your furry friend is a relaxing influence to all who know them.

Dogs help adults stay active and social

They tell us to move our bodies daily for [30 mins with moderate exercise](#), and who has the time for that? Well, dog owners do!

As a necessity, we as dog owners walk on average 22 minutes more daily than the average person according to a 2017 study. That extra activity leads to a less sedentary life, which is linked to higher self-esteem and better mood.

On top of that, the dog park is doing wonders for the social lives of adults. Maybe you have also felt that making new friends as an adult can be tough outside of work. Many worldwide have reported a shortage of friends, with millennials having a verified loneliness crisis.

Studies have shown that people can make new friends just by owning and walking their dogs. It's great to make connections with people you see regularly and share a love of the canine kind with!

Dogs help the elderly fight off loneliness and soothes Alzheimer's

Older adults also benefit from the social aspect of owning a dog with other humans of course, but in particular, dogs are shown to be fantastic companions to the elderly. There is nothing quite like having your dog put their head in your hands to make you feel loved.

Though there is some debate as to whether a dog can protect you from loneliness, or is a response to being lonely, they provide unparalleled comfort as we enter the later stages of life.

Amazingly, research has shown that dogs help those with dementia immeasurably too. Dog ownership can help a person with Alzheimer's feel more independent which boosts their quality of life. As dogs are wonderful at reading body language and social cues, they provide comfort in being able to communicate together without words.

It's important to note that dogs are quite demanding pets so be sure to verify that the intended owner is fully capable of caring for them. That said, the more active and engaged lifestyle that a dog encourages hugely benefits the emotional health of older adults.

Dogs: Everyone's best friend but not your therapist

They say that dogs are a man's best friend but the truth is far more universal. Man, woman or child, a dog can brighten and enrich our lives in more ways than we could ever imagine.

If you are thinking of introducing a furry friend into your household, all members of the family can benefit from having them around.

And though we could go on and on about the benefits of owning, loving and caring for a dog, we want to end this by saying that a dog is not your therapist. They support us in wonderful ways but as responsible owners, we need to provide them with the best possible life too.

Every day, we endeavour to make them happy and they return that energy in spades.

Please do not adopt or buy a dog to salve emotional or mental issues. They are wonderful pets in every way, but you need to be the responsible caregiver that the pup deserves.

Take great care of them and they will take great care of you!

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Author: Vedrana Nikolic.

Vedrana writes for the Australian website Gentle Dog Trainers. She has a BA in Anthropology and is pursuing a Masters degree in Semiotics studying the communication between animals and humans.

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