How Pet Therapy Can Help With Depression

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The Benefits of Pet Therapy for Depression Treatment

Pets can offer a surprising amount of help and support for people with depression and mental illness.

On days when it seems impossible to get yourself out of bed or find the push to get moving, a pet or service dog can provide some much needed motivation to start your day.

While I didn't find much in the way of evidence while doing my research, I've always felt that animals are intuitive and know when we need love and company. My cat is usually close by, but when I'm having a bad day or I'm upset, she always seems to be closer and overly affectionate.

Here are a few other ways pets can help improve the daily lives of those suffering from depression.

Unconditional Love

One of the great things about having a pet is that you have the benefit of unconditional love without the fear of disappointing them or the pressure of living up to expectations. For anyone who's had a dog, you know the incredible feeling of coming home to an excited pooch with a wagging tail. Having a loving pet to come home to can be so uplifting and is sure to bring some positivity into your day.

Responsibility & Routine

When you're lacking motivation, having something to bring responsibility into your day can ensure that you stick to a routine. Pets, even the small ones, need a certain amount of attention and care and are usually quite dependent on their owners.

This added structure could be the added push you may need some days to get moving. For those who are suffering from depression, having a certain amount of responsibility can be a source of great pride.

Exercise

Exercise can be of great benefit to those suffering from depression. Not everybody has the passion for daily exercise or discipline to work out, but having a dog to walk can be a great way to get moving every day. It can be fun to find new dog parks or trails to hike with your furry companion.

Next page: pet therapy as an aid in distraction and social interaction.

Social Interaction

Pets are often great icebreakers, either as conversation starters when in social situations or as a great way to meet people. If you frequently take your dog to dog parks or training classes then you're exposed to more people than you would be otherwise. People love to chat about their furry friends and it could be a great way to make new friends.

Physical Touch

Touch and affection can promote healing for those with depression. Not everybody is comfortable with physical touch or being that close with other people, so having a pet around can offer a similar amount of love and affection. Having a cat purring on your lap or a dog to cuddle can be incredibly calming. The resulting stress-relief can lower anxiety, blood pressure, and release feel-good chemicals in the brain.

Distraction

Sometimes when we are stuck in a down day it can help to have some form of distraction. Pets can be great distractions through responsibility and comedic relief. Playing with a pet can provide a sense of calm and relaxation and get us out of our heads. Anyone who's had a pet knows they can be a distraction even when you don't want them to be.

Service Dogs

Working dogs are fantastic aids for those with depression and other mental illnesses such as severe anxiety and PTSD. They can provide assistance in areas such as psychiatric support, fear management, and treatment related tasks.

Service dogs are trained to provide help such as crowd control, panic prevention, and preventing emotional overload. As far as treatment related tasks, certain dogs can be trained to remind their owners to take medications, which would be of great help to those living on their own.

Conclusion

Pets can be a great way to provide distraction, responsibility, and exercise into your daily routine. They can also provide an outlet of love and affection that can comfort those who suffer from depression.