

Pets provide comfort for 'Ruff' quarantine time

July 15 2020, by Serena Gordon, Healthday Reporter



Schuyler family with their dog, Jackie, during lockdown

(HealthDay)—For New York lawyer Roseann Schuyler, her family's

pets—a dog (Jackie), two cats (Hudson and Winter) and a fish (Atticus fish)—eased the long, lonely days of lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic this spring.

"Those early days were so surreal. There was not a lot to do other than to sit in the house and worry," Schuyler said. "The fact that we had pets—Jackie in particular—gave those days a structure. Jackie still had to go out, and we would take really long walks. Those walks were good for all of us. We were away from the news and our screens."

Schuyler said that during "normal" times, she and her husband often have long days at their private law practice, and their two kids are busy with school. "The one silver lining to the quarantine was those walks. We got to spend more time with the children, and could really talk to them about what was going on in their lives," she said. "Plus, the dog lost weight and looks great!"

She said even the cats appeared to enjoy the extra time. And, the dog sat with her daughter, Isabelle, keeping her company during school hours.

Schuyler wasn't the only American to find solace in their beloved pets: Two new surveys show that two-thirds of dog and [cat owners](#) said their pets lessened loneliness, while nearly half said their pet decreased feelings of being overwhelmed by the pandemic and quarantines.

Researcher Lori Kogan, a psychologist and a professor of clinical science at Colorado State University, designed the survey to get a better idea of how pets impacted people's emotions and lives during COVID-19 quarantines.

"The findings certainly validated what I had been hearing from people. Pets help through companionship, leading to a decrease in anxiety, loneliness and depression. They also help through routine. People didn't

have regular routines anymore, and walking your dog provides a sense of normalcy. Your pet will still want to eat at the same time. Our lives are incredibly different now compared to just a couple of months ago, but our pets are the same, and there is comfort to that," Kogan said.

More than 4,100 people completed a survey on [dogs](#) and nearly 1,000 answered a survey on cats. Survey participants were overwhelmingly women. They spanned the age ranges, though people between 50 and 59 had the largest number of respondents for both surveys.

Thirty-six percent of cat owners who answered the survey lived alone and 91% had no kids. Twenty-one percent of dog owners lived solo, and 81% had no kids. Most lived in areas that had shut down all non-essential businesses and asked residents to stay at home as much as possible.

About 54% of people in both surveys said having a pet gave their lives a sense of purpose.

One note of concern expressed by around one-quarter of people in the surveys was worry about being able to care for their pet if they contracted COVID-19. About 40% of respondents hadn't designated a caretaker for their pet in the event they became ill or died.

"Even if you have someone in mind to care for your pet, you want to confirm that with them. Maybe you know they love your dog, but it might not work for them," Kogan said.

Kelly DiCicco, manager of adoptions promotions at the ASPCA Adoption Center, said, "We encourage any pet owner to proactively develop plans to ensure their pets will be cared for if they become ill with COVID-19. Pets can and should remain in the home when the owner or another household member has been exposed to or infected with COVID-19, as long as plans are in place to ensure that the pet will

be appropriately cared for."

And what about when everyone heads back to work or school? Will your furry friends feel abandoned? Maybe.

Schuyler is concerned about how her family's pets will handle the transition. "I think they will be affected when the kids are back in school all day and we're at work. I think they'll be lonely," she said.

DiCicco said the change will impact your pets. "Dogs and cats are creatures of habit. They thrive on consistency, and sudden scheduling changes can throw them for a loop. When our regular work and school routines commence again, your dog or cat may be left confused and lonely once everyone is rushing out the door instead of spending time at home," she explained.

DiCicco recommended starting to prepare your pets now. Go for a daily walk without your pets or do some yard work to get the animals used to being alone again. Provide them with a distraction, like TV or some music.

Kogan agreed that it's time to start planning. "You don't want to go from being home 24/7 to being gone for eight hours or more at a time. Make sure you're leaving the house sometimes now," she said.

The survey findings were posted on the website of the nonprofit FIDO Fort Collins.

More information: To learn more about the benefits of pets, visit the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).

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Citation: Pets provide comfort for 'Ruff' quarantine time (2020, July 15) retrieved 22 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-pets-comfort-ruff-quarantine.html>

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