



First Days and Every Day: Celebrating the Benefits of Pets for Kids

From first days to the toughest of days, having a dog by our side could help make a stressful time better. Research has shown the presence of a dog can help reduce stress or moderate its impact; lower blood pressure and heart rate; and ease feelings of social anxiety. Dogs also give us companionship and help us connect with other people.

That's the power of pets that the [CESAR® brand's](#) "First Day Friends" ad celebrates. As headlines discuss the growing mental health crises of loneliness and social isolation, the benefits of pets are being considered more than ever as a potential solution – complete with tail wags and soggy kisses.

Dogs Make the Day Better

While many studies are underway to better understand the power of pets, here's what the research suggests so far related to pets and kids:

When an animal is brought into a classroom¹:

- Kids are more likely to follow instructions and focus on a task.
- They ask more appropriate questions.
- They engage with their teacher more.
- There are fewer emotional outbursts and more positive behaviors.

Beyond the classroom:

- Pet dogs reduce feelings of anxiety and promote social interactions in children.²
- Kids report feeling more positive while completing a task with their pet dog.³
- Being accompanied by a pet dog reduces how stressful a social test is for kids.⁴
- Kids with pets tend to have greater self-esteem, less loneliness and enhanced social skills.⁵
- Kids appear to get along even better with their pets than with their siblings.⁶



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Exploring a Pet Program at Your School

If you love pets and were touched by the CESAR® “First Day Friends” ad, you might be wondering if you could bring your dog to school and/or create a pet-friendly program. It’s an appealing idea – we hope for a time in the future when pets will be welcome everywhere.

Before bringing pets into schools, here are a few important considerations:

- What training would be needed for teachers, students and pets.
- What the liabilities would be for parents and for the school.
- How to determine who gets to bring a dog.
- How many dogs could be at school at once.
- How to address challenges like allergies and phobias.
- How to understand when a dog wants to go home.
- Animal welfare considerations, like making sure pets aren’t stressed by the experience and get enough breaks.

Be sure to protect kids and pets with input from parents, animal experts and school administrators, so you end up with guidelines and qualifications that make it a great experience for everyone.

A Quick-Start Option: Therapy Teams

Rather than creating a program from scratch, a great quick-start option may be a partnership with a therapy animal team, such as one affiliated with [Pet Partners](#).

Therapy animals are trained to provide affection, comfort and companionship in public settings like schools and hospitals. They have a special gift for interacting, and they love spending time with people. Also, they’re managed by a trained handler who understands animal behavior, communication, hygiene and more.

As the leading therapy animal organization in the U.S., Pet Partners has over 13,000 active teams and likely has one or more in your area. They also have educational programs already



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in place, such as their [Read With Me™](#) initiative that gives kids a fun, non-judgmental chance to build skills and get excited about reading.

Join the Movement

As research continues to uncover benefits of interacting with pets, one thing seems sure-- Helping people have a pet by their side has the potential to make life better. Here are ways to join the movement to make your community pet friendly:

Cities:

- Through local policy and legislation, make school grounds a welcoming place for appropriately trained and supervised pets.

Schools:

- Explore opportunities to safely make pets part of the educational experience.

Citizens:

- Welcome a pet into your own home to experience the many joys they bring.
- Consider training that helps ensure everyone has a great experience around your pet.
- Advocate for school policies that involve pets in learning opportunities.

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- 1 <https://www.bettercitiesforpets.com/2017/08/30/pets-in-the-classroom-qa-how-pets-help-kids-learn/>
- 2 <https://www.waltham.com/news/creature-comforts-pet-dogs-provide-stress-relief-for-children.shtml>
- 3 <https://www.waltham.com/news/news-14.shtml>
- 4 <https://www.waltham.com/news/creature-comforts-pet-dogs-provide-stress-relief-for-children.shtml>
- 5 <https://www.waltham.com/news/companion-animals-and-child-development.shtml>
- 6 <https://www.waltham.com/news/pets-are-a-childs-best-friend.shtml>



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