

Science of animals

Jill A. Reese, LSCSW

Director Mental Health, Symbiotic Behavioral Treatment Center

Anthony Barnett

Founder/Director, Symbiotic Behavioral Treatment Center

Human-Canine bond

- Not Just fuzzy feelings.
- Result of successful evolution strategies.
- Modern life has transformed our perception - but not the bond
- Tend to view in “cost only” instead of “cost/benefit.”

Human-Canine bond

- Socially, “the bond” endures.
- Homeless, domestic violence survivors, deployed troops – all prioritize canine relationship.
- Progressive pet policies help people & dogs in the community.

Brain Chemistry

- Oxytocin
- Cortisol
- Endorphins
- Serotonin and Dopamine

Oxytocin

- Oxytocin - often defined as the “Neurochemical of Love” or the “Feel Good” chemical.
- Promotes attachment, solidifies relationships, reinforces connection, improves social skills, triggers protective instincts, increases generosity.

Oxytocin

- Is naturally released in our brains when we cuddle/snuggle/hug/touch other people.
- Increases our ability to relax (physiologically) and feelings of trust which have been shown to increase psychological stability.

Cortisol

- Cortisol - often defined as the “Stress Hormone.”
- A steroid-based hormone; very powerful
- Amount in our bodies is determined by: stress, eating patterns/habits, physical activity and sleeping patterns.

Cortisol

- Is designed to save us when we are under stress.
- Fight/Flight/Freeze = flooding of cortisol.
- Oxytocin inhibits and decreases cortisol through slowing heart rate and decreasing blood pressure.

Endorphins

- Endorphins - naturally occurring hormone that blocks pain and help regulates emotions.
- Increased through physical activity and life style changes.
- Essential chemical to maintaining psychological well-being.

Dopamine

- Dopamine - a neurotransmitter that helps regulate movement and emotions.
- Reward motivated and increases positive interactions.
- Essential chemical to maintaining psychological well-being.

Serotonin

- Serotonin - a neurotransmitter that relays information from one area of the brain to another.
- Regulates mood and stability.
- Essential chemical to maintaining psychological well-being.

Research

- Research shows that when humans interact with animals we are positively rewarded in physiological and psychological ways.

Research - Physical

- Decreased heart rate; faster return to resting heart rate.
- Lowers blood pressure.
- Decreases cholesterol
- Increased longevity after a heart attack (1/15 to 1/87)

Research - General Health

- People who own a pet, and interact with this animal in a healthy way, have been shown to have a less medical needs through improved immune systems, less doctor visits and less emergency room use.

Research - Social

- Animal owners have been shown to benefit socially through increased ability to manage a daily routine and structure, increased socialization therefore decreased isolation.

Mental Health

- After 30 minutes of positive and intentional interaction with a dog an individual has increased dopamine and serotonin levels = vital to well-being.
- Watching fish in an aquarium has been shown to lower pulse rate, increase skin temperature and decrease muscle tension.

Mental Health

- Owning a pet has the following positive benefits for an individual struggling with mental health challenges:
 - Increased socialization
 - Development of daily routine/structure
 - Increased care-giving ability
 - Increased mastery/sense of purpose
 - Increased self-worth

Different Relationships

- Service Dog
- Therapy Dog
- Emotional Support Animal
- Pet

Benefits For You

- As a landlord - less turn over, decreased drug/alcohol issues, increased ability to maintain employment (pay rent/bills on time), more accountability for self/property/others.
- As tenant - create a life worth living.

Questions?

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Thoughts?