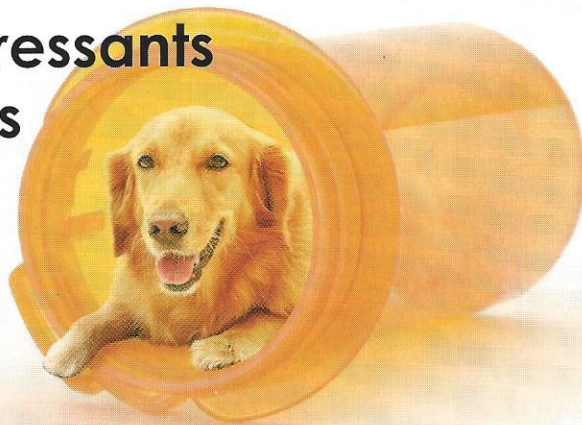


The Best Antidepressants Have Paws

The Link Between
Mental Health
and Owning Pets



The Pet Planet Magazine asks: Please explain how owning a pet can increase mental health. I've known some people in deep distress, how can an animal make a difference?

Pamela Garber answers: A relationship with a pet provides unconditional love. In many cases, emotional challenges stem from family or relationship issues surrounding loss, betrayal, and feelings of unworthiness. Your pet always knows you are worthy and has love in full supply. In my private practice, I was working with a client who lost a large account and had been struggling with his manager. Therapy resulted in this client gaining insight into the situation, which was that he does not perform well when someone is expecting him to fail and that this was definitely the case. We processed why this was of particular difficulty to him and how he could ultimately cope. This led to issues surrounding ongoing disapproval from his father. My client now had greater clarity and also some structured goal setting. However, last but not least, my client, a single guy, also had a golden retriever named Joey. Joey never cared about his owner's quota. During times when my client was a boy, it was the family cat, Timmy, who heard his tears after his father yelled at him. Animals also provide consistency. I've had several clients who have struggled with on again, off again relationships with humans. Regarding the love/hate dynamic, a fellow therapist friend refers to this as 'from hero to zero.'

Animals have pure emotions, no need to second guess their motives on anything. If your animal is kissing you, unlike some of us humans, it is not because they are trying to persuade you to do something with real estate, travel, or evening plans. Treats may be the one goal behind some displays of affection, but, then again, at least there is a communicated level of appreciation following- a kiss, a meow, or a bark.