

## Pets Enhance Learning

Adapted from [petsintheclassroom.org](http://petsintheclassroom.org)

Caring for pets in the classroom improves school attendance, teaches children about responsibility, supports students' self-esteem, and develops strong human animal bonds. All of this means that pets are not only good for households, but are also good for classrooms. Pets enrich classroom experiences and provide new ways for students to learn.

It's official. Studies show that children from families with pets are better equipped to fight off infection than kids from non-pet households, showing significantly higher levels of immune system performance. When school attendance records were compared side by side, researchers discovered that kids with pets averaged more days at school every year than their pet-free counterparts.

The study also showed that kids turn to their pets for emotional well-being, with 40% of children choosing pet companionship when feeling down. Kids were also found to seek out their pets when feeling tired, upset, scared or lonely, and 53% of respondents said they enjoy doing their homework with pets nearby. "Being around animals is extremely good for children," says Dr. Harvey Markovitch, a pediatrician and editor of *The Archives of Disease in Childhood*. "They are good for morale, and teach children about relationships and about the needs of another living being. Learning to care for a pet helps them to learn how to care for people."

Nobody enjoys being treated roughly. Kids soon learn that if they want to be liked and trusted by the family cat, they'll need to treat her carefully and kindly. This sort of training benefits all kids, but is especially important to small boys who don't often get the chance in our society to practice nurturing skills as girls do.

Helping to take care of a pet gives a child a sense of pride and accomplishment, especially if the animal is able to return the affection. Shari Young Kuchenbecker, Ph. D., research psychologist at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, says, "The child who cares for a pet knows that what he does matters, and so he'll want to do more of it. The more successfully he feeds, walks, or emotionally bonds with the pet, the more confident he'll feel." In fact, studies conducted by the Waltham Centre have shown that children with pets have higher levels of self-esteem than those without pets.

Even a small child can begin to learn to care for the needs of another living being. Whether helping to empty a cup of dry kibble into the rabbit's bowl, or filling the hamster's water bottle, it's never too early to start teaching kids proper animal care. Of course, parents or teachers must monitor all pet care carried out by children. Kids should be expected to fulfill their responsibilities, but when the inevitable slip-ups occur, adults shouldn't make too much of a fuss. Instead, children just need to be reminded that the pet was counting on him.

Lots of animals such as cats, dogs, and guinea pigs love human contact and can become a child's best buddy. Kids can even develop strong human animal bonds with non-responsive animals such as fish or turtles. These relationships help to strengthen a child's social skills, giving them the potential to do better in a school setting.

Whether its math ("How much does a hamster weigh?") or science, ("What does a snake eat?") geography ("What part of the world do ferrets come from?") or grammar ("What words would we use to describe a goldfish?") Students will approach learning all these subjects with a new enthusiasm and interest. Students can even create presentations about classroom pets in order to teach other students in the school.

Students who have no experience with animals in their home environments can see, feel, touch, and make connections to animals and nature when classrooms have animals. Studies have shown that the presence of animals tends to lessen tension in classrooms. Students learn that their behavior and actions directly affect others and that all living things need more than just food and water for survival. Classroom pets increase students' understanding of the feelings and needs of others – both humans and animals.

**Response to “Pets Enhance Learning”**

This article presents and explains many reasons for keeping pets in classrooms. The outline below shows one reason from the article, and a quote from the article that helps explain that reason. Complete the outline below with another reason from the article, and at least one quote from the article to explain or support that reason. Write to explain how the quote you chose supports the author’s point.

<p><b>According to the article, why should schools allow pets in classrooms?</b></p> <p>One reason the article gives is... <u>Kids with pets are healthier.</u></p>
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Write a quote from the article that explains or supports this reason.

- “Studies show that children from families with pets are better equipped to fight off infection than kids from non-pet households, showing significantly higher levels of immune system performance.”

<p><b>According to the article, why should schools allow pets in classrooms?</b></p> <p>Another reason the article gives is... _____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Write a quote from the article that explains or supports this reason.

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How does this quote support the author’s point about pets in the classroom?

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