

Let the Fur Fly! The Benefits of Pets for Kids

By Krista Matthews, Adult and Adolescent Therapist



Everyone knows that children love animals. A quick safari through your child's bedroom will remind you just how densely imaginary animals populate the storybooks, movies, music, toys, decor, and clothes of childhood. Most parents agree that having a dog around would help teach our children responsibility and maybe empathy. It has also been discovered that the presence of a pet helps foster a child's emotional, cognitive, social, and physical development.

Here are five reasons to let the fur fly in your home.

Pets Help with Learning

While there are many children who don't struggle with learning, there are also children who find learning challenging. Educators have long known that bringing a pet into the classroom (frequently guinea pigs or rabbit) helps challenged children learn. It is now being discovered that all children can benefit from the

presence of a non-judgmental pal with paws. In one study, children were asked to read in front of a peer, an adult, and a dog. Researchers monitored their stress levels, and found that kids were most relaxed around the animal, not the humans.

Pets Provide Comfort

Animals are a great source of comfort. When children with pets are asked what they did when they felt sad, angry, afraid, lonely or when they had a secret to share, 40% said they went to their pets. Kids who get support from their animal companions were rated by their parents as less anxious and withdrawn. For children to curl up with their pet offers non-judgmental safety.

Pets Encourage Nurturing

We like to believe that nurturing parents raise nurturing children. And there is much truth in that statement. However, nurturing doesn't 'just appear', it is, also, learned by practice. Children need a way

to practice being caregivers when they are young. Research conducted by Dr. Melson tracked how much time kids over age 3 spent actively caring for their pets versus care for or even playing with their younger siblings. Over a 24-hour period, pet-owning kids spent 10.3 minutes in caregiving; those with younger siblings spent only 2.4 minutes.

Nurturing animals can be especially important for boys because taking care of an animal isn't seen as a 'girl' thing like playing house or playing with dolls. By age 8, girls are more likely to be involved than boys in baby care both inside and outside their homes, but when it comes to pet care both genders remain equally involved.

How Pets Build Family Bonds

Pets can help families grow stronger and closer. When children and parents are asked if their pet is truly part of the family, most of them seem surprised and almost offended at the question. The most common response: "Of course they are!"

A pet is often the focus of activities that families can do together. Everyone takes the dog for a walk, or shares in the grooming and feeding, or gets down on the floor and plays (my personal favorite!). There are even benefits from simply watching a cat chase his tail or a fish swim in his tank. Spending time like this offers the wonderful potential of slowing down the hectic pace of modern life and enjoying each other as a family.

Thinking of adopting a furry friend? Here are a few mental health benefits to pet ownership!

* The simple act of petting a dog releases an automatic relaxation response. Humans interacting with dogs have found that petting a dog promoted the release of serotonin, prolactin and oxytocin - all hormones that can play a part in elevating moods.

* Lowers anxiety and helps people relax. Provides comfort.

* Reduces loneliness.

* Increases mental stimulation.

* Assist in recall of memories and help sequence temporal events in people with head injuries or chronic diseases.

* Can provide an escape or a happy distraction



Krista Matthews, MA LPC-S CAADAC CC-S meets with adults and adolescents in New Leaf's Crown Point office.



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Our Mission

New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.

“There Is Indeed Help and Hope...”

By Corky DeBoer, Executive Director



“Life is difficult.”

These are the opening words of M. Scott Peck’s book, *The Road Less Traveled*. Today I was reminded that five months ago, things began to shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has, in one way or another, added layers of stress and hardship upon our family members, friends, co-workers, on our communities, our nation, the world—and yes, if we are truthful, on each one of us. Life is difficult.

On top of the anxiety and losses stemming from COVID-19, our lives, communities and nation have also been impacted by civil unrest, further political polarization, and most recently, the effects of a *derecho* (a new word for me)—as captured by the following headline: “Destructive *derecho*, a line of storms with 100 mph winds, slams Chicago and Midwest.” Life is difficult...

For many, the year 2020 has seemed like one *derecho* after another. The heavy winds of all these external forces have accentuated the stress brought about by the normal “life is difficult” realities. When faced with the storms of life, one tendency can be to ignore or

deny such painful realities. M. Scott Peck highlights this tendency:

“The attempt to avoid legitimate suffering lies at the root of all emotional illness...When we avoid the legitimate suffering that results from dealing with problems, we also avoid the growth that problems demand from us. It is for this reason that...we stop growing, we become stuck. And without healing, the human spirit begins to shrivel.”

A healthier tendency when faced with the storms of life is to seek support. We lean into faith, family, and friends as well as mentors, spiritual guides, and Christian therapists for the compassion and care we need to get us through the storms.

I am truly grateful to see children and people of all ages courageously seeking the support of our skilled Christian therapists. New Leaf has been providing excellent care, support and guidance to our clients for more than 40 years, and the need for our ministry is now as great as ever.

We continue to covet your prayer and financial support, especially as the unemployment and economic stressors of the pandemic may hinder some from reaching out for the professional help that is essential during these unprecedented times:

- Pray that God will provide more Christian therapists to join our team, as the demand for our services increases;
- Pray for the health of our ministry team and their loved ones
- Give generously! Additional monies are needed for our Marty Doot Client Assistance Fund. Each year, \$125,000 - \$150,000 is required to provide therapy services to those who do not have insurance or are unable to pay the portion that insurance does not cover.

Thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of New Leaf Resources. We need you! We are facing a time of unprecedented demand for mental health services from a Christian perspective. Through your prayers and ongoing support, the healing touch of God will help many to become unstuck, to grow and to heal, whereby the human spirit will once again begin to thrive and flourish. Thanks be to God!

Blessings to you and your family from all of us at New Leaf.

In Christ,
Corky DeBoer

Check Out New Leaf’s New Video!

Would you like a deeper look at the individuals whose lives are impacted by New Leaf Resources?

Visit www.NewLeafResources.org to see our new video, spotlighting the lives YOU are changing with your gifts!

Effects of COVID-19 on Children

By Caryn Johnson, Adult and Adolescent Therapist

COVID-19 has affected us all these past months in many different ways. It has exposed us to many life stressors and changes that not only have affected our lives but our children and families. We often think of ways to help us manage everyday life, but few of us know what possible short-term or long-term effects that a pandemic can create, especially on our children. There is a lot of fear of the unknown and we're all left wondering "How long will this pandemic last? What will the future look like?"

Research shows that children and adolescents are experiencing an increase in emotional and mental distress and many parents have reported an increase in emotional and behavioral behaviors. The list of changes in our kids' lives caused by the pandemic is long and includes e-learning, changes in home or school structure, loss of social interaction, fear for their own health or that of family members, and not having access to additional support for kids with special needs. These are not easy times to be a kid.

What are some emotional and behavioral changes you may notice with your child?

Children are not always able to articulate their thoughts and feelings, especially when experiencing stress but behavioral changes may show your child is struggling. Children often show some of these behaviors because they can't address these negative thoughts and feelings. Every child responds to stress in different ways.



Some ways children may show distress:

- Changes in sleep patterns or experiencing nightmares
- Changes in appetite
- Increase in headaches or stomachaches
- Fatigue
- Lack of motivation
- Increased agitation or irritability
- Excessive worry
- Demanding more attention from adults or caregivers
- Increased sadness
- Increased self-isolation or withdrawal from others
- Difficulties with attention and concentration

What are ways parents can support their children?

Stay calm and take care of yourself – children often get their cues on how to react to situations from their parents and caregivers. One way that may help your child is to find a way to maintain your own stress. Children do better when their parents are better. Limit your child's exposure to stories online, through social media and television. It is important to know what your child has seen or heard about

COVID-19. Share age appropriate and factual information with your child.

Communicate – validate and give your child a chance to talk about their thoughts and feelings. If your child has trouble talking about their feelings, encourage them to use coping strategies to help regulate their emotions such as reading, walking, deep breathing or exercise.

Provide routine and structure; children do better when there is a routine in place and it can help provide a sense of safety. Maintain healthy relationships; when time allows, try to make time to do things with your child – Play games, exercise together, read together, go for a walk or bike ride together, go stargazing or camping in your yard. These will help maintain a positive relationship with your child.

Remember that during these stressful and uncertain times, there are several supports available to you. New Leaf's therapists are always here to help you and your family. Call us at (708) 895-7310 to schedule an appointment. Additional resources can also be found at www.newleafresources.org/covid19.cfm.

Who Is New at New Leaf

New Leaf Resources is excited to welcome a few fresh faces to its office staff. **Britney Jackson** and **Angela Simmons** have joined New Leaf as our new Intake Specialists. **Alexis Crenshaw** also came on board as New Leaf's new Account Specialist.

The next time you're in New Leaf's Lansing office or hear a new, cheerful voice over the phone when calling us, please extend a special welcome to them!

New Leaf wishes a fond farewell to Intake Specialists **Francesca Morris** and **Jessica Rhein**.



Caryn Johnson, MA LCPC is a licensed professional counselor who sees clients in New Leaf's Lansing, Illinois office.



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Can You Provide Hope Today?

The coming months, filled with holidays, can be extremely difficult for individuals struggling with depression, anxiety, grief, or relationship issues.

Can you give a gift to help individuals find hope, help, and healing at New Leaf today?



New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling and consultation services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.

