

REMOVES ODOURS INSTANTLY
NOT JUST A COVER UP!
THE ULTIMATE ODOUR ABSORBER
WHEN LITTLE ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

PISS OFF!™



Distributed through Prestige Pet Products (07) 5428 2990
and all fine Pet Stores and Veterinarians
www.camso.com.au

Cats @ Kids

By Brad Kollus

A Special Bond

The attraction children have to pets, including cats, appears strong and universal. Statistics prove this to be true. Roughly 75% of all households with children have pets. Anyone watching a child playing with their cat can see the value of this wonderful interaction. However, the benefit to this relationship is far greater than most of us realise.

Learning to Care

Teaching young children nurturance and fostering empathy are important benefits cat ownership provides. "The idea of learning about nurturing things that are different from you is something that children are not born with and they have to learn," said Dr. Gail Melson, author of *Why The Wild Things Are: Animals In The Lives Of Children*. In the past, children learned nurturance by living in large families, caring for younger siblings or grandparents. "The opportunities today children have to learn about nurturing others increasingly may be coming from the pets in their home," said Dr. Melson.

Many studies have found that pets can help develop children's sense of empathy. One study of 826 four to eight-year-old's found that children with high attachment to their cats or dogs had higher empathy scores than children without pets.



Another study found children with cats or dogs had higher levels of social sensitivity and interpersonal trust.

Some children are learning about nurturance through cats from humane education programs. Partners in Empathy Training (PET) is a humane education program of SAVE, Princeton's Animal Shelter, in Princeton, New Jersey. Currently working with over 100 four to eight-year old's in five schools, the program brings cats and dogs into schools and teaches children a reverence for life and compassion for all living things.

Units of the program include: We All have Feelings, Caring Classrooms, Living Things Depend on Each Other, and Cat and Dog Communication. "We're hoping that we're building empathy. Just seeing things through their eyes and understanding a little bit what it feels like to be an animal," said Program Director Dale Maski.

Do the affects pets have on children's empathy last? "One study of a humane education program found first and fourth grade participants showed more empathy to both animals and humans. The children were followed up a year later after the program had ended and that empathy gain was still there," said Dr. Melson. Another study looked at college students and found that those who grew up with cats or dogs had more concern for animals welfare issues.

Constant Friends

Providing social support in unique ways to both children and adolescents is another important role cats play in their lives. "Because pets are there in the home they are available, they are not on the phone, or busy, or traveling. They are accessible and can provide emotional support. When you need that shoulder to cry on when you need someone who seems to be listening and doesn't need to talk back, just that presence is such an important part of social support. Pets can provide that to children. We already know from hundreds of studies how important that social support is for dealing with stress, even improving recovery after disease, it is just a fundamental human need," said Dr. Melson.

Numerous studies have already proven the social support benefits cats and dogs provide. One study of 725 teenagers found that cat or dog ownership resulted in higher levels of well-being. Another study of 610 children from war ravaged Slovenia and Croatia found that children with cats or dogs had lower levels of Post Traumatic Stress. A study of autistic children found that cats provided companionship and comfort that they couldn't receive from family members. The children also had lower levels of anger and aggression.

Endless Benefits

It turns out the positive effects cats have on children are abundant. In a study of 540 four, six, and eight-year-old's, cats were found to increase pro-social behavior and self-reliance. Another study found that children with cats or dogs were more cooperative and had a more positive attitude toward animals than those without pets. In one study, kindergarten students with higher levels of attachment to their pets had higher levels of self-esteem. Other studies have found pet ownership is positively correlated with self-concept, importance, and social competence, and a National Institutes of Health Panel found that pets provide health benefits for some children.

Dr. Melson says that many studies show that children with higher levels of attachment to their cats or dogs are the ones that obtain the benefits from pet ownership. She also emphasizes that it is important for parents to model positive interactions with pets.

How Important Are Cats to Kids?

Dr. Melson recounts in her book that during a questionnaire for a study she asked elementary school children if they liked their pet as much as a good friend or less than a good friend. To her surprise many children answered "neither." Perplexed by these responses one young child finally explained that he liked his pet more than his good friends. It seems that a cat is often a child's best friend.