

Pets And People

How To Support Your Pet's Mental Health This Summer

by Darris Cooper, CPDT-KA, FFCP

(NAPS)—As pet parents start to fill their summer agendas with outdoor adventures, travel and social gatherings, it's important for them to consider how plans will affect their pets' mental health. Stress and anxiety in pets can be triggered by both environmental changes, such as new places, people and routines, and situational changes, like less time at home or more time alone.

During May, Mental Health Awareness Month, and beyond, it's important to care for your pet's mental health, as one of the five dimensions of Petco's Whole Health philosophy. Here are a few things to keep in mind to support your pet's health and wellness as you make plans for the summer ahead:

Outdoor Activities

As the weather warms up, pets and pet parents will spend more time outdoors at parks, beaches and trails. If you're bringing your dog to a new place for the first time, especially one that will involve interacting with new dogs, consider a few things you can do in advance to make it a more positive and safe experience for all. Pet parents can enroll in a positive reinforcement-based dog training program to equip themselves with the tools and skills needed to help encourage desired and appropriate behaviors. Other mental health solutions—such as anxiety vests, calming chews and boredom-fighting toys—can help pets to feel more at ease. Be aware of the common signs and symptoms of pet anxiety, including accidents, diarrhea or vomiting, excessive barking, destructive behavior and aggression. Pet parents should consult with a trusted veterinarian first to rule out any underlying health issues.

Travel

Many people will take long-awaited vacations this summer, but that could mean a few new experiences for your pets, especially those adopted within the past two years. Petco offers a Four-Week Guide to Helping Your Pet Deal with a New Routine with actionable steps pet parents can take today to help ease pet separation and social anxiety. Further, Petco's four-week separation anxiety course, available online, was developed with a certified separation anxiety trainer, also known as a CSAT, and walks pet parents through key tips for creating a safe, calming place for pets to help mitigate anxiety, including key training techniques and how to gradually and safely expose pets to more time alone. Rewarding your dog with what



Use positive reinforcement-based dog training methods and mental health solutions like anxiety vests and calming chews to help care for your pets' whole health and wellness.

they find reinforcing is key, so treats to reward desired behavior will be helpful throughout the process. Through positive reinforcement the goal is to reward behaviors you want to see continue. Pet parents can also access pet sitting, boarding and dog walking services from Rover directly on [petco.com](https://www.petco.com). Members of Petco's Vital Care program, a paid annual membership that makes it easier and more affordable to care for pets' whole health, will receive a one-time discount of \$20 on their booking beginning this spring.

Social Gatherings

Summertime gatherings with friends and family are an exciting part of the season, but it's critical to know your pet's unique personality and triggers if he or she will be tagging along. Be on the lookout for signs of social anxiety—including shaking or trembling, a tucked tail, trying to escape the situation, barking or howling—and make time to introduce your pet to new people and pets based on their comfort level. Remember each dog has individual preferences and pet parents must always advocate for his or her particular needs in all situations. While each dog is unique, proper training and preparation can help make for a happier, healthier and more confident pup. If your dog seems particularly uneasy or if common interventions are ineffective, contact a veterinarian and professional dog trainer for support.

Learn More

For more information, training resources and pet anxiety solutions, visit [petco.com/mentalhealth](https://www.petco.com/mentalhealth).

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