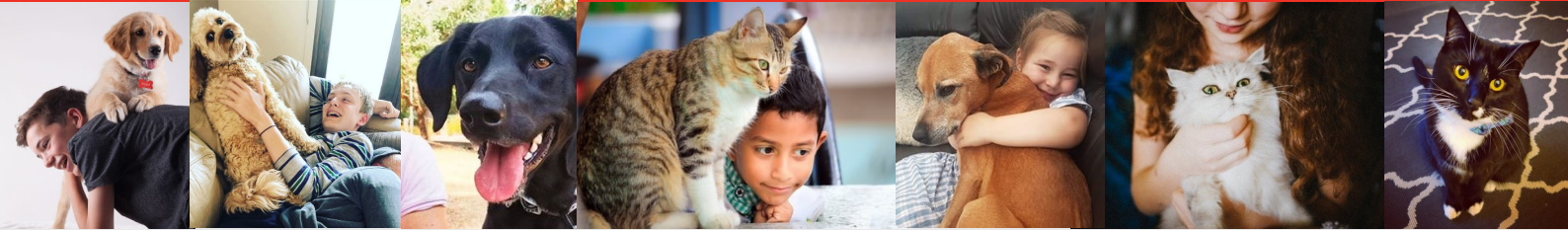


Parents, Pets & Pandemic Survey

Summary of findings

June 2021



Thank you!

The *Parents, Pets & Pandemic* Team extend a big thank you to the many Australian parents who took part in our survey between July and October 2020.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way that most of us work, live and study. Many families have spent more time at home together with their pets, and there has been enormous demand for pet adoptions. We conducted this survey because we wanted to understand:

- How families with children were **spending time with their cats and dogs**, including new pets.
- How **attachment with pets** related to parent and child **wellbeing**, especially mental health.
- The **benefits and challenges** of having children and a cat or dog during the pandemic.

Who took part?

A total of 1,299 parents responded to our survey across Australia.

- 35% responded about their **cat** and 65% responded about their **dog**.
- 78% of respondents were **female** and 22% were **male**.
- Most had two children under 18 years (47%)
- Families were living in **metropolitan** (50%) and **non-metropolitan** (50%) areas, and in all states and territories: VIC (38%), NSW (30%), QLD (13%), WA (7%), SA (5%), ACT (3%), TAS (3%), NT (1%).
- 81% were living in **two-parent** families, 16% in **sole-parent** families, and 3% in **other** family arrangements.



Parents across Australia participated in the survey.

How were families with kids and pets spending time?

Many parents reported changes in how they lived and interacted with their pets during COVID-19.

- 71% of parents and 73% of children were spending **more time** with their cat or dog.
- 58% of dogs were being **walked** 'a bit' or 'a lot' more than before.
- 55% said they were more likely to walk the dog as a **family activity**.
- 63% participated in cat/dog pages or groups on **social media**, and 43% had a specific account for their pet.
- 20% dressed their pet in outfits or costumes.



What about pets and wellbeing?

We asked parents to tell us about their own wellbeing, their child's wellbeing, and their pet's wellbeing.

- 14% of parents were experiencing **significant distress** (e.g. feeling 'nervous', or 'hopeless').
- 23% said their child was feeling '**worried about things**' often or always.
- 46% said they felt at least 'a little' worried about their **pet's emotional wellbeing** (e.g. seems unsettled or anxious).
- 78% of parents said their pet was helpful for their **own mental health** and 80% said their pet was helpful for their **child's mental health**.

What were some of the benefits and challenges for families during 2020?

Families with children and pets described a broad range of experiences during COVID-19.

What was hard...

- Some pets struggled with **anxiety**, especially with the family spending more time at home.
- Many worried about potential **separation anxiety** in the future (for both humans and pets).
- **Costs** of caring for pets (e.g. vet), especially for those with a reduced income.
- **Limited access** to vet care, supplies, training, and opportunities to socialise pets.
- **Juggling** caring for kids and pets, working from home, and supporting kids to learn at home (especially those with a new or young pet).
- Pets sometimes **disrupted** home learning or work from home.
- Challenging pet **behaviour or interactions** between pets and kids.
- Many families wanted to adopt a **new pet**, but increased demand meant low availability and high costs.

What worked well...

- Pets offered **comfort, companionship and distraction**, especially during 'lockdown'.
- **Love and affection** with pets helped the parents and children to cope (e.g. hugs, pats, cuddles).
- Pets helped families to feel **calmer** and more **relaxed** during a time of change and uncertainty.
- Pets encouraged families to spend **quality time** together, and offered **fun, laughter and humour**.
- Pets helped families to maintain **mental health** and **physical health**.
- Pets provided **structure and routine** and a 'reason to get up' each day.

1 in 5
adopted a new
cat or dog
(since March
2020)

What's next?

Findings from the *Parents, Pets & Pandemic* survey will be used to:

- Highlight the **experiences** of parents with children and pets during the pandemic.
- Understand how we can **best support** parents, as restrictions and changes to work start to settle.
- **Share this evidence** with other researchers, clinicians or government agencies.

The research team

Ethics approval for this study was granted by La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee (HEC20251).

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