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Popular Article

## Differences in boys' and girls' attachment to pets in early-mid adolescence

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### *Abstract*

Human-animal interactions positively impact health at every life stage. Research demonstrates the positive influence of human-animal interaction (HAI), including pet ownership and animal-assisted therapy, on a child's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Science also supports the integration of companion animals in children's education. Attachment to pets can promote healthy social development, social competence, increased social interaction, improved social communication, and social play in children.

**Keywords:** adolescence, age, companion animals, attachment, caring relationship

### **Introduction**

Attachment refers to the inborn ability to form bonds of affection and love toward others and plays a significant role in infancy and later in life. Infants seek proximity, physical contact, and emotional connection with main caregivers for psychological, emotional, and physical support and protection. Studies reveal that the mere presence of a family pet during childhood can increase emotional expression and control in children,<sup>[1]</sup> and research supports that even brief interactions with dogs can lower stress levels in children.<sup>[2]</sup> Children and pets “develop strong bonds” as they often grow up together and share formative experiences.<sup>[3]</sup> Pets are often an emotional comfort, a confidant, and belief that someone that loves them unconditionally<sup>[3]</sup> for adolescents.

### **Emotional and cognitive development**

Children are emotionally expressive towards their pets and are strongly connected to them, often reporting them as one of the most important figures in their lives, which leads to improved emotional understanding and expression. Opportunity for a child to care for a dependent provide a significant impact on a child's development; this instinct property aids to be mercy and kind to all throughout life and also fulfils the child's need to feel important and needed, and to have a purpose<sup>[4]</sup> A child feels when they have successfully cared for a pet develops their sense of caring leads to friendly attachment to family members in adolescence to throughout life.

Girls often express their emotions more openly and may form deep emotional bonds with their pets, viewing them as companions or even confidants. Boys might be more reserved in expressing their emotions but can still form strong attachments to their pets.

### **Educational enhancements**

Companion animals can help children learn to express and understand non-verbal communication and decipher intentions thereby motivating reading performance. Pets are not judgmental, they do not laugh, criticize, and allow children to read at their own pace; increases their motivation to read by acting as natural incentives. When students are given a tough assignment to do, pets can help them feel less stressed. The presence of a dog in the classroom is thought to promote the development of independent functioning and a greater self/ non-self-separation, which is the basis of empathy towards other people. Additionally, having classroom dogs can help students learn lessons in empathy, respect, and responsibility as well as improve their attitudes about learning.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Activities with Pets**

Boys may engage in more active play with pets, such as roughhousing or outdoor activities like fetch, which can contribute to bonding through shared experiences. Girls may focus more on nurturing activities like grooming, cuddling, or talking to their pets, fostering a different type of attachment.

### **Pet type**

Boys are more attached to dogs of sporting group / longer breeds and cats of short hair breeds like Siamese , Bombay cat etc. while girls are keener to keep puppies of toy breeds (balls of fur), cats of long hair breeds like Turkish angora, Persian breed etc.as they love to spend time in grooming, brushing to look their pet exceptionally cute/smart and moreover to pet birds especially parakeets, lovebirds, canary birds etc. as their early morning greetings provides a lovely feeling that encourages social interaction.



### Companionship vs. Activities

Girls may seek companionship and emotional support from their pets, valuing the presence of the animal as a comforting presence. Boys might see pets more as playmates or activity partners, appreciating their pets for the fun and excitement they bring.

### Communication Style

Girls often communicate more verbally, sharing their thoughts and feelings with their pets through talking or even reading stories to them. Boys might communicate more through actions, such as playing games or engaging in physical activities with their pets.

### Attachment Style

Research suggests that girls may exhibit a more secure attachment style with their pets, seeking comfort and support from them in times of stress or uncertainty. Boys might display a similar attachment but may also demonstrate a greater sense of independence, relying less on their pets for emotional support.

### Conclusion

Attachments can differ significantly depending on a person's personality, family dynamics, cultural influences, and the bond between the child and their pet. These distinctions are not always present. Ultimately, gender differences aside, boys and girls can have close, meaningful relationships with their animal friends. Pets' undoubtedly aids in minimizing stress, surpassing depression and thereby enriches life with feelings of joy, happiness and complete hood.

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