

Connected Pets

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Forming a Healthy Social Attachment and Communication.

If you've ever had a rich relationship with an animal who just seemed to be on your same wavelength, you know what it's like to communicate with a "connected" pet.

We've all seen animals who were so in tune that they seem to read their humans' mind. Connected attachment means that an animal and human are in harmony with one other. Being in harmony with your pet is one of the most fulfilling feelings a pet owner can ever hope to have. When the connected handler gives a cue – even the most subtle shift in weight – the connected animal responds. But it's not just one way. The handler also responds when the animal gives a cue, because she is responsive and sensitive to what the animal has to say. There is a mutual level of understanding and trust.

Healthy relationships are give and take, listen and speak, ask and comply.

It isn't about dominating and submitting. Both parties have the ability to express a need or a question and have it answered. It doesn't mean that you spoil your pet; it means you're able to understand the animal's request and respond with an answer. The most distinctive feature of a healthy, connected relationship is *open lines of communication* that foster a cooperative and mutually beneficial kinship.

Not all animal-owner relationships are healthy.

They range from merely co-existing with no real attachment at all, to being totally co-dependent, finding it difficult to cope with separation. The goal is balance: a pet who is comfortable being alone, yet dependent enough to look to you for leadership and actively seek your approval, affection and attention.

So how does the attachment evolve?

Initially, the first-time pet owner's responses may be a bit strained and not always what the animal needs. The new pet may have no clue how, or that any attempts to communicate with this new human would work if he tried. But a few weeks or months into pet-parenting, their relationship becomes more natural and harmonious. Although the pet-owner is typically leading, the pet also plays a role. Both humans and pets become better at reading cues and communicating their needs, especially in secure, mutually supportive and attuned relationships. This is how animals learn to tell us they need to go outside or that their water dish is empty - because it has become apparent that the human is listening, understands and will respond.

- ❖ As a new pet owner, you're learning to anticipate your pet's needs. A certain facial expression or perked ears predicts a full bladder. You respond to "the look," anticipating what the pet needs even before she begins to circle and look for a spot to eliminate. You're beginning to learn your dog's language.
- ❖ As time passes, your responses become more natural; they flow intuitively. Instead of making a science out of your newfound communication and going through mental gymnastics (Will I spoil her?)





Is she manipulating me?), you naturally act and feel right about your response. You're becoming attached.

- ❖ Because the pet and owner give each other feedback that their attempts at communication are appreciated, they enjoy each other more. A bond is formed. Connected animals are more likely to remain in their homes; connected owners are more apt to be patient through the challenging times.

Being a connected trainer is like responsive parenting.

By becoming sensitive to the cues of your pet, you learn to read your animal's level of need. Because your pet trusts that her needs will be met and her language listened to, she trusts in her own ability to give cues. As a result, the animal becomes a better cue-giver, owners become better cue-readers and the whole pet-owner communication network becomes easier. The better you know your pet, the more your pet trusts you, and the easier and more effective discipline will be.

Can you build a connection in a pet who is disconnected?

The best chance for staying connected later on is to get connected early. There's a prime socialization window where forming interspecies communication is easiest and sets the stage for a strong bond: for dogs it's between 3 and 12 weeks, the most important between 7 and 12 weeks. Between 10-16 weeks, your puppy is learning about where he fits in the pack, becoming aware of who is the leader. If he misses the opportunity to form a bond with humans during this time, it will be more difficult and may never develop the depth it could have, but you can show a disconnected dog that you are listening and help him learn to communicate with you. Like learning a foreign language, young children are able to learn a new language much more quickly than an adult. A dog who has never known a bond, can learn to trust and enjoy the company of his new person. A person who has never bonded with an animal, may be surprised to find himself head over heels in this newfound interspecies relationship - even an old "dog" can learn a new language!



If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society and SPCA is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.