PET OWNERSHIP AND AGING

Benefits, challenges, opportunities, and concerns of client pet ownership encountered by professionals.

WHAT ARE COMMON BENEFITS?

Companionship is the most common benefit of living with a pet.

Caring for a pet can provide purpose, physical activity, and motivation.

The bond with and love of a pet is a bidirectional and valued relationship.

As companions, pets help alleviate loneliness and provide comfort.

Pets can create connections with other people, including family, friends, and neighbors.

WHAT ARE COMMON CHALLENGES?

People who require assistance often require help with pet care.

Day to day pet care is the most common challenge for older adults.

Daily and veterinary care can be a financial strain and difficult when transportation is limited.

Pet ownership can limit housing options or be a reason to stay in unsafe conditions.

OPPORTUNITIES & CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH PET OWNERS

Asking about pet ownership can have a positive impact.

Talking about pets can quickly build rapport.

The health and wellbeing of a pet often is an important factor in individuals’ decision making and planning.

Pets can be a safety issue for owners as well as professionals entering the home.

Asking about pet ownership can provide a more comprehensive understanding of an individuals’ needs, resources, and behaviors.
SAFETY ISSUES

- The risk of falls is higher for people already at risk of falling.
- Pet waste inside the home can lead to unsanitary conditions, presenting a health risk for those living in and visiting the home.
- Lack of basic pet care can have negative health consequences on pets and people.
- Perpetrators of elder abuse may use pets to further control an older adult.

BUILDING RAPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING

- Understanding the and challenges of pet ownership can uncover other issues and needs such as financial strain, food insecurity, and housing issues.
- Learning about the bond with a pet can uncover resources such as social and emotional support–including from other people.
- The sense of purpose often provided by caring for a pet can also be a central motivator which can be used to motivate other health behaviors and routines.
- Asking about pets shows you care about the person you’re working with.

Professionals who enter homes are more likely to encounter and ask about pet issues.

These issues exist and impact pet owners whether or not they’re encountered or asked about.

PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

- Pets and visiting animals are a way to engage with the environment and other people.
- Pets and visiting animals can elicit memories and begin conversations.
- Pets provide a way to redirect from negative thoughts and focus on the present.
- The physical touch of a pet can be calming.
- People may not be aware that their ability to care for their pet has changed, and they may not ask for help.

PETS AND PLANNING

- Because a pet is often an important relationship, they can be an important and often unstated or overlooked, factor in decision making.
- The level and types of assistance required in pet care transforms/alters with changes in individuals’ physical and cognitive functioning.
- Family and friend caregivers often take on these responsibilities, which can lead to caregiver strain.
- The topic of pets needs to be included in planning discussions.

A POTENTIAL BARRIER TO CARE

- Older adults may refuse needed care to stay with their pet. For example, a person may leave a hospital against medical advice to care for their pet.
- People may delay or reject transitioning from unsafe housing situations to remain with their pet.
- The behavior or housing conditions created by a pet can impede access for professionals to provide routine or emergency services in the home.

Pet waste inside the home can lead to unsanitary conditions, presenting a health risk for those living in and visiting the home.

Perpetrators of elder abuse may use pets to further control an older adult.

The need for assistance with pet care changes along with a person's own changes in functioning and resources.
Benefits, challenges, opportunities, and concerns of client pet ownership encountered by professionals.

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*Companionship is the most common benefit of living with a pet.*

Caring for a pet can provide **purpose**, **physical activity**, and **motivation**.

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As companions, pets help **alleviate loneliness** and provide **comfort**.

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*People who require assistance often require help with pet care.*

Day to day **pet care** is the most common challenge for older adults.

Daily and veterinary care can be a **financial strain** and difficult when **transportation** is limited.

Pet ownership can **limit housing options** or be a reason to stay in unsafe conditions.

**OPPORTUNITIES & CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH PET OWNERS**

*Asking about pet ownership can have a positive impact.*

Talking about pets can quickly build **rapport**.

The health and wellbeing of a pet often is an important factor in individuals’ **decision making** and **planning**.

Pets can be a **safety** issue for owners as well as professionals entering the home.

Asking about pet ownership can provide a more **comprehensive understanding** of an individuals’ needs, resources, and behaviors.

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Challenges, benefits, opportunities, and concerns of caregivers caring for pet owners.

**WHAT ARE COMMON BENEFITS?**

A pet can provide a connection between caregivers and loved ones.

Caregivers may benefit from the happiness and mental wellbeing a pet provides their owners.

A pet can be a way to redirect loved ones from negative thoughts.

The bond with a pet and can have a calming effect.

**WHAT ARE COMMON CHALLENGES?**

People who help pet owners with daily tasks often help in pet care too.

Day to day pet care is the most common challenge for older adults.

Daily and veterinary care can add to the number of tasks caregivers do and add to the time they spend providing care to their loved one.

The topic of pet care can cause conflict with a loved one and assisting with pet care can be a source of strain.

**OPPORTUNITES & CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH CAREGIVERS OF PET OWNERS**

Asking about pet care issues can have a positive impact.

Talking about pets can quickly build rapport.

A loved one’s pet is often an important factor in decision making and planning.

Pets can be a safety concern for owners, caregivers, and professionals entering the home.

A pet may present a barrier to care, caregivers may not be willing or able to help with pet care.

Asking about pet ownership can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the needs, resources, and behaviors of caregivers and their loved ones.
CAREGIVERS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

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SAFETY ISSUES

Pet waste inside the home can lead to unsanitary conditions, presenting a health risk for those living in and visiting the home.

Lack of basic pet care can have negative health consequences on pets and people.

Allergies may prevent caregivers from being able to assist with pet care.

A pet needs to be a good fit for the owner's home and their abilities.

Professionals who enter homes are more likely to encounter and ask about pet issues.

These issues exist and impact pet owners and their caregivers whether or not they’re encountered or asked about.

CAREGIVER STRAIN

- The time, energy, and resources provided in helping with pet care can be a source of stress.
- Disagreements with loved ones about pet care and planning can lead to conflict.
- Caregivers may worry about the health and wellbeing of the pet in addition to that of their loved one.
- All of these can add to the experience of caregiver burden.

BUILDING RAPPORT AND UNDERSTANDING

- Asking about pets shows you care about the person you’re working with.
- Understanding the loved one’s bond with a pet and challenges of pet ownership can uncover other issues and needs such as financial strain, food insecurity, lack of transportation, and housing issues.
- Talking about pet care may uncover a source of caregiver burden, stress, or worry.

PETS IN PLANNING

- Because a pet is often an important relationship for an owner, they can be an important factor in planning discussions.
- Pets can limit housing options, particularly when transitioning from the home to long-term care.
- Caregivers often face the difficult issue of rehoming a pet due to the owner moving or dying.
- Rehoming a pet without consent can have negative consequences on the mental health of the owner and lead to conflict with the caregiver.
- Having a plan in place for a pet in emergency situations, such as hospital admissions or natural disasters, allows for immediate, focused response and can remove worry.
- Planning for a situation removes a potential barrier to receiving needed care.
CAREGIVING FOR AN AGING PET OWNER

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A loved one's pet is often an important factor in **decision making** and **planning**.

Pets can be a **safety** concern for owners, caregivers, and professionals entering the home.

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