

Connecting with Animals in Times of Uncertainty
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Lockdown, quarantine, self-isolation, virtual meetings, and social distancing. These words have entered our daily lexicon with deeper meaning over the past few months. While society around us hopefully continues to return to pre-virus levels of interaction, many of us are still trying to cope with the mental effects of increased stress, anxiety over health and finances, lack of sleep, and disrupted schedules to name just a few. Face masks change the way we read social cues and expressions. Handshakes, high fives, and hugs of greeting are now halted mid impulse or awkwardly expressed. People aren't the only ones feeling the tension or noticing the impact either. Many places long crowded with people are seeing wild animals tentatively exploring. Dogs have been overjoyed to have more time and attention from owners stuck at home only to see them now returning to work a bit at a time. Cats, well cats don't care either way. All of us, though, recognize a profound disconnect between what was and what is.

It has long been established that humans are social creatures. The poet John Donne famously wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself." We crave interaction. We want to be acknowledged, accepted, and affirmed. Our fascination with what our minds will do when separated from others has been expressed in stories for millennia, books for centuries, and in film for decades. The benefits of regular communication and mutual expression are well documented. Equally attested are the positive effects of our interactions with our animal companions. Spending quiet time in nature has been shown to reduce the chemicals in the brain related to stress and anxiety. Interacting with pets for care and play boosts mood chemicals in the brain, lowers blood pressure, and can improve breathing and heart rate regularity. How do we make the most of our time with our finned, feathered, furred, scaled, or carapace covered friends? Here are some books from our collection to get you thinking.

For our youngest readers, **Pet This Book** by Jessica Young & Daniel Wiseman (**Picture Book Young**) provides an interactive experience allowing them to take care of various animals in the book from feeding to grooming to play. The rhyming words add to the fun of the pictures.

In **A Dragon's Guide to the Care and Feeding of Humans** by Laurence Yep & Joanne Ryder (**Junior Fiction Yep**), 10 year old Winnie, living in San Francisco, finds herself suddenly taken in as a pet by the refined Miss Drake, a dragon living in San Francisco's hidden magical spaces. As Miss Drake learns the ins and outs of caring for a human, Winnie begins to find the benefits of having a friend. When Winnie's notebook of sketches takes on a magic of its own, Miss Drake and Winnie's growing bonds are tested.

Mutual Rescue by Carol Novello (**636.0887 Novello**) shares over a dozen true stories of how adopting a homeless animal helped rescue the person adopting as much as the animal in need. Research on the benefits of animal interaction is shared along with each

true story that helped people overcome grief, build trust, recover from illness, find purpose and more.

Strays: a Lost Cat, a Homeless Man, and Their Journey Across America by Britt Collins (**921 King**), tells the true story of Michael King, a homeless man in Portland, Oregon struggling with depression and alcoholism. After a chance meeting with a stray injured cat, Michael begins to find purpose to his life as he takes on the responsibility of caring for the cat he names Tabor. Their physical and emotional journey is transformative for Michael, but after nurturing such a strong bond, he is faced with a challenge that could take him right back where he started.

Stop in to the library and check out one of these, or one of many others we have, and connect with the animals in your life. Who knows? You may find a better connection with the people around you too.