

Recession Anxiety Believed Spreading to Dogs

Experts say owners' glum faces are to blame, and offer tips to calm pets.

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Dog owners feeling anxious over news of the deepening recession might be making their four-legged friends blue. Recent animal behavior research seems to suggest that cats and dogs may be picking up on the recession fears that their owners experience as stock prices tumble and unemployment figures soar.

For example, a recent University of Florida study offered evidence that dogs are more perceptive of human conduct than previously understood. Other research has described humanlike cognitive and emotional characteristics in pets, such as dogs' ability to read body language and sense fear in humans.

People who walk around with slumped shoulders and glum faces can pass along their stressed-out mood to the cat or dog, according to researchers. Some veterinarians specialized in animal behavior warn against causing animals emotional stress because that can trigger physical health problems.

Maintaining your pet's routine is key. Walking in the park, having them sit in your lap while you're watching TV, even visiting the vet for periodic checkups and shots should be continued in order to provide a reassuring sense of stability despite the instability, experts recommend.

Other tips for keeping pets from feeling insecure include the following. Exercise. Letting your pet romp more often can serve as a major stress reliever — for both of you, said Dr. Jennifer Adler, internal medicine specialist at the Center for Animal Referral and Emergency Services in Langhorne, Pa. Don't let your treat cupboard go bare. Keep a supply of wholesome comfort foods. For dogs, these might include all-natural biscuits and pesticide-free carrots or other safe vegetables. Be mindful of your voice. It's easy to come across as a basket case practically every time you open your mouth to lament the banking crisis or some other aspect of the recession. Use care in the tone and tenor you take during such conversations while pets are within earshot. Give flowers. Some naturopaths assert that aromatic exposure to certain fragrant blooms, such as olive blossom and the Star of Bethlehem flower, can sooth a traumatized canine.