

# GOING TO THE DOGS

How pets can help with ADHD and ASD



By Fintan O'Regan



Behaviour for Learning

"Get out of my face, it's not fair and you don't understand me at all"



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There have been a number of significant heroes and heroines throughout this pandemic, certainly those working in the health and other public sectors, but also let's remember the dogs.

Walked often multiple times by different family members during the daily period of exercise, never complaining, forever willing they helped to lift the gloom and doom across the nation.

In the majority of cases dogs improve the mood of all around them as they are generally the positive and optimistic of creatures. Consider a dog's attitude to a walk when it's a sunny day... tail wagging as if to say "it's great" and if it's a wet and windy day ..... tail still wagging and still saying "it's great"..... If the walk is on a Monday "it's great" and if it's on Tuesday well then "it's great"..... It's always "great."

It will not always be possible to have a dog in your life for many reasons, including location, supervision, cost, health and personal choice, but they have not achieved the accolade as "man's best friend" for nothing.

Over the years, in working in the field of behaviour, I have been an advocate for the use of dogs both in schools, and with families with children with ADHD and ASD. Using animals for therapy has become more popular and a number of schools have dogs regularly on site to help support some of the sensory, learning and behavioural needs of their students.

There is also a book written by the author Kathy Hoopman called "*All dogs have ADHD*" part due to traits of hyperactivity and impulsivity which she believes can be compared to their human counterparts.

However, she may instead have called it "*That dogs are great for children and young persons with ADHD.*"



There are a number of reasons for this, including that dogs are significantly able to support and relieve the symptoms of individuals with ADHD by helping with the following:

- Providing consistency
- Offering a distraction
- Requiring routines and schedules
- Providing an outlet for extra energy
- Encouraging outdoor time
- Increasing serotonin and dopamine levels in the body
- Minimizing the sense of isolation and loneliness
- Being completely non-judgmental and providing unconditional love
- Making social situations less stressful
- Giving the owner something positive to look forward to



In summarising these points, the exercise and playtime that a dog needs, provides a good outlet for extra energy. As dogs need a routine, this can help an individual with ADHD work on their organisation and time management skills.

Stroking a dog, or any other physical contact, minimizes stress and anxiety. Dogs are a great ice-breaker when meeting new people, therefore helping social skills, whilst hopefully developing aspects of caring and empathy for others.

So there you have it, dogs are great. Now all you have to do is decide the breed and go through the trials and tribulations of puppy training.

And good luck with that.

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