



This tool was created by one of our senior clinical team members, Kate McPhee, Learning & Organisational Development Consultant at AccessEAP.

When thinking about managing your people's stress, there are the obvious management strategies that come to mind – resources management, work flexibility and good communication. What is perhaps not as well-known is the positive impact that pets can have on employees in their workplace. As many states in Australia and New Zealand have differing levels of lockdown, these strategies can be adopted now if you are out and planned for those of us still in it. Stress management and hopeful plans for the future are really needed right now. Of course, every person reading this has a different experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, and some readers may have adjusted well to lockdown, whereas others may not have, and others will have had little experience with lockdowns.



Given where many of us may or may not be at – we can all agree that we experience stress. The research is overwhelming when it comes to pets and stress – those that have a pet feel less stress - patting a pet, watching fish in a tank or listening to a bird all help to relax and increase mindfulness. Pets, and in our organisation, particularly dogs, provide companionship and help to reduce loneliness. Dogs have often been referred to by medical professionals as walking antidepressants¹, so a very cheap and effective way to stay healthy is to walk with a dog.

When thinking about the workplace and how it will look post-COVID, perhaps today, we can turn our spotlight to creating a pet-friendly space. Many leaders ask why they would want to have pets (in all their messy glory) running free around the office? The simple answer is that the employee who brings their pet is more focussed, appears more comfortable and often works longer hours². Win, win.

The longer answer is that it is a novelty and a reason to come into the office. In a post COVID world where it may be some office members electing to stay at home (voluntarily) and continue working – this can be an incentive to encourage your people and ease their concerns about the return to the office. It will help rebuild the energy in your office and reconnect your people and teams. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Australia has become one of the highest countries of pet ownership and this spiked in about Spring of 2020. Most Australian workplaces are not pet friendly and with most pets being used to people around in their houses while we all worked at home – you can see that there is going to be some separation anxiety on both sides in the coming months. A recent study showed that some employees would change jobs if it meant taking their pets to work at least some of the time. Further studies suggest that a pet-friendly workplace can reduce some of the risks of sitting and inactivity as owners are forced to get up and go outside with their pets.

Having pets in the office is no easy decision – there are both pros and cons of both sides. Like owning a pet, having pets in the office requires a lot of changes and many points of view will need to be considered. Our suggestion would be that you trial it out and get feedback from your people to see how they like it and adapt your pet policy accordingly. If you need some suggestions on starting this conversation, please contact our Manager Support Hotline on 1800 818 728. We are here to help. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact AccessEAP on **1800 818 728**.

¹ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/mood-boosting-power-of-dogs.html>

² <https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/6-business-reasons-why-pets-should-be-allowed-at-work.html>

