



The Pet Parent's Back-to-Work Guide

Preparing Your Dog or Cat for a Healthy Transition in Routine

PRESENTED BY

GreatPetCare.com

PET LIVING
WITH
Kristen Levine

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I wrote this guidebook to help pet parents= and their furry family members adjust to life after COVID-19 quarantines. Follow this advice from experts to reduce pet stress and anxiety.

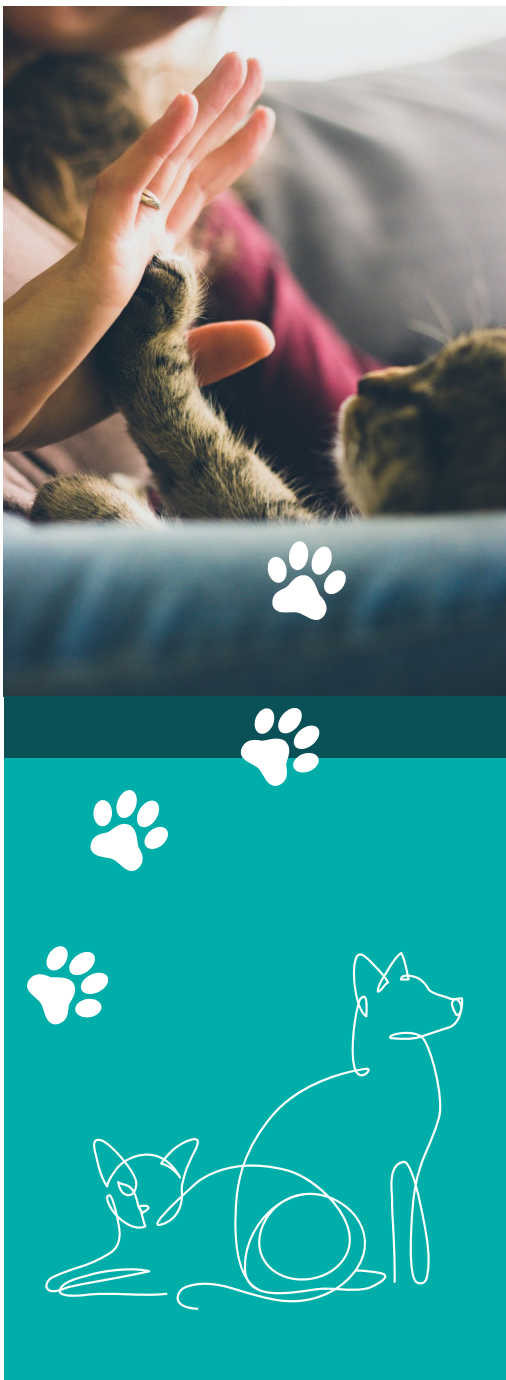
- Kristen Levine



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Introduction



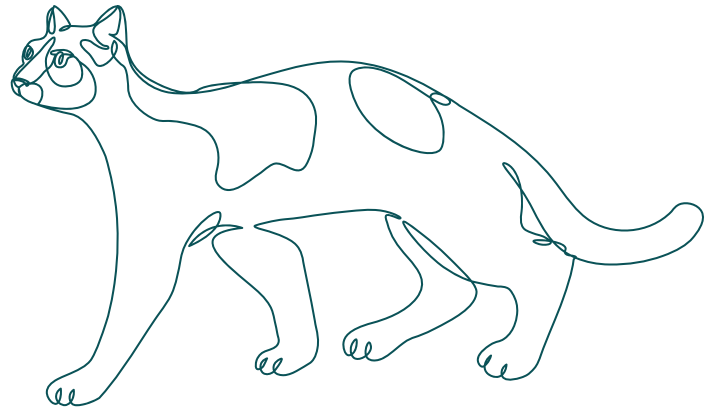
The attachment we have to our pets is undeniable. And—as it turns out—that connection is even important for our health, particularly during social distancing or isolation.

According to [a survey](#) from HABRI and Mars Petcare, 80 percent of pet owners say their pet makes them feel less lonely. And no doubt the reason why, in some areas, fostering rates [are up nearly 70 percent](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent months, we've all needed the benefits of the human-animal bond like never before. [The CDC](#) reports that pets help reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure, decrease cholesterol, motivate us to exercise, and make us laugh.

It's no wonder an estimated [63 million](#) American households have a dog and [43 million](#) have a cat. These statistics do not yet include the countless number of pets that have been fostered or adopted during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Challenge: Routine Disruptions as Pet Parents Go Back to Work



In recent months, our staying at home has created a new routine for our dogs and cats—one they’ve likely adjusted to by now. However, as many of us start the transition back to working outside the home, or even leaving the home more frequently for normal errands or appointments, our pets’ routines will once again be shaken.

What’s good for business will surely pose challenges for all the pets who’ve been enjoying (or enduring, depending on their purr-spective) our 24/7 presence at home. They’ll have to adjust to day-to-day changes in routine that could result in fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS). And those conditions sometimes lead to problematic or unhealthy behavior changes.

Sudden routine changes may lead pets to start whining, vocalizing excessively, inappropriate elimination, destroying property, or harming themselves. In more serious cases, this sudden change could make them more susceptible to separation anxiety.

This guide is intended to help you slowly and successfully transition your pet to a new routine.

The Expert Back to Work Guide for Dog Parents

Home is Where the Dog Is

Although staying at home has, understandably, left more than a few dog parents feeling a bit stir crazy, their canine friends may view things a little differently.

For many dogs, having their parents at home 24/7 is a dream come true. It means more of the best things in their doggy lives—more walks, more treats, more puppy talk, and more time spent in the company of their favorite humans. But the benefits go both ways.

The human-animal bond is a proven stress reliever and can decrease your blood pressure and heart rate. And, should you get sick, you may be interested to know that people with pets [tend to recover from illness faster](#) than people who don't have pets.

Life with a dog does a world of good for our mental and emotional well-being, especially at a time when social interactions outside the immediate family are largely limited to videoconferencing.



Dogs Provide Comfort and Purpose

Pet parent, Amanda Joy, says her dog, Buster, has been like her shadow. She adds, "I don't know how I'll survive without a million kisses a day!"

A dog is a constant companion, and it doesn't hurt that they're also blissfully oblivious to the current world situation. Your dog will never bombard you with depressing news around the dinner table.

If you're craving physical contact, they're more than happy to let you pet them to your heart's content. And, even though hugs [may not be their favorite thing in the world](#) they'll probably even tolerate a squeeze or two if it makes you feel better.

Dogs can also literally be your reason for getting out of bed and out of your pajamas. They need you to feed them at a regular time, to take them for their daily walks, and to maintain their regular routines.

And the sense of purpose and normality that those simple tasks provide can be oddly comforting when so many other aspects of life seem out of your control. Not to mention that the exercise and fresh air you get while outside with your dog are great for you too!

Advice for New Dog Parents

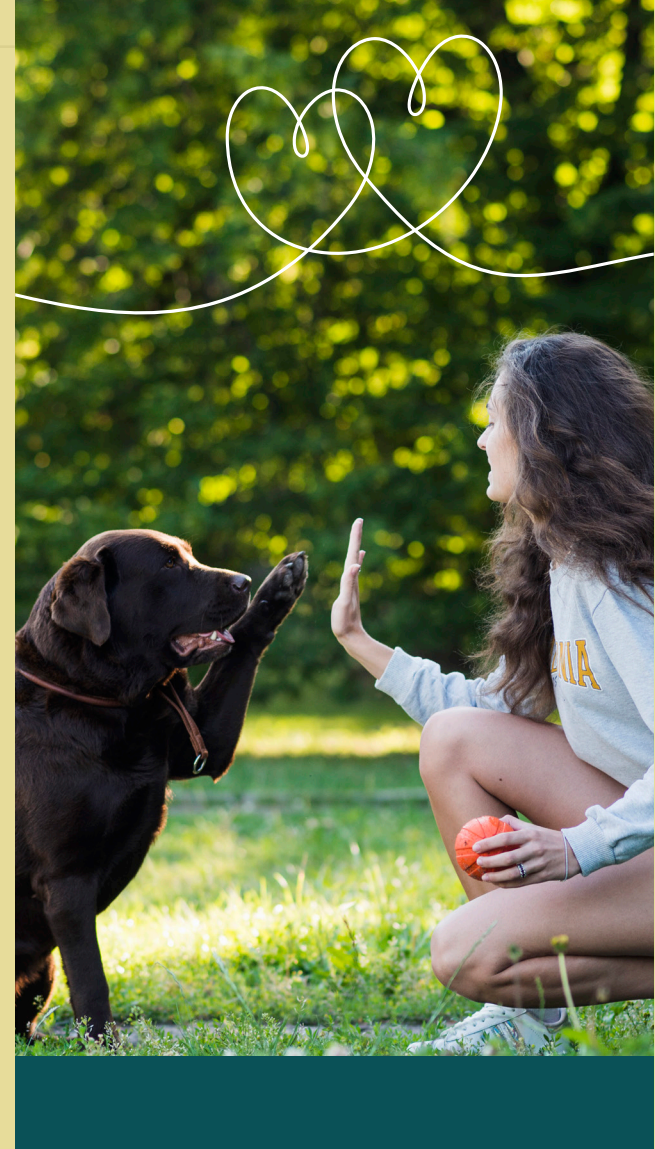
Many gracious hearts have been motivated to take advantage of their time at home by adopting or [fostering a dog](#). In some areas, the ASPCA reports fostering during the pandemic is up by [70 percent](#) over last year.

Sharon Gesser at Peak Lab Rescue in Apex, North Carolina told the [Wall Street Journal](#), “We have had so many offers to foster dogs that we’ve had to stop accepting applications.”

Likewise, many shelters, even breeders report difficulty keeping up with the demand for puppy adoptions.

If you’ve recently adopted a new furry family member, you may have used your newly-found time at home for [training and bonding](#). And you’ve likely found great comfort in giving a forever home to your new furry friend.

Of course, it’s important to remember that a dog is a long-term commitment. When life eventually returns to



a more normal state, those furry friends will continue to provide love and companionship for years to come—and they’ll need the same from their human families. One important consideration, whether you’re new to being a dog parent or not, is knowing how you’ll care for your dog’s medical needs.

Thankfully, most veterinary practices are still open, though most are adopting safety precautions that may change the way they handle your appointments.

If you decide to adopt, it’s important to establish care as soon as possible since wellness visits can ward off potential health issues.

A New Routine Can Be Ruff

Dogs are creatures of habit, and before the pandemic hit, your dog had probably become pretty comfortable with your regular routine. And then you went and changed it on him.

Now, weeks later as you prepare to head back to work, his routine will be changing again. So before we dive into what that means for your dog's wellbeing, let's take a look at how this recent time at home has likely affected him.



Your dog knew what time you usually got up, what time you gave him his breakfast, when you left, and when you got back home. He knew when the mailman came, when the neighbors walked their dog past your house, and when he would get to go on a walk of his own. And then his routine became totally disrupted.

As much as he's been enjoying all of the extra time with his family, he may not quite know what to make of this new, seemingly chaotic schedule.

Pet parent, Marc Scarpa, says since he's been home, his dogs have begun asking for their 5:00 p.m. feeding around 2:00 in the afternoon.

In addition to a disrupted schedule, over the past few weeks and months, your dog may have felt your stress. Dogs are super intuitive, and they have [a way of knowing when things are bothering us](#).

Even if you think you've hidden it pretty well, your dog will notice sudden changes in your tone of voice and even your body language. If those changes tell him that you're under stress, he'll likely feel a little anxiety too.

Your dog may also be puzzled by the fact that he's not always the center of your attention during your confinement at home. You may be busy working, helping children with school work, or taking on other responsibilities as a result of changes in your day to day life. Your dog has no way of knowing this and may busy himself coming up with ways to attract your attention.

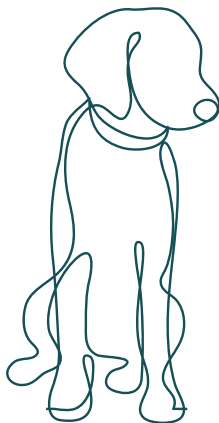
Behavior Changes Due to Anxiety

Some dogs will take a little disruption in stride, while others may become anxious. This anxiety could cause them to display new and unusual behaviors. If you notice your dog doing anything that seems a little out of character, there are a couple of possible explanations.

The first is that it's not really that unusual. Many of us are away from our pets for a good part of the day and we may not see some of their normal quirks. But when we're suddenly together all the time, their oddities become more noticeable. You may observe your dog doing some things that seem a little weird, but chances are your dog is occasionally looking at you and thinking it's paws-ible you've totally lost it.

A second explanation for your dog doing unusual things is something that's known as "[displacement behavior](#)." These behaviors are a response to stress. They may include, but are not limited to:

- Mounting
- Whining
- Over grooming
- Pacing
- Vocalizing
- Paw lifting
- Yawning



If you notice that your altered routine is causing your dog anxiety, you can minimize the stress in his life. Try to keep as many of his daily routines as you can.



Back to Work Game Plan for Dog Parents

Whether your pooch is a new addition to the family or a long-time companion, he's spent the last several weeks getting used to having you around. Now that you're preparing to return to work, it's bound to affect him.

Gila Kurtz, professional dog trainer and co-founder of [Dog is Good](#), shares, "While some [dogs] may have no problem returning to their pre-COVID-19 living arrangements (in fact, some may welcome it), others will be confused, especially because we can't explain the sudden changes. We owe it to our pets to ease them back into the routine they will need to adapt to again."

Even if you're not headed back to work right away, you need to prepare for the day when you won't be there all the time. Veterinary Behaviorist and Veterinary Services Specialist for Ceva Animal Health, Valarie Tynes, remarks, "Prevention is always easier than treatment and it's easier to be proactive while we're at home." She goes on to recommend implementing your dog's new schedule for one to two weeks before you go back to work.



In addition, some dogs are more susceptible to developing [separation anxiety](#), notes Dr. Tynes, “Especially senior dogs or dogs who have been in foster care or shelters.” This real condition can lead to [feelings of terror](#), as well as destructive behavior like destroying furniture or peeing in the house.

You can get ahead of those behaviors and help prevent anxiety and stress in your dog by implementing three important tips.

Tip #1: Re-establish a routine.



While sleeping in and waking up as you please may feel like a pretty comfortable new normal, your dog depends on an established routine to start his day.

Kurtz recommends, “Start getting up at your usual time and carry on with the morning routine just as before.”

Additionally, Dr. Tynes recommends you “start mimicking a schedule that you think you can maintain when you go back to work. For instance, if you can’t do one-hour walks when you go back to work, start taking 10-minute walks.”

Dogs thrive on predictability, so avoid any sudden changes to your routine. Slowly implement the above changes so your dog can grow accustomed to your absence at regular intervals. Kurtz advises starting with establishing this routine two days in a row, then work up to three days, then four days, until it becomes a habit every day of the week.

Tip #2: Create a safe space.



Pet parent, Kimberly Battinelli says, “We got Buster in January when he was three months old. He finally got used to me leaving for work without barking. Now when I leave, all hell breaks loose. It’s going to take some time.”

Your dog, like Kimberly’s, may have become velcroed to you during your time at home. You’ve become his safe space. But now you need to create, or recreate, those safe spaces around your home.

Dr. Tynes recommends that “dogs have a safe place within your home where they feel comfortable resting

alone.” For some dogs, that may mean a crate, a bed, or even a whole room.

The goal is to transition your dog to once again feeling safe while he’s alone in the house.

Tip #3: Practice social distancing from your dog.



As if we ever want to hear that term again! However, as during the pandemic, distancing (gradually) is actually good for your dog.

That doesn’t mean you have to leave him alone for extended periods of time right away. Kurtz recommends going for walks during the day without your dog. And Dr. Tynes adds that simply closing the door and letting your dog be alone for a few minutes will help him become accustomed to not having you around.

She continues, “Work up to longer periods of time, like an hour. Leave him puzzle toys so the dog has something to do and associates being alone with something wonderful.”

Following these tips, over the course of several days to two weeks, your dog will gradually develop a new normal, where you’re not with him 24/7.

Tip #4: Test some calming products and techniques.

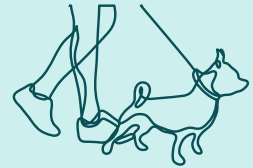


In addition to interactive puzzles and plenty of exercise, your dog may benefit from calming products. Anti-anxiety vests, aromatherapy sets, or [calming oils and treats](#) are designed specifically to help reduce stress in our

canine companions. Additionally, pet parents can try to leave on [DOGTV](#) programming while out of the house or play [soothing Spotify playlists](#) to enhance a dog’s environment.

While these tools and techniques may not work for every dog or every situation, some calming tools can ease anxiety as your pets get used to you being away.

Tip #5: Have a trainer or behaviorist at the ready.



Certain dogs will adjust to you going back to work with little fanfare—especially if you gradually ease the transition and establish new routines. But, for others, separation anxiety can be debilitating and you may need to call in some professional help.

Don’t stress—that’s what dog trainers and dog behaviorists are here for! Connect with an accredited professional ahead of time so that you understand their rates, schedules, and availability for services like virtual training classes or video calls. Knowing you have help if you need it will ease the transition for you and your dog.



Helpful resources for dog parents:

Fear Free Happy Homes: Fear Free Happy Homes is on a mission to prevent and alleviate fear, anxiety, and stress in pets by inspiring and educating the people who care for them. Learn more about how to join their free program at www.fearfreehappyhomes.com.

The Anxious Pet: The Anxious Pet is on a mission to help pets live a happier and more peaceful life by creating veterinarian-formulated calming products for dogs and cats. All products are ethically sourced and rigorously tested to ensure safety and quality. Learn more at www.theanxiouspet.com.

Pet Anxiety Awareness Month: Despite the fact that an estimated 50% of pets suffer from fear, anxiety or stress (FAS), this condition is still not well-known, and pet parents may not know where to turn for help. In partnership with experts, veterinarians, and companies providing meaningful solutions for FAS, June is Pet Anxiety Awareness month. Pet parents can find valuable resources to help them alleviate FAS in their beloved pet at www.petanxietyawareness.com.



The Expert Back to Work Guide for Cat Parents

The “Fur-One-One” On Being at Home with Your Cat

In the past few weeks to months, you’ve likely been staying inside with your cat more than ever before. And while cats have a (sometimes well-deserved) reputation for being natural champions at social distancing, even the most aloof cats truly love the humans they allow to live in their homes.

Cat parent Marissa Segundo says, regarding her stay-at-home time, “My cat has gone through some phases: 1. Annoyed 2. Confused 3. Super lovely (current phase) 4. I’m anticipating a riot.”

If we’re being honest, most of us have felt the same as Marissa’s cat during these past few months.

This prolonged time together may have been a good thing for both you and your cat, but if you haven’t already, you’ll likely soon have to return to work. With that, comes yet another change in your cat’s routine, just when she was getting accustomed to having you around.

With that in mind, it’s important for you to begin preparing your feline family member for these changes in routine now.

Ex-purr-t Tips on Helping Your Cat Adjust to a New Routine

Dr. Liz Bales is a veterinarian with a special interest in feline behavior. The following are her recommendations on how to best prepare your cat as you return to life outside the home.



Tip #1: Implement changes gradually.



According to Dr. Bales, “Cats like to be in charge of their environment.” If they’re going to adjust their schedules, they’ll do it on their terms. Too much change too fast can cause them undue stress.

If staying at home meant a drastic change in environment for your kitty, she likely felt some degree of stress. Now that you’re headed back into the outside world, your cat’s environment is once again shifting.

It’s important to listen to your cat and slowly begin readjusting her to your absence. This is especially important if you fostered or adopted a kitten while staying at home. Be sure to make changes gradually so you can get off on the right paw!

If permitted in your area, try leaving the house at regular intervals during the day, even if only to go for a walk or do an errand. In this way, your cat can slowly adapt to once again having the house to herself.

Tip #2: Use scheduling to help establish routines.



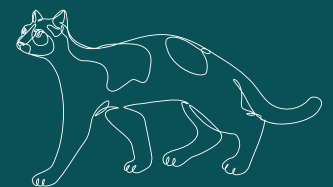
Dr. Bales also suggests implementing a set feeding time and a set playtime that you can maintain when your schedule goes back to normal.

Regular playtime is also essential. Set aside time each day to play with your cat, preferably at an hour when you’ll continue to be available for her. It will not only help you establish a routine together, but will also pro-



vide some much-needed stress relief and bonding time for both of you.

Tip #3: Prepare your cat for independence.



While some cats are purr-fectly content to be on their own, others are paw-ticularly clingy. For these special felines, the transition from you being home to going back to work may be challenging.

In fact, a recent study shows some cats form special bonds with their owners, making them more likely to experience anxiety when they are separated.

Dr. Bales suggests preparing your cat for more independence by putting her in a separate room with their favorite food on a paper plate. Keeping her occupied

for prolonged periods of time with something she can really “sink her teeth into” will provide a positive association with alone time

Tip #4: Cater to your cat’s basic needs.



As a cat parent, you always try to meet your cat’s basic needs (and then some!). However, your opinion of “basic” may differ quite a bit from your cat’s. Dr. Bales advises, “Pay attention to what your cat needs, then try your best to work with them, not against them.”

Perhaps most important on the list is litter box fitness. Your kitty needs a large, clean litter box, and if you have more than one cat, Dr. Bales recommends one box for each cat, plus one more. If your cat is still not using the litter box, there could be a few more reasons why. You can [learn more here](#).

Tip #5: Encourage independent playtime.



Hunting and playing (or “play hunting”) are incredibly important for cats. In fact, cats spend 80 percent of their time hunting for food in nature. That is a lot of hunting time! You can help your feline friend get her paws on prey by using puzzle feeders [like this one](#), rather than bowls, for meal time.

In the past few weeks or months, you may have given in to playtime at your cat’s whim. Now, as you head back to work, she won’t have you at her beck and call and may begin to show signs of loneliness.

However, you can combat this now by establishing a daily routine of independent playtime. A large scratching post your cat can climb and plenty of toys she can use on her own will help keep her occupied.

Tip #6: Connect with your vet.



Lastly, check with your veterinarian’s office to see how they’re handling exams and vaccines during this time. While most practices have remained open during the crisis, some pet parents may have put off routine wellness checks until leaving the house is less of an ordeal. If this is the case for you, be sure to schedule your cat’s checkup as soon as possible. In addition, if your cat is showing signs of [anxiety, fear, or stress \(FAS\)](#) during this time, be sure to consult your veterinarian right away.

Although you might be ready and willing to return to your regular schedule, your cat may not be as excited about the change. It’s important to listen to her needs and gradually introduce her to any variations in her schedule.

When your cat’s needs are met, she’ll be happy, stress-free, and content even if you can’t be with her 24/7.

Helpful resources for cat parents:

Dr. Liz Bales Website: Dr. Liz Bales has 20 years of experience in the pet industry as a veterinarian and pet behavior specialist, with specific emphasis on felines. Her blog contains helpful information on pet ownership, wellness, and behavior. www.doclizbales.com.

Doc and Phoebe: Dr. Liz Bales created the Doc and Phoebe indoor hunting feeder to create an easy, science-based, fun feeding solution for every cat parent. Learn more at www.docandphoebe.com.

Fear Free Happy Homes: Fear Free Happy Homes is on a mission to prevent and alleviate fear, anxiety, and stress in pets by inspiring and educating the people who care for them. Learn more about how to join their free program at www.fearfreehappyhomes.com.

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Back to Work Guide for Parents Missing Their Pets



We've covered a lot about what we can do for our pets when we go back to work, but what about you, as a pet parent?

Gila Kurtz, mentioned earlier, observes, "When crisis hits, we seek comfort and direction. Our pets are always a source of stress and anxiety reduction."

In the previous weeks and months, we've had 24/7 access to some of our greatest stress relievers, and now we'll have to learn to adapt to a new normal without them at our side.

And while some of us may be looking forward to getting back to a faster pace of life, some of us may not have been content with our pre-pandemic situation. Kurtz recognizes that without our pets as

constant companions, this "will create a bigger gap on the 'happiness meter.'"

So how can we adapt to seeing our pets less?

Tip #1: Practice time away from your pet now.



We can use many of the same re-training methods for ourselves that we use for our pets. Spending purposeful time away from our pets, even while we're still home, will help us become accustomed to not having them at our side. We're not suggesting you avoid snuggle sessions altogether, but devote time to your own independence and focus while your pet snoozes or plays independently.

Tip #2: Stay connected.



If you are headed back to work and find yourself experiencing withdrawal from your pet, you can use tools, such as the [Furbo camera](#) and others, to stay digitally connected.

Tip #3: Maintain good habits.



When work is back in full swing, it can be easy to fall back into bad habits that cause stress, anxiety, and depression. And you may find yourself spending far too few precious moments with your pet.



Make sure you spend quality time, bonding with your [cat](#) or your [dog](#) every single day. Time together is about more than just getting the walk done or a few pats on the head.

To fully benefit from the stress relief that the human-animal bond provides, you need to spend time playing, cuddling, patting, and talking to your pet each and every day. Then, you'll truly be living the best life together with your pet.





PET LIVING
WITH
Kristen Levine

About Kristen Levine

As a pet-parenting expert and a pet adoption advocate I love to help translate between pet professionals, veterinarians, brands and pet parents to ensure you can provide your furry loved ones the very best care at all stages of their lives.

I've been insanely passionate about my pets since I was a little girl. Early on, pets were a critically important part of my life. I had a powerful experience that shaped how I forever feel about animals and our relationships with them. I believe we need pets as much as they need us and I believe we owe them the very best care we can afford and provide.

I hope you find this guide helpful in transitioning your beloved pets back to a more "normal" routine in a way that nurtures health and happiness for both of you.



GreatPetCare.com

About Great Pet Care

Great Pet Care is an editorial destination that provides pet parents with practical, medically-sound pet health information, delivered with clarity and kindness. We're a team of pet-industry veterans who have worked for brands including petMD, PetSmart, Petco, and Chewy.com. We're here to make pet care less confusing by providing relatable, vet-reviewed information about pet health and wellness to help you make the best decisions for your four-legged family members. Explore more at www.greatpetcare.com.