

Recession Anxiety Believed Spreading to Cats

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

Posted: Jan. 8, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

Pet 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.

Cats who are anxious because of their owner's depression will feel better if offered more exercise, experts say. 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 an ability of dogs 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 accustomed routines is key. Walks in the park, having them sit in your lap while watching a favorite TV show, even visiting the vet for periodic checkups and shots should be continued to provide a sense of stability despite the instability of recession-plagued finances, experts recommend.

Other advice for keeping pets from feeling insecure: Exercise. Playing with your pet more often can serve as a major stress reliever — for the 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. Make sure you keep a supply of wholesome comfort-foods. For dogs, these might include all-natural biscuits and pesticide-free carrots. For cats, consider organic cheese treats and purest high-altitude-grown catnip leaves.

Moderate 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 pet are within earshot.