

In the Presence of Animals

By Sarah Burke in *Science and Society*



1 As far back as the 1790s, the owners of a senior citizens' home in York, England, **encouraged** patients to spend time with farm animals, believing that this would help their mental state¹ more than the sometimes **harsh** therapies² used on the mentally ill at the time. In recent years, scientists have finally begun to find **proof** that contact with animals can increase a sick person's chance of **survival** and has been shown to lower heart rate, **calm** upset children, and get people to start a conversation.

2 Scientists think that animal companionship³ is **beneficial** because animals are accepting and attentive,⁴ and they don't **criticize** or give orders. Animals also have a **unique** ability to

get people to be more social. Visitors to nursing homes, for example, get more social responses from patients when they come with animal companions, researchers have found.

3 Not only do people seem happier when animals are nearby, but they may also live longer. Studies show that a year after heart **surgery**, survival rates for heart patients were higher for those with pets in their homes than those without pets. **Elderly** people with pets make fewer trips to doctors than those who are without animal companions, possibly because animals lessen **loneliness**. A professor of public health at UCLA says that pet ownership might provide a new form of "low-cost health intervention."⁵

¹ **mental state**: emotional condition

² **therapies**: treatments

³ **companionship**: friendship

⁴ **accepting and attentive**: agreeable and caring

⁵ **intervention**: the act of preventing something undesirable (unwanted)

A Connotations

Some words have **feelings** connected to them depending on how they are used in a sentence. These feelings, or **connotations**, can be **positive** (good or useful) or **negative** (bad or harmful).

Look at each word. Find the word in the reading. Decide whether it has a **Positive** or **Negative** meaning. Check the appropriate box. Discuss your answers with a partner.

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
1. encouraged	☐	☐
2. harsh	☐	☐
3. survival	☐	☐
4. calm	☐	☐
5. beneficial	☐	☐
6. criticize	☐	☐
7. loneliness	☐	☐
8. unique	☐	☐

B Definitions

Find each word in the reading and match it with its meaning.

___ 1. encouraged	a. unpleasant
___ 2. harsh	b. say what faults someone or something has
___ 3. proof	c. an operation by a doctor
___ 4. survival	d. old
___ 5. calm	e. urged someone to do something
___ 6. beneficial	f. act of continuing to live
___ 7. unique	g. unhappy feeling when by oneself
___ 8. elderly	h. special, rare
___ 9. loneliness	i. make relaxed
___ 10. surgery	j. facts
___ 11. criticize	k. positive