

# Pets, not pettiness

**Adjusting to life with a furry friend is tough enough. It's harder when the world beyond still won't acknowledge the bond**

**By Anushree Chatterjee**

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Teething is common among puppies. They will chew on everything, furniture to flip-flops, till you train them to stick to their chew toys.

Pets, they say, are basically babies that never grow up. Adults on the other hand, can be total babies when it comes to recognising a pet as a member of the family. As more Indians welcome a dog or cat into their households, they're grappling with the everyday responsibility of keeping an animal alive and happy. They're also realising how dismissive the world can be towards a pet parent. See how it's creating new complications.

## Special addition

Mumbai vet Dr Malhar Joshi has seen several cases in which families excitedly brought a pet home as a plaything, only to abandon it weeks later, because the animal grew sullen or disruptive from inadequate care.

In Gurugram, one family of three is learning some lessons the hard way.

They adopted Treat, a Maltese pup three months ago, and while they did set up poop mats, a doggy bed, a security cage, chew toys and a vet on call, the mental and emotional adjustment has taken longer. Treat didn't settle in right away. He refused to eat for 30 straight hours for the first two weeks. Then came teething. He has chewed on everything, from furniture to flip-flops. As the primary caregiver, media marketer Niyati Kumar, 46, gets woken up three times before 6.30am on most days. Treat wants food, attention and sometimes just





reassuring pats through the night. “It was a slow realisation that puppies need as much hands-on care as human babies do, and continue to need that as they grow,” she says. “But one has to dive in, exactly as parents of human babies would. You wouldn’t abandon a child over sleepless nights.”

Dr Joshi now counsels every potential pet parent on whether they’re ready for multiple daily walks, interaction, constant care and responsibility for at least the next 10 years. Most families are surprised to learn that big dogs need a room-sized space to themselves and are not a good idea in apartments and small homes.

### **External affairs**

Those that do right by their furry friends find that there remains a disconnect with the rest of the world. Social structures are just not geared to accommodate families with animals.

Chiranjiv Rajan and Srushti Gandhi, 30-year-old chartered accountants in Mumbai, are parents to Pepper, a three-year-old Indie dog. Friends and immediate family welcomed the addition. “But many extended family members are not OK visiting the house,” says Rajan. They struggle to accept that humans share their living spaces with an animal.

New pet parents, then, find that they have to navigate tricky territory. House guests expect an animal to be locked away or leashed in a corner for the duration of their visit. “But it’s as much the animal’s home as it is ours,” argues Utpal Khot, a social-media strategist who fosters animals in need in his Navi Mumbai home.

Khot has encouraged visitors to let down their guard. Sometimes it works. When it doesn’t, guests are reminded that his family – fur, claw, tails and all – comes first.



**New pet parents find that they must navigate tricky territory. House guests, especially older relatives, believe it’s good manners for an animal to be locked away, or leashed. But it’s as much the animal’s home as it is the humans’.**





On Reels, what doesn't go viral is the everyday responsibility of keeping an animal alive and happy. And how casually dismissive the world can be towards a pet parent.

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In other cases, when pet parents decline an invitation to a party of a weekend away because their pet needs to be cared for, there's little empathy.

Ironically, most dismissals come from family members, who see the pet as a problem rather than an elective addition. They question why a pet parent might buy branded pet care instead of feeding an animal leftovers.

Pet parents are done with rolling their eyes at every raised eyebrow. "Why skimp to keep your pet safe, healthy and comfortable?" asks Kumar. "And must pet parents justify spending on someone who gives them so much joy?"

### Official note

Many who've returned to the office after months of clocking in from home say that workplace sensitivity towards the pets is greater. There's less stigma when an employee takes time off to care for an animal.

Mrinalini M Khusape, founder of PawPurrfect, a Mumbai-based pet grooming and behaviour-training service, says many companies now have office pets. "Pets can help create calmer work environment, with less employee friction," she says. "They're great stress-busters. Pets humanise us."

Some still need convincing. When Pune-based hairstylist Warada Bhide, 41, lost her dog, Manku, two years ago, one long-time friend in her WhatsApp group remained apathetic to her grief. The woman would skip past the condolences and move on to banal questions about everyone's weekend plans. That's all it took for Bhide to unfriend her. 🍋