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Canine decline: 64% of dogs that need to be rehomed suffer from behavioural problems.

Should fewer people own one? Many dogs in America are being given antidepressants — and the reason may lie with the humans who are supposed to look after them.

What's happening?

Marcia could not understand what was wrong with her dog. Maisie howled constantly and would not sleep at night. Marcia took her to an **expert** on animal behaviour.

The expert's answer was to give Maisie medicines. A survey found that 83% of US **vets** have given dogs medicines to help with **anxiety**.

Find out more

Why are dogs so upset? **Lockdown** could be one reason. During it, 23 million American families bought or adopted dogs to keep them company. Maisie was one of them.

Lockdown was a time when many humans had big feelings — loneliness, fear and sadness. Dogs watch what humans are doing and are very aware of how their owners are feeling.

Pets bought during lockdown also did not have a chance to meet other humans and dogs. And when their owners went back to work, they were not used to being left alone.

But there are other possible reasons why more owners are looking for expert help. One is that more people are getting dogs from **rescue centres**.

These dogs have often been through hard times, but their new owners may not be able to give them the special care they need.

There are about 78 million dogs in the USA. It may be, though, that many dogs are being given medicines they do not need. One expert suggests that because people have become so worried about human **mental health**, they are seeing problems in animals that do not really exist.

Should fewer people own one?

Some say

Yes! Animals need a lot of care. Most people do not have the time or ability to care for their pet dogs. All countries should have a dog-care test.

Others think

No! People and dogs have lived with each other for a very long time. We need each other. The world would be a sadder place if fewer people owned dogs.

Some people say

"Dogs are such agreeable friends. They ask no questions, they make no criticisms."

George Eliot (1819 – 1880), English novelist

*What do you **think**?*

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you have a dog?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: How long does it take to train a dog?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are offered a dog for your birthday. Think about what you would say.

5. Express

What do others believe? - Which is the best kind of pet? Take it in turns to say.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine you arrive at school and find a dog sitting at your desk. Draw or paint a picture of it.

Glossary

Expert - Someone who knows a lot about a particular subject.

Vets - Short for either veterinarians (animal doctors) or veterans (former soldiers).

Anxiety - A feeling of unease or worry. It can be mild or very severe.

Lockdown - Periods of time when, due to the coronavirus pandemic, people were ordered to stay indoors.

Rescue centres - Places that look after animals without homes and try to find them new owners.

Mental health - The part of your health that has to do with your mind, your thoughts and feelings.