

Stuffed Animals Are the Epitome of Happiness

Imagine that you're camping out in the middle of nowhere. You hear something outside of your tent and wonder what it is. What do you grab first? A flashlight to check out what is happening outside of your tent or your stuffed animal that you brought with you? Checking what's outside of your tent is an okay option, but who knows what peril awaits? However, if you grabbed your stuffed animal, I think that's the better option. You won't be too scared, because you'll have something that is comforting to you — and stuffed animals are made to comfort. Stuffed animals are cute, snuggly, and basically your built-in best friend. I bet you had a stuffed animal when you were younger. You might even still have it. I know I do. If you still have your favorite stuffed animal from when you were a wee little one, would you throw it away? What if it was basically falling apart? Your nostalgia with your stuffed animal would convince you otherwise to not throw them away. The psychological effects on having a stuffed animal are actually very beneficial, and there have been many case studies on this topic. For this reason and more, everyone should have a stuffed animal.

Transitional objects are helpful to anyone. A transitional object, defined by D. W. Winnicott in a 1953 study, is an “inanimate objects that provide comfort, particularly in unfamiliar or distressing situations” (Lai). A teddy bear, for example, could bring comfort to a child who just recently cried. There are many ways to alleviate sadness, however. Maybe you could have bribed the child with ice cream, but a teddy bear could bring more long-lasting comfort than just a scoop of ice cream. In a 2017 study of preschoolers, the children were given a stuffed animal that was pictured doing various activities in a library. After a child was given the stuffed animal, a note was attached to it, instructing the child to read to them. The study

increased the number of children reading to stuffed animals at home. The researchers also found that, a month later, the children were more inclined to read after participating in the program (Lai). In other words, the stuffed animals taught children that reading was fun, and that's a great thing for encouraging kids to read. Build-A-Bear had commissioned a survey with Atomik Researchers, and they found surprising results about having a stuffed animal. Build-A-Bear states that, "Across generations, more than half of all respondents surveyed mentioned they still own a stuffed animal. 40% of respondents sleep with their stuffed animal by their side." Even as adults, many people still own a stuffed animal, which shows that owning a transitional object, such as a stuffed animal, doesn't pose any risk of not having one. Scientific studies are showing the beneficial effects of using stuffed animals.

Stuffed animal robots are being used in scientific studies with beneficial results. A Japanese company produced a therapeutic robot, called PARO (companion robot), and they state that its robot, "allows the documented benefits of animal therapy to be administered to patients in environments such as hospitals and extended care facilities where live animals present treatment or logistical difficulties" ("PARO"). The PARO robot site states that this robotic baby harp seal helps patients relax and improves motivation. Studies with the PARO robot have shown that elderly people who have dementia had a significant decrease of depression (Park). The increase of research on pet robot intervention, or PRI for short, has provided beneficial outcomes to people with neurological or mental disorders (Park). These pet robots are becoming a better treatment than using harsher methods that have always been used to help people with neurological or mental disorders. Technically, if you think about it, these aren't really stuffed animals, but they are plush and do adapt to their surroundings. So, for example, if you have a stuffed animal and it starts to have that comforting smell you always love, it's sort of adapting to

its surroundings. These robotic animals are benefitting scientific research and maybe one day when you are older, these robots could help you, too. Just know you are never too old to have a stuffed animal.

Some might say that having a stuffed animal is childish, but I say who cares? Having stuffed animals has helped many people, so why care about others' opinions? In a study using electroencephalography (EEG), researchers were trying to detect different stress levels, and stress levels were shown to be decreased by hugging a pillow during the testing (Zhang). Even though the people who participated in the study were hugging a pillow, a stuffed animal could still have the same effect. I'm not saying that only hugging a stuffed animal or pillow can make you feel better, but there are many other things, too.

Having stuffed animals helped me when I was younger. Ever since I was a little girl, I had always collected stuffed animals. They've stayed on my bed or have been put away in a container, but I swear there are tons of them around my house. When I was younger, my father gave me a stuffed animal from one of his trips. Even though I was supposed to share that teddy bear with my sister, I took it for myself. The teddy bear was soft and was wearing a baby blue onesie. I always had my teddy bear with me while I slept, and it soothed my nerves every time I was anxious or upset. I have an attachment to all my stuffed animals, even though I don't know where half of them are. Just because I only sleep with a couple of my stuffed animals doesn't mean I can just give away the ones I don't use anymore. Every single one of them has a different story, and they've all been with me throughout my entire life. My emotional attachments with these inanimate objects have helped me be a better person because, even though I can't let them go, I've learned to be more open to people and be a better person in general. Having stuffed animals helps with my sense of security and just makes me happier as a person.

Will you consider having a stuffed animal now? All the beneficial factors are pretty calming to hear. I must say so myself. If my evidence still hasn't convinced you, then there are many other case studies on having a stuffed animal and its psychological effects you can find easily on the Internet. Just try having a stuffed animal for maybe a month, and make it into an experiment if you're into things like that. I think you would be pretty cool if you had a stuffed animal. Just saying!

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