Sleeping with the animals [1]

Dear Alice,

Is it mentally healthy to sleep with pets? I've been sleeping with my cat since childhood, but have recently added my dog to my bed. When I mention it to people, they kind of raise their eyebrows. The cat won't leave, but should I kick out the dog?

Pet-lover

Answer

Dear Pet-lover,

Bark, bark, hiss! It's your bed, so if you don't mind kitty and puppy parking their furry behinds in it at bedtime, there's not a doggone thing wrong with it. Slumbering with dogs and cats doesn't make one unhealthy; in fact, your four-legged company may help you to sleep easier. Pets are proven sources of relaxation for their human friends, and might make people feel safer, warmer, and pleased to provide them with a cozy place to turn in after an exhausting day of grooming and lounging.

Could the eyebrow raisers be teasing you, suggesting with their looks that you're bedding down with Boots and Sparky? you know, getting a little tail? Maybe they think three's a crowd, or conjure up images of you and your pets tucked in, spooning, and snoring. Let their imaginations run wild; we have all different kinds of relationships with animals, and as long as we respect them and are able to relate in healthy ways with people, too, no one need go to the doghouse.

One, two, or ten mammals on the mattress, beware that unknowingly rolling over on Rover or kicking Kitty clear across the room while you're sleeping could injure them, and you if their fight or flight responses cause them to scratch and bite back. If your pets venture outside, you may also be sleeping with ticks, fleas, and other critters not always visible under all that fur. And then there are allergies that can unleash all sorts of reactions when pets' hair and dander are so close? even after they've split for their morning walks.

Alice!

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