

## Parents Are Hard To Raise® S03 Episode 95 Transcript

**Announcer:** [00:00:37] Recent scientific studies have shown that positive emotional benefits adult can bring to our aging parents. But one study reveals those benefits can reach far beyond the emotional joining Diane. This week on Parents Are Hard To Raise® is the lead author of that study gerontologist, Dr. Angela Curl.

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**Diane Berardi:** [00:01:17] Welcome to Parents Are Hard To Raise®. Helping families grow older together without losing their minds. I'm elder care expert Diane Berardi.

[00:01:27] There's just something magical about the bond between humans and animals. An almost instantaneous kinship and fascination with one another. You can see it in their eyes as you watch a child and a puppy or kitten at play. Both social scientists and veterinarians have long since recognized the human animal bond as a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship, one that we now know powerfully influences the health and well-being of both animal and human. This comes as no surprise to this week's special guest. She has made a career out of studying the human animal relationship and its impact on the health and well-being of our aging parents.

[00:02:12] Dr. Angela Curl is an assistant professor at Miami University's Department of Family Science and Social Work. Her research focuses on the productive and social engagement of older adults and its intersection with health. One major focus of her research is studying the benefits of pet ownership for older adults for health and social interactions. She has published 26 articles and made 56 national and international conference presentations. And even more importantly, she has two eight-year-old shiatsu dogs. Dr. Angela Curl, welcome to Parents Are Hard To Raise®.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:02:53] Thank you.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:02:54] Thank you so much for being here. And perhaps the most important question of the day... Tell Us about your dogs.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:03:04] Well, they are twin dogs from the same litter and they are about 10 12 pounds. They're just the perfect size that cuddly and they still have lots of energy but they're very companionable.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:03:18] What are their names the names?

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:03:21] Their names are Bret and Jesse, they received their names from my sister in law, and they get along with each other. They love to be created during the day, which is a bonus for me because I work.

[00:03:33] And yes, we take different turns on who they they prefer. But since there's my husband and I and our daughter two dogs goes a long way to meeting the three people need, quite nicely.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:03:46] Oh my gosh. Well we love... I love talking to anybody about their dogs. So...

[00:03:54] Well, we're here in snow weather so they really love the snow and it's a fun time seeing them play.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:04:00] Oh that's great. Yeah. We're going to be getting some snow ourselves this weekend. So, could you tell us a little about your research.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:04:11] Sure I'd love to. My research came out of this idea of, How can we help people promote health? So, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all adults get at least an hour and a half of moderate physical activity every week. So we thought maybe dogs could help, because of dog walking and the social benefits of seeing other people when you're walking et cetera. So we use a large nationally representative sample of adults over the age of 50 to look at whether owning a dog or dog walking were good for people's health.

[00:04:47] So we had 771 adults total, of which two hundred and seventy one of them had dogs and we had a control group of five hundred who didn't have dogs. That really helps you look at whether dog ownership or dog walking has a benefit.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:05:04] Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:05:05] So... And actually we were then separated out whether or not it was enough to just have a dog or whether you had to walk the dogs and we always compared those against the people who are non-dog owners.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:05:19] OK.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:05:20] And we looked at a variety different health outcomes. We looked at obesity levels, activities of daily living, like being able to bathe, dress, prepare meals, et cetera. The number of doctor visits. How frequently did you get moderate activity physical activity and how much you got that vigorous physical activity, as well as a number of chronic conditions overall, like cancer, arthritis, stroke.

[00:05:48] And just to let the cat out of the bag, [laughing] so to speak, for a dog walking paper. We found that dog walking was associated with lower obesity levels.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:05:59] OK.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:06:00] Fewer problems with limitations of daily living. Fewer doctor visits and more frequent moderate and vigorous exercise. And those are all really important outcomes.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:06:11] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:06:12] So we're really excited about that. But what we found was that there was no difference between those who had a dog but didn't walk them versus the people who were non-dog owners. So it's really important that you walk the dog to get all these health benefits.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:06:27] Right.

[00:06:28] We did a show on encouraging us to get dogs for people's parents, because of the socialization and the exercise and, you know, having a routine, having a friend, you know someone to talk to.

[00:06:44] And we kind of encourage people to maybe adopt you know maybe an older dog or you know someone... Maybe not so much a puppy, I guess, who might... [laughing].

[00:07:02] But it's amazing. You know, what a dog can do for a person; for our parents.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:07:08] Right. It really depends on too much I think the owner is all in. Some people inherit dogs from other people and they like, Yeah we just... We're just taking care of this dog because we feel obligated to. And I don't think there's the same magical connection.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:07:28] OK.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:07:29] That sometimes when you want the pet. And when there's a good fit between the health status of the owner and the health status of the pet, because sometimes older pets can have a lot of health issues...

**Diane Berardi:** [00:07:45] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:07:46] ...that might be difficult for an older person to really address. Like if the pet needs to be picked up all the time, it might be hard.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:07:56] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:07:56] Though, just being careful with that... But there's so many different programs like fostering dogs.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:08:02] OK.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:08:02] I think offers opportunity. Still, parents can be such a different age range, so older adults are this such a large range, and I think that the older one gets, one's parents get, and the more frail they might be, the more I think some of those planning for you know dog ownership and who might get take care of the dogs if it comes to that is important to do.

[00:08:38] But different people have told me that they... It gives a meaning. It does increase the socialization with other people when their dog walking or even when they're not, when they're talking with other people in the store.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:08:55] Right. They're talking about their dog. [laughing]

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:09:00] Right. They're Talking about their dog.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:09:02] You put up fostering. Now what is that? You take a dog in, or... I mean, or you just you know go visit a dog and can take him for a walk, maybe or...

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:09:14] There's different programs. Some shelters have programs where you can volunteer with a shelter and walk dogs, as part of being at the shelter, the dogs who are at the shelter. There's some programs where members of the community can be part of the socialization of dogs.

[00:09:36] For example... Just with students at the university that I'm at. They have the four paws student organization, where they fostered dogs and they, for a year, and they helped them get used to people and then they go into a official service dog training. But it's a it's a pre-step where they learn how to sit and be around other people and not be afraid. And all of that. But what I like about it is, it's a time limited thing. And there's also you know an organization that's behind them. One of the things I think we really need to do is think if we want to promote pet ownership. Then it's helpful to have a support network behind it. Like, I know with my grandmother, she had a car accident and she called and told us she had a car accident, not because she thought we'd want to

know about the car accident, and that she was going to the hospital emergency room...

**Diane Berardi:** [00:10:31] Oh my Gosh.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:10:33] But that she was worried about her dog. And who was going to care for her dog. [laughing]

[00:10:39] If you must have... Anybody can have health incidents. And If you're living alone just having somebody who can be a backup is always a useful thing.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:10:50] Right.

[00:10:52] Was there anything in your research that surprised you?

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:10:59] I was surprised that dog ownership by itself wasn't enough, I thought.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:11:03] Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:11:04] I thought, you know, if somebody... Like if you're pet is relying on you to take care of them, that you would be motivated to maybe take care of yourself more in a different way.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:11:18] OK.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:11:20] And that was my thought was that idea just the social cultural relationship mutual dependence and so... And that if you own a dog there's still a number of things within a household that you might force you to get up, to go get dog food and get dog water and to whatever it is.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:11:43] OK. Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:11:44] That maybe you'd have more activity then you would otherwise think might still well be true but they're there. That's not what the research suggests.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:11:59] Right.

[00:12:00] You see now, people bringing in pets, you know, into the hospital and into nursing homes, into long term care facilities. And a lot of times they have the patients maybe walking to a room you know so I guess that helps a little. You know walking [laughing] at least they're getting up they're walking, they want to go see the dog, that type of thing.

[00:12:23] But I can see where the difference if someone just inherits a pet as opposed to somebody who really wanted a pet and really wanted to you know have this companion and to take care of the dog. You can kind of see the difference.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:12:40] Yeah. And there's a whole range of fascinating research that's going on about the different studies in nursing homes and hospitals about the benefits and under what circumstances. But yeah. It's a fascinating area about who benefits and when and how much and how can we benefit and maximize on that.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:13:00] That's right. And we'll be back talking to Dr. Angela Curl. But first, if you are a woman, or there's a woman in your life, there's something you absolutely need to know.

I want to tell you about my friend Katie. Katie is a nurse and she was attacked on her way home from work. She was totally taken by surprise. And although Katie is only 5 feet tall and 106 pounds she was easily able to drop her 6 foot 4, 250-pound attacker to his knees and get away unharmed.

Katie wasn't just lucky that day. She was prepared.

In her pocketbook, a harmless looking lipstick, which really contained a powerful man stopping aerosol propellant.

It's not like it was in our grandmother's day. Today just going to and from work or to the mall can have tragic consequences. The FBI says a violent crime is committed every 15 seconds in the United States. And a forcible rape happens every five minutes. And chances are when something happens, no one will be around to help.

It looks just like a lipstick. So no one will suspect a thing. Which is important since experts say, getting the jump on your attacker is all about the element of surprise.

Inside this innocent looking lipstick is the same powerful stuff used by police and the military to disarm even the most powerful, armed aggressor. In fact, National Park rangers used the very same formula that's inside this little lipstick to stop two-thousand pound vicious grizzly bears dead in their tracks. It's like carrying a personal bodyguard with you in your purse or your pocket.

Darkness brings danger. Murderers and rapists use darkness to their advantage. We all know what it's like to be walking at night and hear footsteps coming at us from behind. Who's there? If it's somebody bad, will you be protected? Your life may depend on it.

My friend Katie's close call needs to be a wake up call for all of us. Myself included. Pick up a Lipstick Bodyguard and keep it with you always.

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**Announcer:** [00:15:47] It's as simple as that.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:15:49] You're right Dolly. There are so many really cool new ways to listen to our show. It's hard to keep track.

[00:15:56] You can join the one hundred and eighty million listeners on Spotify. You can listen in your car, at the gym, or pretty much anywhere on your smartphone with Apple podcasts and Google podcasts. You could get us an Apple TV, Direct TV, Roku and like Dolly said, you can even ask Alexa to play the show for you.

[00:16:17] It's great, because you don't have to be tied to a radio anymore. You can listen when you

want, where you want, for as long as you want.

[00:16:26] And if you're listening to the show on one of these new ways, please do me a big favor. Please share this new technology. Help someone else learn about the show and show them a new way to listen.

[00:16:40] Angela... We were talking about studies with pets in nursing homes and hospitals. Do you have any... As a gerontologist, do you have any new information on any studies, any recent studies?

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:16:56] Well I can certainly tell you you know even at Cincinnati Children's Hospital I was talking to some people in the hospital there and they have an ongoing study right now in the dental clinic. They have looking at whether or not people do better when they're have a dog versus when they don't and they have this I guess three different studies that are happening right now and it's fascinating.

[00:17:24] One of the challenges, just methodologically, is just disentangling whether or not it's the person with the dog from the dog. So there's always that issue and... But And then looking at what is the mechanism by which people benefit. So, I went to this one conference presentation and I said well maybe they think it's the actual touching of the dog that matters. Or maybe it's the gazing into the eyes of the dog.

[00:17:55] So since then I've been gazing into my dog's eyes more, just on the off chance that that's what's missing. [laughing]

[00:18:03] But they're comparing the dogs that tend to spend more eye contact versus dogs with less eye contact and they're looking at the benefits and concerns for the dogs as well that human animal interactions go both ways. So working dogs do they... How much of a break do they need? In terms of a hospital setting you know. Making sure they have a place to go to the restroom and you know there's a whole variety of different considerations for that. But the people at Children's Hospital told me that it was pretty expensive for them to get trained and certified and using certified animals. So there's a process to go through if you want a really rigorous design.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:18:50] Yeah, you don't think about that. But yeah, obviously that's something, a concern.

[00:18:57] There's a hospital in our area and they bring a pony... Like a little pony. [laughing]

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:19:10] Oh, I love it! I think it's awesome! How many people take ponies in the city? I assume you're in the city.

[00:19:17] Yeah. Yeah. And it's you know, I witnessed it. It's this little kind of pony this white pony and it goes from room to room. And you know you watch the patients and they, they do... They pet, you know they sit and they pet the pony and I mean it's fascinating to watch, you know. And I'm like, oh this pony goes from room to room, I don't know oh I guess. [laughing]

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:19:43] They are given a variety of different animals for animal assisted intervention, most commonly dogs, but they're using cats, they're using even robotics they're investigating them in certain circumstances, like in dementia.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:19:59] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:20:00] To see whether or not robotic animals can have the same health benefits as non robotic animals. I mean as regular animals or other interventions like reminiscence or quilting or something like that.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:20:15] Yeah. I mean, I've watched some dementia patients, you know, with those... I guess their mechanical cats. You know, where they purr and they they're petting them.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:20:27] Yeah.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:20:27] You can see them in their petting them. And you can watch them calm down and you look at their face and you could see they come alive.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:20:38] Yeah. It's really, it can be really soothing, depending on how realistic it is...

**Diane Berardi:** [00:20:43] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:20:43] As everything and... But they have some really high-end pets that are robotic and they are particularly suited for perhaps people with cognitive impairments who might not have the capacity to remember to feed the animals or take them you know clean the litter box or whatever, might not be really able to take care of an animal or not be in a housing situation that allows them, but they still have this pseudo connection with another being.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:21:19] So... The health benefits are the walking.

[00:21:22] Now, did you find in this study that people with dogs, they would walk them more and longer?

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:21:29] We didn't find that. We found that they would... We found that what mattered was that they had a good relationship with their dogs. We had this pet bonding scale. Of course, the people who primarily the people are dog owners said that they were highly bonded with their pet, because you know they're not, they hated dog ownership, perhaps it would get rid of their dog. So that kinda makes sense. [laughing] But they said it's personal connection with them. And what we found which is fascinating we thought to people with dogs would walk faster, longer, whatever. But we didn't find that they would walk faster, because you know, when you're walking a dog, sometimes a dog is stopping to sniff.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:22:19] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:22:20] And sometimes the dog is...

[00:22:24] So there is some of those elements that really surprised us as well. You had asked about things that surprise us. And that was certainly one of them was that they didn't walk faster. But they did walk on average more regularly.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:22:40] OK.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:22:41] And that's something about having it. If you walk your dog you know, your walking rain or shine...

**Diane Berardi:** [00:22:48] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:22:48] Because the dog needs to be walked. So I think that that's something that's really encouraging and if people don't have a dog then finding another means of encouraging that kind of activity like maybe being in a mall walking group or something like that where there's a safe environment and a social environment might be an alternative for people who who aren't able to have a dog or whatever for whatever reason some people have allergies or some people are afraid of dogs.

[00:23:28] Yeah. There are some people aren't dog lovers you know. I don't know why but... [laughing] but there are some people...

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:23:39] Oh, I know. Right?

[00:23:41] There's dog people and there's everybody else. [laughing]

[00:23:44] Right. Exactly.

[00:23:46] I know when I with my last Shepherd. I brought him everywhere. I was like, I can't come unless I can bring him. [laughing] I mean it was just that way.

[00:23:59] But, you know, when I think about it, I had a great relationship with him. You know we bonded and yeah I would... I definitely walked more. You know I would take him for a walk. He loved to go for a walk and I was on... You're you're on a schedule, too. You know, you know...

[00:24:19] So, are there any considerations that we should take into account if we're thinking of getting a dog for ourselves or for our parent?

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:24:31] Well I think it's really important to make sure there's a good match. So like allergy levels, whether or not a dog breed. If you I have known different dogs that were one that was a tiny little dog and the dog owner tripped over the dog and hurt the dog. I mean not that.. So that's one bad example.

[00:24:57] Another person I know had this dog and it was way too big for them and it just dragged them down the street. And so, being careful that there's a good match between the dog of course I'm a shitzu fan, so I think there's a perfect dog, but that's just my bias opinion. [laughing].

[00:25:15] But making sure that the dog likes walking. I knew somebody who said I love this dog. I want to have a dog. I need to have a dog. And then the dog ended up being really hyper and a challenge for her to take care of it. So she went from saying, I will die if I don't have a dog, to... This dog will be the death of me.

[00:25:38] But it was getting her going out walking every day, multiple times a day, so she might still have the health benefit. But it ended up being a bit stressful for her.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:25:48] Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:25:48] Because it was a puppy and it was such high maintenance.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:25:51] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:25:52] So you know just being careful. I then I think it really does pay to have some kind of succession plan if anything happens.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:26:02] Right.

[00:26:03] Who will take care of my pet? I know my grandmother made my mom promise that she would make sure her dog was taking care of when anything happened to her. And so that's what we did. We didn't end up adopting her ourselves. We found this wonderful family that desperately wanted a puppy was a relatively young puppy and just had such a wonderful time and we still see them. And so it's kind of like the gift that keeps giving.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:26:31] Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:26:33] My grandmother was happy till the day she died.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:26:36] Oh that's wonderful.

[00:26:39] Yeah. I heard one story of somebody who was denied getting a dog by the breeder, because he said, You're an older adult. I refuse to sell to you, because... And the person was sixty-two and I was like...

**Diane Berardi:** [00:26:56] Oh my gosh.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:26:56] ...what are you thinking?

**Diane Berardi:** [00:26:58] Yeah.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:26:58] You know... And so I thought that was so tragic when you know people are living to 100.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:27:05] Right.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:27:06] Sometimes. Not always, but sometimes and you know that's a 40... 38 year period of time that somebody might have had to enjoy multiple dogs. We don't say, Don't buy a new car.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:27:20] Exactly. Yeah. Oh my gosh. I never heard of that. That's awful.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:27:24] I know. Yeah. It was my friend's parent that was refused to purchase it.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:27:32] That's awful for the person and the dog.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:27:37] There's so many dogs that are waiting to be adopted through shelters, through a variety of other locations and you know it's a wonderful thing to be able to share and benefit both the dog and the person.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:27:53] Right. You're absolutely right. I encourage people to you know go to a shelter and see. You know because you're helping a dog and it's something beneficial for both of you.

**Dr. Angela Curl:** [00:28:06] Yep. The mutual bond.

**Diane Berardi:** [00:28:08] Yes exactly. Angela thank you so much for being here for being a guest on Parents Are Hard To Raise®. We loved hearing what you had to say.

[00:28:19] Thank you, Diane, so much. I really appreciate the invitation.

[00:28:21] I hope you got something out of this episode... Episode 95. I know I did.

[00:28:28] I love getting your e-mails and questions, so please keep sending them. You can reach me at Diane at Parents Are Hard To Raise® dot org or just click the green button on our home page.

[00:28:37] Parents Are Hard To Raise® is a CounterThink media production. The music used in this broadcast was managed by Cosmo Music, New York, New York.

[00:28:46] Our New York producer is Joshua Green.

[00:28:48] Our broadcast engineer is Well Gambino. And from of our London studios, the melodic voice of our announcer, Miss Dolly D.

[00:28:56] Thank you so much for listening. Till next time... May you forget everything you don't want to remember and remember everything you don't want to forget.

[00:29:06] See you again next week!