



COLLEGE PREP

Parents aren't the only ones who will miss their high-school graduates come fall. The change can be tough on pets, too.

By *Melanie D.G. Kaplan*

WHEN GAIL THOMSSSEN'S NEPHEW TAYLOR—WHO LIVED with her through his high-school years—left for college, the family's foxhound mix, Bruce, took it hard. He'd stare solemnly out the window, apparently waiting for Taylor, his favorite kid, to come back. When Taylor did return during breaks, Bruce was so overjoyed that he'd lose control—all over the floor and Taylor's foot.

While Thomssen, who now lives in Alexandria, learned to insist that Bruce and Taylor hold their reunions outside, she didn't have a solution for their sorrowful partings. Finally last fall, Taylor headed for his junior year at the University of Nebraska, and Bruce was delighted to find out he was going, too.

Most kids, however, can't take their pets to college. And, especially if the one going to school represents the dog or cat's primary relationship, it's best to start making adjustments now. "When kids leave home, often pets grieve in the same way they might if someone passes away," says Dr. E. Kathryn Meyer, who runs the Veterinary Behavior Clinic in Gaithersburg. "The animals have no idea that the person is coming back, or when." Signs of grief include a loss of interest in activities the animal usually enjoys, restlessness,

social withdrawal, and changes in eating or sleeping patterns. Some pets may chew furniture or start relieving themselves in the house. Tough as it can be, experts advise patience, not punishment, while pets adjust.

Anissa Grossman, a board member of the Washington Humane Society, anticipates that her dog, Barth, will struggle when her son moves out of their Spring Valley house for Kings College London: "He's going to go to my son's room a lot. It'll be a shock to his system."

There are steps parents can take to ease the transition. Meyer suggests having other family members slowly take over walking and feeding duties from the college-bound kid. Introducing new tricks will give the animal something fun to focus on, plus training offers a chance for pets to form stronger attachments to other family members. If a dog or cat typically sleeps with the student, have the animal move to another room.

There's always a chance that pet and student will one day reunite permanently, as Bruce and Taylor did. Thomssen was sad to see her hound follow her nephew out of the nest, but she gets twice the kick out of the Snapchat photos Taylor sends of them—both clearly loving college life.

MORE EXPERT TIPS

🐾 Plan a few overnights away for the college student over the summer so the pet becomes accustomed to her absence.

🐾 Animals' sense of smell is stronger than ours. Ask your teen to sleep in a few T-shirts he no longer wants so you can toss them into the pet's bed after he's gone.

🐾 Deploy plenty of the pet's favorite items and activities after the student leaves, says veterinarian E. Kathryn Meyer, such as "new and interesting toys, more walks, longer walks, and walks in new areas."

🐾 Consider enrolling dogs in a training class to give them something new to look forward to.

🐾 Some people FaceTime with their pets. While it's comforting for humans, says vet Katy Nelson of News Channel 8's *The Pet Show With Dr. Katy*, animals don't understand visuals on the screen. They do, however, often seem to enjoy hearing their person's voice.

🐾 If the pet seems exceptionally stressed by the student's absence, talk to your vet about anti-anxiety medications. **W**