



# Special Bonds and Benefits Cats and Children



*Twig*

**By Teri George**

Children with special needs require extra patience, time, and effort to discover what helps them flourish and overcome their challenges. Finding strategies that help with individual struggles, and ways for their children to cope can be difficult for parents of special needs children. The very same can be said for cats with special needs.

Cats with special needs do not have the ability to speak up about their challenges. Thankfully, compassionate caregivers will work to figure out what a cat may be struggling with. These cats may need medications, help eating, have wobbly movements, be blind, be deaf, or struggle with socializing.

Twig, a special needs cat, entered Garfield's Rescue Inc. foster care in March 2021. His physical appearance showed that although only 4 years old, what a tough life he was living until his rescue. His cauliflower ears are the result of him scratching himself for an exceptionally long time due to the discomfort of untreated ear mites. He also had many scratches on his head and back from fleas and possibly encounters with other cats. He was a mild-mannered cat who backed away rather than confront other cats. Twig's wonderful, friendly personality indicated early human care in his life. He received treatment for his physical wounds and lots of socialization to help him trust again. Twig benefitted from his physical and social care and was adopted by a loving family.

There are mutual benefits of children with special needs working with special need cats. The unspoken understanding between the two is awe-inspiring. I have seen special needs cats and children interact flawlessly, as if they truly understood each other from the start. Not all interactions will be that profound or easy, but all of them are worth it. All children can benefit from spending time with animals, and vice versa. For children with challenges, the advantages can be even more profound.

A child with Sensory Processing Disorder may be more inclined to learn to control their force while working with an animal. The soft sensation of the animal's fur, as well as the general concern for the animal provides stimulus. While all children can benefit from learning to handle animals with care

and ease, a child with Sensory Processing Disorder has the possibility to find a special way to overcome challenges or to simply cope with those challenges.

Many children feel alone and misunderstood. It is no secret that the presence of animals can help children, as well as adults, through stressful moments in life. Everyone needs someone to relate to, even if they happen to be furry and four-legged.

Some possible benefits for children working with animals include stress relief, improved social skills, improved moods, higher self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and development of empathy. Animals help children develop skills like time management, responsibility and the importance of schedules.

Many cats benefit from socializing time. You will be making a huge difference in the cat's life and the relationship may make a huge difference in your life!



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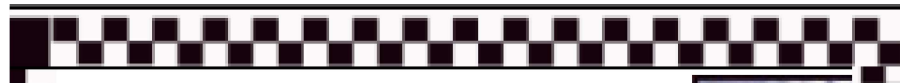
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