

Cat's Pajamas: Pets Find Their Way Into Everyday Expressions

Our dogs and cats certainly brighten our lives, so when I came across a list of common phrases I probably should not have been surprised to see the number of sayings involving pets. The actual words of the phrases are often not to be taken literally; instead they have come to mean something completely different, giving us more colorful ways to express ourselves.



By Bonney Brown

We can talk about the *cat's pajamas* or *cat's meow* to convey the very height of perfection. (Surely, if cats had PJs, they would be cool!)

It's a dog's life (easy life) for *fat cats* (wealthy individuals) and *big dogs* (important people). But even if you are not rich, you could *put on the dog* (behave or dress in a showy manner).

While a *cool cat* would be unflappable, a *scaredy cat* (frightened person) would have the opposite reaction.

Feeling pleased with yourself? You might look like *the cat who swallowed the canary*. Facing a hopeless task? You might as well *herd cats*.

If you are slow to speak, someone might ask if the *cat got your tongue*. On the other hand, if you accidentally let a secret slip, you might be said to *let the cat out of the bag* and that could land you *in the dog house* (in trouble). Rather than bring up a touchy subject, you might be wise to *let sleeping dogs lie*.

The hottest days of summer coincide with the rising of Sirius, the brightest star in the constellation Canis Major, and so came to be called the *dog days*. If it's raining very hard, you could say it's *raining cats and dogs*.

When the cat's away, the mice will play (without supervision people might misbehave) and the whole workplace may *go to the dogs* (standards may really slip). If you put on a *dog and pony show* (a good performance) you might be able to impress your boss and get ahead in this *dog eat dog* (competitive) world.

Feeling *dog tired* (very tired)? Take a *cat nap* (*short nap*). Indulged in a little too much to drink last night? Folk wisdom recommends *a hair of the dog that bit you* (another drink in the morning). Even if you feel *sick as a dog* (very sick) today, remember; *every dog has his day* (a time of influence and power).

Bonney Brown is Co-Founder and President of Humane Network. She created and sustained a 94% communitywide save rate as Executive Director for Nevada Humane Society, which had more than 10,000 annual animal admissions. And she was National No More Homeless Pets Director, COO and Communications Director for Best Friends Animal Society.

