

Give the dog a phone: device could ease pain for lonely mutts

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Inventors hope the DogPhone device could ease separation anxiety suffered by 'pandemic puppies' who became used to human contact during lockdowns.

Does your chihuahua crave a chinwag or the Yorkie want to yak, the greyhound needs to gossip and the corgi loves a chat?

Lonely dogs could soon be able to call their absent owners using a new device invented by animal-tech scientists in Britain and Finland, they said Wednesday.

The DogPhone works when the pet shakes a ball fitted with an accelerometer, which triggers a nearby laptop to make a [video call](#) to the owner's device.

It was invented by the University of Glasgow's Ilyena Hirskyj-Douglas, with help from her labrador Zack, and colleagues from Aalto University in Finland.

After Hirskyj-Douglas showed "lab assistant" Zack how to make a call using the ball, he was given the toy to play with for 16 days.

Despite being hounded with some accidental calls, Zack used the prototype [device](#) to contact his owner and show off his toys.

Hirskyj-Douglas, a specialist in animal-computer interaction, responded by showing the pet her office, a restaurant and a street busker, causing Zack to approach the screen.

"Of course, we can't know for sure that Zack was aware of the [causal link](#) between picking up the [ball](#) and making a call, or even that some of the interactions which seemed accidental were actually unintended on his part," she said.

"However, it's clear that on some occasions he was definitely interested in what he was seeing, and that he displayed some of the same behaviours he shows when we are physically together."

The team hopes the DogPhone, which is undergoing further testing, could help ease separation anxiety suffered by "pandemic puppies" who

became used to constant human contact during lockdowns.

More information: Ilyena Hirskyj-Douglas et al, Forming the Dog Internet, *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* (2021). [DOI: 10.1145/3488539](https://doi.org/10.1145/3488539)

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