

ANIMAL EMOTIONS: DO THEY HAVE THEM?

Written by Shaid
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As “parents” of our pets, most of us believe that we can tell when they are happy or sad and that they also tune into our emotional states and respond to them empathetically.

There is no scientific consensus on emotion in animals, eg what emotions certain species of animals, including humans, feel. Most of the debate is about mammals and birds and since they cannot speak, it is difficult to prove anything. However, animal pain was recognized long ago and resulted in the criminalization of animal cruelty. The story of Koko the gorilla and her pet cats is well-documented. She has cared for several cats over the years and Koko's relationship with *All Ball* was featured in the 1987 book *Koko's Kitten*, which was written by Francine Patterson (Koko's scientist/sign language trainer).

The *Boston Globe* printed a story in July 2007 about a resident cat in the dementia unit of the Steere House Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Providence. When death is near, Oscar nearly always appears at the last hour or so. Yet he shows no special interest in patients who are simply in poor shape, or even patients who may be dying but who still have a few days. Animal behavior experts have no explanation for Oscar's ability to sense imminent death. They theorize that he might detect some subtle change in metabolism -- felines are as sensitive to smells as dogs -- but are stumped as to why he would show interest.

The emotions of cats have also been studied in the lab and it has been shown that cats can learn to manipulate their owners through vocalizations that are similar to the cries of human babies. Some cats learn to add a purr to the cry, which makes it harder for their humans to ignore. Individual cats learn to make these cries when a particular cry elicits a positive response from a human and the cat is more likely to use that cry in the future.

The idea of animal emotions is prominent in Darwin's work with his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*. Willingness to see animals as emotional beings (and humans as having a rationality that can override the emotions) goes back to Ancient Greek philosophy.

Whatever you believe about your pets' abilities to experience emotion and tap into yours, here are some tips for increasing your dog's happiness quotient:

5 Ways to Perk Up Your Dog from the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine.□

Start by cheering yourself up first! Remember, dogs are social animals. So, if you're glum, they're gonna be glum, too, because they reflect your mood. And even if you don't feel happy, fake it! Studies show that forcing yourself to smile and talk in a happy voice tricks your brain into believing you're happy. And your dog reads your mood by the sound of your voice and the smile on your face – just like you read his by his wagging tail.

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Let Fido play with his food. Experts say one of the biggest reasons for doggy depression is boredom. So, next time you leave them at home, make sure they have toys to engage their mind – like a “treat ball”. Basically, a rubber ball with holes in that you pack with kibble. And the bits drop out piece by piece while they’re playing with it.

Another way to boost your mutt’s mood: change your tune. Studies show that cows produce more milk when they listen to country music. Because it helps them stay happy and relaxed. So, try some tunes. There is a list of “music for dogs” CDs at www.tesh.com. You can also try this: Record a tape of your voice or common household noise, and play it when you’re not around. Because hearing familiar sounds is comforting.

Use soothing smells. Certain aromas have an uplifting effect on dogs and humans. So, what’s the best? Vanilla! But instead of using vanilla air freshener – which can be toxic - sprinkle a few drops of vanilla extract on Fifi’s favorite chew toys. And let her chew herself calm.□

Finally, let your pooch loose! Dogs don’t like to be in the house constantly, or only go for walks on concrete. So, once a week, let Rover run free in an off-leash park or a meadow. The exercise will help him stay fit. It’ll also produce the same feel-good brain chemicals that come with human exercise, like endorphins and serotonin.