

# THE EMOTIONAL LIVES OF DOGS

## CANINE CONNECTION WITH HEART

### THE RICH EMOTIONAL LIFE OF DOGS

Dogs experience a wide range and depth of emotions. Their emotional lives are no less rich than ours, just different in some ways. Recent research dispels the belief that dogs experience only the most basic universal emotions of fear, anger, sadness and happiness as primary emotions. Some academics believe that self-consciousness is required to feel pride, love and empathy. Research supports the idea that some animals do have sufficient self-consciousness to experience more than the basic set of primitive emotions. Dogs have been described as capable of compassion, love, jealousy, gratitude and disappointment. All of which require self-reflection. A theory of mind!

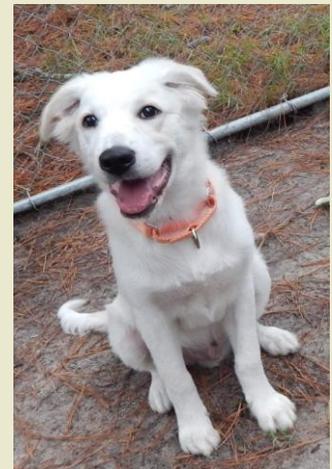
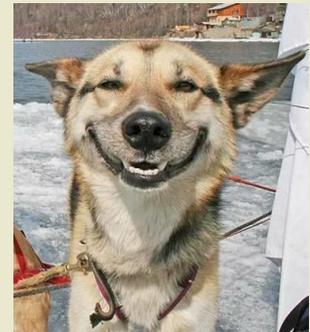


Take the secondary emotion of jealousy. There is good evidence that dogs feel jealous when their owners pay attention to another dog. In one study owners pay attention to another dog or person in the household. The dogs would perform attention seeking behavior. Get in between the person or animal and the owner, bark, whine or growl to get attention.

Guilt is an important emotion for dog owners to understand. Recent experiments support the belief that dogs do not experience the emotion of guilt. Understanding that an action will cause consequences at some point in the future is not part of a dog's mental process. The dog knows that the last time he pooped and his owner was gathered in the same house at the same time things did not go well for him. He has no clue what specifically he did was wrong. For the dog to make the connection between the behavior that is not desired the correction must be made within seconds of the behavior. Punishing a dog for something he has no understanding of will cause them unnecessary stress, emotional pain and harm the bond with one's dog.

No dogs do not plot to get back at you. Please punt that concept down the road along with guilt. Your dog will thank you for it.

### THE MANY FACES OF LOVE!



Based on recent research we now believe that dogs indeed do possess a theory of mind. Theory of mind is that one understands its own mental state and that of another. Theory of mind is the recognition that others have mental states such as intentions and beliefs that are different from one's own.

So, what about empathy? Empathy is the ability to put oneself in another's position, to understand to some degree to experience their thoughts and feelings. I believe empathy and consciousness are one in the same. The word consciousness means awake and aware of what's going on. I do believe that dogs can experience consciousness but it may not be exactly as our mind works.



Dog's emotions may not be as complex and complicated as humans but they live in the moment, a much purer way of expressing their emotions. Most humans are busy ruminating about the past or worrying about the future which doesn't exist. There's little doubt that dog's emotions are part of their minute-by-minute experience. It's actually a more sane way to live life, in the present moment free of agendas and much purer and real in nature.

There's little doubt in most people minds that dogs feel love and give it freely. Unconditional love is one of their most cherished qualities. Thanks to the recent work of several scientists we have gained a great deal of valuable evidence of dogs rich emotional life. Gregory Berns has written a book *How Dogs Love Us*. For the first time dogs were trained to enter a MRI un-sedated and remain still long enough to get a clear image of the brain. Dr Berns initial question asked was do dog's really love us or love us because we feed them hotdogs? The images of the brain revealed that the pleasure center in the brain lit up when the dog smelled their owner's sent vs the sent from someone the dog did not know. This allowed the researchers to gain a greater understanding of what dogs are actually thinking." The conclusion is yes dog's love us. As Gregory Burns sums it up." I believe the right course of action is to assume that dogs have a level of self-awareness and emotion that bears more in common with humans than we had ever anticipated. Dogs are surely our first friends for always"

Where conflict often comes into play is when owners project responsibilities and expectations onto the dog which is not even aware of let alone capable of responding to appropriately. Greater understanding of dog's cognitive abilities can increase our awareness to what your dog may be feeling and secondly be able to read the multiple ways in which dogs express and show their emotions. We can learn much from dogs. They live in a world of simplicity, integrity and generosity of heart. Humans can develop a greater sense of wellbeing and kindness and connection through the rich emotional generosity of the dog! Man's best friend indeed!

#### References that may be of interest.

How Dogs Love Us.	The Genius of Dogs	Chaser	Through a Dogs Eyes
Gregory Berns	Brian Hare Vanessa Woods	John W. Pilley	Jennifer Arnold

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Owner

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