



The Empathy Pawject

Lesson #6: What Makes a Happy Dog?

Lesson Overview

Group Discussion:

In this lesson students will review their understanding of how dogs express themselves as well as how to read a dog's body language and signals. This lesson goes over how to understand a dog's feelings, what situations may make a dog happy, anxious, nervous, excited or bored.

We know how to listen to our friends or family members to understand and try to empathize with them. But, what about a furry family member who cannot speak the same language and uses different ways to communicate? How do we learn to empathize with them?

This lesson includes some examples of things and situations that may make a dog feel happy, excited or loved.

Lesson Materials

- 1) Read page 126-129 of *The Not Bad Animals* by Sophie Corrigan. In this beautifully illustrated children's book Corrigan dispels some myths about animals. On page 126 – 127, she talks about “scary dogs” with their barking and menacing behavior, and then explains how all breeds have the potential to be sweet and kind if provided a caring and loving upbringing. Corrigan makes some extremely important points in a very simple, and child friendly way!
- 2) Chart paper, a whiteboard or a smart board to brainstorm ideas with the students.

Curriculum outcomes:

(from the Alberta Education Program of Studies for Grade 4 Health and Wellness)

- assess how to act as important role models for others (R-4.9)
- recognize that individuals can have a positive and negative influence on the feelings of others (R R-4.1)
- identify and describe ways to provide support to others (R-4.6)

Curriculum outcomes:

(from the Alberta Education Program of Studies for Grade 4 Art)

- Understand that operating from a position of trust sets the stage for building relationships (CHC 9e)



Learning Activity

Brainstorming Session #1:

Have a whole class conversation about what it looks like when we feel certain emotions.

- What do we look like when we feel happy, sad, angry, proud, embarrassed, excited, frustrated or bored?
- What does our body language tell people?
- Do we always have to use words to express how we are feeling or to understand how someone else is feeling?

Move onto dogs or other animals with your students. Have another brainstorming session and ask for suggestions about how we know if a dog is happy or if a dog is sad.

- What are some things that might make a dog happy? What toys? What adventures?

Record their suggestions on a piece of chart paper, they will come in handy in Lesson #7!

Slide Presentation to Review:

- 1) Physical signs your dog is happy or sad. This information was received from:

<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/taking-care-of-your-pet/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/canine-body-language>

Signs of a Happy Dog

There are some clear signs to look for to see if a dog is happy:

- A high and wagging tail.
- Floppy ears: this means that their ears are not flattened against their heads. Their ears are relaxed. Ears that are upright can be a sign of the dog being alert and focused.
- Relaxed body: soft eyes, loose shoulders and a body that is not tense.
- Playful: a dog that feels happy is more likely to feel playful and may leap or jump around. Play “bows”, when a dog stretches out in a bow position, are a sign your dog is feeling playful.
- Learning in: a dog that feels relaxed and comfortable may lean into you to gain your attention.
- Belly up: a dog that shows you their belly is showing you that they trust you and maybe that they’d like a belly rub!



Signs of an Uncomfortable or Worried Dog

Much like reading the body language of a happy dog, a worried or uncomfortable dog will tell you with their body language. Signs to spot include:

- Low or tucked tail: a dog that feels worried, fearful or stressed may tuck its tail between their legs instead of wagging it like a happy dog. Tail wagging is not only associated with happy dogs though! Watch the way a dog wags its tail. Is it wagging it high and fast? It's likely very happy! Is it wagging it slow or low? That may mean indicate a feeling of insecurity.
- Tense body: they may hold their heads low or shrink away. Or they may freeze like a statue. These are definite signs of an uncomfortable dog
- They avoid eye contact by looking away.
- Ears are back: instead of straight up looking alert, or relaxed, the ears are flattened back against their head.
- Turning away: this is an interesting one as it sometimes comes with a signal to let you know they are feeling like they need some space. If a dog is unhappy with a situation or something you are doing, they will turn their head away from you. They may give you a quick lick on your hand or face to let you know they are feeling done with company for now, or just uncomfortable and need some space!
- Yawning repeatedly: this along with licking their lips repeatedly are low key signals that they are very uncomfortable with a situation and would like it to stop.
- Hiding/walking away: if a dog is feeling uncomfortable in a situation they may hide behind you or someone else. If they do that they are asking you not to push the interaction. This is their way of telling you they want a "time-out".

Brainstorming Session #2:

2) To help your students with the next lesson which will focus on what their adoptable dog's new life could look like, try a brainstorming session with the students to come up with some ideas of what things may make a dog happy. Make sure to record any ideas they come up with as you will revisit these during Lesson #7.

3) Once the brainstorming session has concluded you can show the list you have already created. Here are some ideas to get you started. All of these ideas came from: <https://barkpost.com/life/surprising-ways-make-dog-happy/> Your local humane society will likely also have a list of best age and size appropriate toys and bedding for an adopted dog. You can check their websites to add to this list!



What makes a happy dog?

- A job: dogs love having something to do. Teaching them a trick or to fetch items for you, is a good way to keep your dog stimulated and happy.
- Toys: most love to have a toy to play with. You can purchase a toy at the pet shop, or you can test your sewing skills and make one for your dog out of socks and some stuffing. Or, your dog may be happy to find their own and play with sticks and branches!
- Chewing and playing: let them destroy their toys! This is a big one! Dogs have animal instincts and it is good to let them exercise that and keep their minds sharp by destroying their toys.
- Brushing their teeth: this may not be fun for them at the time but they will appreciate it in the future when they have healthy teeth and gums!
- A treasure hunt: much like giving a dog a job to do, a treasure hunt like hiding treats in hiding places around the house, will give them something to do when their owner isn't home. It will also encourage them to explore and stay active!
- A Dance Party: now this is not for every dog, but some dogs enjoy a good dance party. Basically your dog loves being with you and doing the things you are doing. If they see you are excited and happy then chances are they will be too. If you throw on some tunes and dance with your dog, they will likely be thrilled with this new and strange but fun activity you have arranged for them!
- Play hide and seek: this will actually help develop and keep your dog's scent tracking skills intact!
- Family Yoga: much like the dance party, this one just allows your dog to participate in something you enjoy and that will make them happy. It doesn't have to be yoga either, having your dog involved in any exercise will make them happy!

End of Class Activity

- Lesson #7 focuses on dreaming up and designing a brighter future for each adoptable dog. Students will use this information to create the background of their portraits.
- At the end of this class ask your students to give some thought to what their adoptable dog look forward to in the future. Ask them to think about what might make their adoptable dog happy.