

# Module 2 : Why Learn About Animal Behavior?

All animals, including humans, have certain behaviors, mannerisms and emotions that create individual personalities and identities. Learning about animal behavior will help you identify the mannerisms, emotions and traits that you see in your pet. This module will review the following:

- Reasons for learning about animal behavior
- Domestication of animals
- Pet fashion
- Pet ownership

## 2.1 Generalized

**Being familiar with various animal behavior will help in understanding your pet.**



Each animal has its own instinct, way of learning and method of teaching their offspring. It is useful to be informed about animal behavior so that you can understand and have a better relationship with your pet.

Similar to humans, all other animals have individual personalities.

Consider twins for a moment. Even twins have different personalities, heights, appearances, likes and dislikes.

In the animal world, to have a better relationship with any animal you work or live with, you need to determine the personality, mannerisms and behavior of that animal.

## **There are various components to animal behavior.**

Evolution states that there are certain innate behaviors which animals have adopted. These traits are often connected to the survival of the species; including hunting, hiding and procreating. Often, when attempting to train an animal against its instinct, you will discover that the process is challenging, with poor results. However, if you observe and understand traits specific to that animal, you will have a more humane interaction and a more responsive level of communication.

Learning mode is about associative learning, imprinting, cultural learning and teaching in a method your pet can understand. It all comes back to animal behavior. Once you understand your pet's instincts and traits, you can create a welcoming and suitable environment for it.

Sometimes pets engage in activities that can be harmful to them, such as chewing on shoes or digging through the garbage. Although natural behaviors, you may want to discourage them from doing so. But unless you observe, study prior animal adaptations and figure out how your pet will learn best, you will not be able to curb these behaviors.

A cat can be taught to wait by its bowl for food and to not steal from other cats. A dog can be trained to be a companion or a service dog, but the first step is to always learn about animal behavior.

## **2.2 Domestication**

**Approximately 31,700 years ago – according to remains found in a Russian cave – the world's first known dog is said to have**

**lived and survived on a diet of horse, musk ox and reindeer, according to studies (Viegas, 2008).**

But how did this domestication begin? What is it that made the wolf want to coexist among humans? What about the domestication of various animals in more recent years? Chimpanzees, monkeys, parrots, cockatiels, panthers, tigers and elephants are some of the many animals that humans have tried to domesticate. However, some animals have a harder time adapting to life with humans, compared to that of others.

### **For example**

Exotic pet owners who raise large cats, such as panthers, will find that a mature panther is not easy to take care of. It is because panthers are not as adaptable to the human world. There is a reason why house cats are smaller in size and more comfortable around humans than that of a wild feline.

Domestication is all about symbiosis. Is the animal going to receive something it needs from the human in order to make the alliance work? If there is a possibility of a symbiotic relationship, what traits need to exist for this to happen?

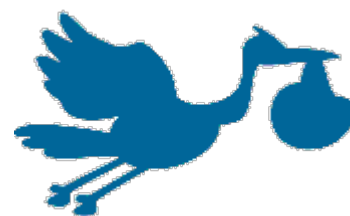
There are a few species of wolves left in the wild, the most common of which is the North American gray wolf. However, none of the remaining species of wolves that exist today have been domesticated. There must have been some traits in ancient canines that humans found to be desirable, that ultimately resulted in the breed of a new canine species.

One theory is that humans did not, in fact, domesticate wolves, but rather that wolves domesticated themselves. American biologist, Raymond Coppinger believes that with prolonged human settlements, comes waste and this would have attracted scavengers such as wolves. Eventually, recognizing that an aggressive nature would get them killed, they began to adopt more docile traits to allow for coexistence with the humans.

It is important for the environment to be taken into consideration when animals are being domesticated. The environment needs to be suitable for the breed. Is there enough space? Is it a safe place or are there too many objects and wires, for example? Can proper food and drink be made available and accessible? It is one thing to want to take care of a pet, but it is another thing to actually be able to take care of the animal in a proper and humane way.

## 2.3 Breeding

**How are two animals compatible for breeding?**



How do breeders know what animals to bring together in order to breed them? How does natural cross-breeding of species in the wild occur?

### **Compatibility**

You have certain traits you look for in a person, as a human being. Animals tend to do the same. Although animals have an innate sense to breed, there are still specific traits that they look for in a mate. Lions form a pride with one male lion. This male is the strongest, capable of fighting off other male lions and protecting the pride. All females in that pride mate with him and not others. It is the instincts of choosing the fittest mate.

Breeders have to look for these compatibility traits when breeding as well.

## Choosing Traits

Animal breeding is often done with the intent to maintain or produce certain qualities.

For example, show animals are usually pure bred, possess an obedient temperament and have desirable appearances.

Unlike the natural selection, breeding is artificial selection. Therefore breeders must observe the two animals that are intended for mating, to determine if the traits, personalities and mannerisms are compatible.

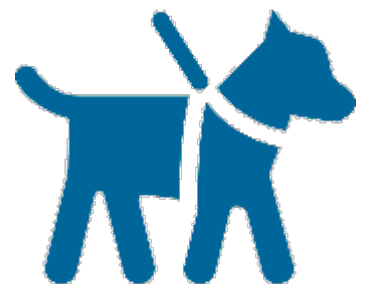
Breeding requires a level of animal science knowledge as well as knowledge on canine health and genetics.

Owning certain animals, such as dogs and cats, was historically a luxury reserved only for the wealthy. However, over time, owning specifically bred dogs has become easier and has even caused an epidemic of over breeding among certain breeds.

A 2009 article written in the Journal of Veterinary Behavior indicated the importance of mixing natural selection with breeding, pointing out that artificial reproduction technologies can have a “detrimental impact” when overused.

## 2.4 Therapeutic Value

Humans have been using service dogs for over 200 years.



The use of guide dogs and service dogs dates back to 1750,

when a hospital in Paris began to train certain breeds to aid the visually impaired. However, therapy dogs serve a slightly different purpose than that of service dogs. While service dogs are there to assist individuals with disabilities, therapy dogs are trained to provide affection and a sense of comfort.

Many individuals can benefit from pet therapy. Veterans, young children, those in long-term care facilities or those who are diagnosed with cancer can all benefit from the comfort that a therapy animal provides. While dogs are common therapy pets, there are many types of animals that can provide the same calming and soothing effect that a therapy dog does, such as a cat, guinea pig or a rabbit.

## **Choosing Therapeutic Benefits**

**Here are a few of the most common benefits of therapy animals:**

- Companionship
- Lowering blood pressure
- Releases endorphins
- Assisting those with ADHD
- Improves cardiovascular health

Animals can assist with a wide array of disabilities. Individuals who are blind or deaf have found many advantages to having a pet. However, in the last decade, there has been a substantial rise in the use of animals as a form of therapy. For example, many facilities in the U.S. with long term care patients have opted to bring in dogs and cats to help with patients diagnosed with dementia, cancer, Alzheimer's and other debilitating diseases.

Individuals with epilepsy who have enlisted the help of therapy dogs are able to live a fuller life. Furthermore, certain breeds of dogs have been trained to detect chemical changes in their owners and are able to warn of an oncoming attack, such as an epileptic seizure.

Some studies have found that animals can also detect when

their human companion is ill. To benefit from this type of therapeutic value, however, the owner has to be able to read the change in their animal's behavior.

## **Assessing an Animal for Therapeutic Traits**

Not all animals are able to function as therapy animals. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect all animals to be able to learn this type of behavior. When looking for a therapeutic pet, it is important to research and find a facility that is trained in animal behavior and science. This can ensure that the therapeutic animal is not only properly trained to assist, but is also safe and gentle to be around.

Training and learning capabilities are two other areas to observe and assess. Is the pet capable of learning new things with ease? Does it show an aptitude for certain therapeutic needs?

It is important to assess certain personality traits of a pet. A pet that is not easily panicked, often remains calm no matter what is happening, and approaches all humans with love is a good example of desired therapy traits. A pet that is very anxious, is easily scared or is unlikely 'to cuddle' when the owner is worried, will most likely not make a good therapy pet, as it will not adapt to the training required.

## **FACT**



Dogs can be beneficial additions to the lives of children with Autism. Trained dogs can lessen the child's tendency of aggressiveness and give them a sense of independence

*Source: animalplanet.com*

## 2.5 Anthropomorphism

**Anthropomorphism is the assignment of human characteristics to animals.**



This is extremely common in pet owners, who often try to ascribe human motivations to their pet's behavior. For example, they may claim their dog feels guilty after doing something wrong, like knocking a bin over to eat its contents. This is simply not the case; the dog just associates the knocked-over bin with the owner's anger, and this is not the same as guilt as a human would experience it.

To understand animal behavior, it is essential to put aside



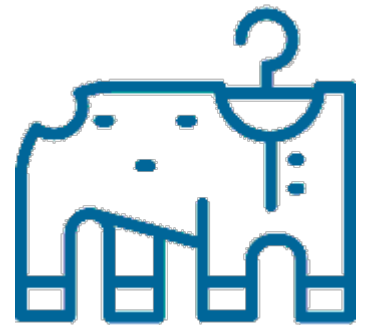
any notion that they are like humans or have the same thoughts or needs. Anthropomorphism can be harmful, as it stops you from truly understanding animals and treating them in the way that they deserve.

That is not to say that you shouldn't try to empathise with animals – simply be mindful that they are a different species.

Animals are animals, and to anthropomorphize them is to do them a disservice. It is far better to learn about the characteristic traits of a species than to try to humanize them. For example, learning about how to read a particular animal's body language is crucial to understanding how it is feeling.

## 2.6 Pet Fashion

**Is pet attire really comfortable for animals?**



In last couple of decades it has become a trend to dress up animals in specialty made pet attire. However, do our pets really like it or is it something they have been trained to accept?

For example, the concept of breaking a horse is to show the horse which is the dominant species in order to put a bit in their mouth, a harness around their face and ears, and a saddle on their back. A more acceptable method is showing the horse that there is a symbiotic relationship to accepting the harness and saddle, where there is love and respect between human and horse. Some horses are keener than others to be

saddled and trained.

Leash training with a dog and cat begins early to ensure the pet understands the weight, feel, and control of the lead. If you start too late, the pet may resist moving once the harness or collar is on.

By utilizing early training, when the pet has yet to learn too much or understand its natural instincts, it is possible to train the acceptance of a harness and pet fashions.

However, dressing up a pet can sometimes be uncomfortable. It is important to assess the benefit of the item of clothing for the animal, rather than just dressing it up as a fashion statement.

## 2.7 Choosing a Pet

### **How are you going to choose a pet?**

Have you ever brought home a pet from a shelter or pet shop, only to find that it is hard to train?

Learning about animal psychology and behavior specific to breed will help when choosing a pet. Not only will this prove to be beneficial for the pet owner, but for the animal itself.

For example, if you already have a 10 year old dog or cat, the shelter might suggest adopting an older dog or cat, rather than a puppy or a kitten. This can help with acceptance by your current pet. It is very important to take into consideration the current domestic situation as well as the behavior of specific breeds.

### **Here are some questions current pet owners can ask:**

- Has this pet ever been exposed to any other animals?
- How does the pet behave around other animals?
- Is this pet sedate or active?
- Is the animal lonely?

## **Assessing a potential new pet:**

Most shelters and pet stores allow you to spend time with an animal before taking it home. This is to help determine the relationship between the animal and potential owner.

Sometimes, this brief interaction may not be enough to decipher the compatibility of pet and potential owner.

Many shelters will do background checks and various other assessments to determine compatibility before allowing for adoption of their animals. This not only ensures that the new home is appropriate for the pet, but also makes certain that there is compatibility.

## **Summary**

Animal behavior is about studying the instincts of animals in order to decipher how they learn, play, interact with others and teach their offspring.

Several reasons exist for learning animal behavior, including understanding domestication, breeding, therapeutic value, and choosing the best pet for your household. All of these topics were discussed in detail, as well as having a look at anthropomorphism, pet fashions, and whether animals truly enjoy wearing clothing or if it is something they accept based on training.

For pet owners, becoming familiar with animal psychology is crucial in ensuring a happy pet.

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