

JOY OF DOGS

BE PRESENT

"Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen." – Orhan Pamuk

The presence dogs brings to their world - squirrel!, endless tree sniffs, anxiousness, or joy - is reminder of how much more we can notice when we slow down and pay attention

By exuding non-judging awareness, dogs remind us look at our lives with openness and curiosity.



Meditation applies non-judging awareness to our inner life - pausing to watch our body, breath, or even distraction with that same curiosity.

And, every dog walk or pet can be its own mindful pause, as long as you pay attention

"Petting, scratching, and cuddling a dog could be as soothing to the mind and heart as deep meditation and almost as good for the soul as prayer."

– Dean Koontz

Micropractice: I get to! Try saying "I *get* to" instead of "I *have* to." Some things are just unpleasant, but this technique can help shift your attention to what is there, not what is missing.

Fido practice: Stay curious! Give your pup your full attention and try to notice something new - a detail in their eye, how they feel as you pet them, even a smell. See if you can channel this curiosity to yourself and others!



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GRATITUDE

To sit with a dog on a hillside on a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden, where doing nothing was not boring — it was peace. — Milan Kundera

- For the most part, **there is no objective reality**: our perceptions and how we relate to the world create our experience -- including whether we see the good or not.
- **That doesn't mean it's easy**: evolution and society **bias us towards negativity**, focusing on the criticism not the compliments, and striving for what we don't have.
- Luckily **our minds are changeable**: Practicing **gratitude counteracts our negativity bias** and helps us find contentment despite things being imperfect, which is good, because everything is imperfect!



Dogs are gratitude experts: In addition to cuteness, they show us (1) Different perspectives are possible, (2) Simplicity supports happiness, and (3) Rigid expectations and old grudges don't help us find peace.

Dogs are also practice: Even the most perfect dog can frustrate. When that happens, take a breath and practice shifting perspective to see their goodness! It's easier than with humans so it's great first step :)

"The choice for gratitude rarely comes without some real effort. But each time I make it, the next choice is a little easier, a little freer, a little less self-conscious" - Henri Nouwen

Micropractice: Turn towards gratitude: text/email a gratitude partner every night, write gratitudes on post-its or in a journal, or, awkwardly, tell your dog what you appreciate about them!

Fido practice: The Canine Perspective. When you notice yourself in a frustration-doom loop, try to reframe the story through your dog's perspective. What wisdom would they offer you?



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SELF COMPASSION

Compassion is seeing pain and responding with love. We tend to **minimize our own pain**, and try to **browbeat ourselves into changing**. But research shows that **self judgment actually makes us less generous towards others or able to change** (See anything Kristin Neff!).

"You don't become a good person by believing you are a bad one." - Matt Haig

Mindfulness is central to self compassion (and vice versa): we can learn to **recognize our pain**, large or small, and, like we would for a friend/dog, **respond with kindness**: an affirming word, a tender touch, a treat.

Dogs are phDs in self compassion.

- **First, they model compassion:** They see our goodness when we forget and always give us those loving non-judgmental bedroom eyes.
- **Second, they take care of themselves: naps on naps on naps.**
- **Third, we can practice with them.** We respond naturally to their needs (and wants!) with love. And we learn to love them as they are, whether they fetch or not, whether they are super snuggly or little-miss-independent. Take note!

"For if we can't learn to be kind to each other how will we ever learn to be kind to the most desperate parts of ourselves." - Rupi Kaur



Micropractice: "Ouch!" When you are feeling hurt, disappointed, or sad, try saying "ouch" to yourself, putting a hand on your heart, or even using the words "it's OK sweetie" to help touch into self compassion.

Fido practice: Notice the good. It's easy to take for granted the good our dogs do: obeying, peeing in the right place, chillaxing. Pay attention to it, and tell them! This will help you notice all the good you do that often goes unnoticed

"If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog." – Harry Truman



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JOY!

"Make the ordinary come alive, the extraordinary will take care of itself" - William Martin

Joy is a feeling that arises from **saying yes to the moment**. It's **less about adding new things**, and more about **not missing what is already there**.

To connect more with joy try this:

1. **Be present:** Multitasking is the thief of joy. Joy happens now, not in the past or in the future
2. **Connect with your body:** Joy is not a thought, but a feeling that occurs in the body. Place a hand on the heart, connect with your breath, notice sensations in the chest or throat
3. **Appreciation is key:** Joy is NOT what happens when everything goes your way. It's a recognition that you have everything you need and don't need life to be perfect (thank god)

"We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world." - Jack Gilbert.

Dogs are our guides to joy!

- They are relentlessly present
- They live embodied lives playing and exploring with their noses, paws, and all their body
- They appreciate so well: they are not perfectionists and don't judge themselves as the romp in the park or fetch semi-successfully.

"I try to witness this moment how a dog would witness it. To take it all in." - Lily and the Octopus, Stephen Rowley

Micropractice: One thing less! A surprising way to find joy is simplifying. Try not to multitask when you go for a run, do the dishes, fold laundry, walk your doggo or something else and see what more you notice!

Fido practice: Don't miss the mystery. Meeting our dog's daily needs and meshing them with our busy lives can be frustrating. But don't forget to marvel at the wild mix of nature and nurture that is your beautiful, sometimes challenging pup. And **let them train you** to find presence, gratitude, self-compassion, and joy! Ruff!

