

5 mindfulness lessons from our animals

Sometimes when looking at my dog, I notice how mindfulness appears to come so *naturally* to her. She doesn't carry the weight of the world on her shoulders (OK, she's a dog—of course she doesn't!). But we can learn a thing or two from these mindfulness masters, our favorite cats and dogs.

Over the years, in my animal Reiki work with animals and also after spending so much time with my own animals, it has occurred to me that important examples in mindfulness exist right before my eyes, every single day. My animals live in this special mindful space we humans are always trying to reach (but rarely get there). It's so hard to “be mindful” when that same mind is filled with worries for the day, responsibilities for loved ones, tasks to accomplish and so on.

So whenever I start to feel overwhelmed (and therefore less mindful), I think about these lessons in mindfulness we can all learn from our animals:

1. Embrace the moment right now. When Mystic is sprawled in the sun for a nap or on a walk, she's not worrying about her next vet visit or wondering if another dog is going to turn the corner at any moment (these are two things she does not enjoy). Her mind is free and open to wander, since she's not stuck inside thoughts about yesterday or tomorrow. She's able to fully surrender to and enjoy each moment. Looking back on my life, when I'm able to really "be" in the moment, I feel so good. It's easier to be strong, centered and my true self when I remember to just "be." Though a to-do list often looms in my head, I try to remind myself that if I'm following Mystic's lead and losing track of time doing something fun, that means I'm doing it right!

2. Don't just take your dog for a walk; embrace the walk the way your dog does. Be curious and notice the small details and sights, sounds and smells, like: the sound of leaves crunching underfoot, the feeling of the sun on your skin, the salty beach air and so on. When you focus on the beautiful world around you, there isn't as much room for worry or anxiety.

3. Be silly and have fun! Mystic doesn't always take herself so seriously. Sometimes, she's happy to play and romp around like a puppy. Just yesterday she was leaping like a gazelle through the tall grass on a hike. I swear she was smiling! We all can remember from childhood how good that can feel, and it's another way for us to connect with that mindful space.

4. **Do something new today.** Reliving routines over and over again allows our mind to slip into old patterns. We don't have to give our full attention because we've seen it or done it a million times before. The result? Our mind might wander to past or future worries instead of noticing the moment right now. But when we're doing a new activity, it forces us to focus on the moment at hand. For Mystic, this might mean chasing a lizard instead of a squirrel. For me, it could mean taking a new trail for our walk, using an alternate route on my drive or trying a new café instead of going to the same favorite places over and over again.

5. **Savor your favorite things; don't multitask.** This one can be especially difficult! But Mystic has it down pat. When she gets a new treat (peanut butter flavor is her favorite) or a few bites of something I have baked (she loves muffins!), she's 100 percent there, savoring every last morsel. When was the last time I enjoyed my tea without also watching TV or checking the computer? I can't even remember the last time. I'm going to try this tonight! I guess when I eat chocolate: That's a time when I remember to savor.

What lessons in mindfulness have your animals taught you?

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