

OPINION

DO DOGS HAVE FEELINGS? | OPINION

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If you live with a dog you just know when it's happy or miserable, don't you? Of course you do. Even the [scientific community, now admits that dogs have emotions](#)—even if scientists can't directly measure what they are experiencing.

People have had a close bond with domesticated dogs for centuries. In his 1764 *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire observed: "It seems that nature has given the dog to man for his defence and for his pleasure. Of all the animals it is the most faithful: it is the best friend man can have."

[Research](#) has shown time and time again the positive impact pet ownership can have on our lives. Indeed, a [study](#) of 975 dog-owning adults, found that in times of emotional distress most people were more likely to turn to their dogs than their mothers, fathers, siblings, best friends, or children.

It's not surprising then that dogs are now the most commonly used animal in therapy. Our canine pals are being increasingly used as participants in a variety of mental health programmes—offering companionship, happy associations and unconditional love.

In the U.K., Pets As Therapy (PAT) has more than 5,000 active PAT dogs, which meet some 130,000 people a week. In the U.S., the American Kennel Club has a [Therapy Dog Program](#) which recognises six national therapy dog organisations and awards official titles to dogs who have worked to improve the lives of the people they have visited.

Dogs who heal

Sigmund Freud is generally acknowledged as the accidental pioneer of [canine-assisted therapy](#). During his psychotherapy sessions in the 1930s, a chow chow called Jofi stayed alongside him in the office. Freud noticed that patients became more relaxed and open [when Jofi was present](#), and it helped him to build a rapport.

But the official beginning of [animal-assisted therapy](#) is generally linked to World War II, when a [Yorkshire terrier](#) called Smoky accompanied corporal William Lynne when visiting service hospitals in New Guinea. Her presence lifted the spirits of wounded soldiers.

