



LESSON 1

Lessons We Learn from Dogs

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Teaching Points / Topics / Themes

1. Start the discussion by asking how many participants own a dog.
2. Ask participants to share how their dog makes them feel when they are sad
3. Keep discussions going about what it is about dogs that make them so special
4. Try to get the participants to come up with the 8 lessons below.
5. They will think of many other lessons... write them down and talk up each lesson but focus the most attention on the 9 below as these are the key points to be a good comforter yourself.
6. Explain that comforting is a learned behavior so that's why it's ok to be uncomfortable. It's not natural. When we feel uncomfortable and don't know what to do, we can think of how dogs comfort us to remind us how to treat others.
7. Go into the review of the lessons below, reinforcing the examples that were brought up in discussion.

Review Our Key Comfort Lessons from the Comfort Dogs

- **They don't judge or hold grudges – they always see the best the best in you**
Sometimes we have a hard time letting go of things that bother us about each other. We make assumptions and judgements about each other. And this gets in the way of us being nice to each other. Instead we avoid or get mad. Dogs don't think this way. They just see someone they love and want to be with. Maybe one time you accidentally stepped on your dog's paw and he yelped. That didn't stop him from loving you.
- **They recognize when you are hurting**
If you have a dog, then you know how they pay attention to you. And they can sense when you are having a bad day. They will come to your side if you're crying or lay next to your bed if you're home sick. They always seem to "know" when you need them because they are always paying attention and looking for ways to love you. As humans, we are not as good at this. We spend most of our time thinking about our own hurts instead of others who are hurting.
- **They show up and are there for you – they are never too busy**
One of the best things about having a dog is the way they greet you when you come home. You are the only thing on their mind. They aren't on their phones or too busy for you. They aren't watching TV or working. They are there for you and happy to see you. That makes us feel good. We feel loved and special when someone puts us first.

- **They Listen & are confidential**

When you are feeling lonely and sad, you are afraid to share your feelings with others. And this could be that you are afraid they won't listen or understand. Or maybe you are afraid that they won't keep it to themselves and will share it with others. Dogs don't think that way. They are always just here to love you and listen. They don't talk back. They don't try to give you advice, they just listen. For many of us humans, this is very hard to do. We sometimes want to solve problems more than listen. Or sometimes are tempted to share what we've learned with others.

- **They are never at a loss for words**

Sometimes we just don't know what to say to people when they are struggling. We are afraid to say the wrong thing and make things worse. Many times, we avoid any interaction with that person because of this fear. Then we watch dogs. They actually seek out those who are hurting. And it ends up not being so much about the words – but rather, the caring loving hugs, the eye to eye contact and most of all the listening.

- **They comfort anyone & everyone and are never awkward**

Have you ever watched a dog go up to a total stranger wagging their tail? And in doing so making that person happy? Us humans don't think that way. We avoid people we don't know even if we know they are hurting. Dogs help fill the gap of loneliness for many people because of this. They love to help. Us humans need to also help fill the loneliness gap.

- **They are present– they comfort**

When we ourselves hurt, it can be hard to trust our feelings with people. Sometimes they are too busy to spend time with us, and we don't want to bother them. When you have a dog, you know they will be there for you. You know you aren't bothering them. You can tell that there is no place they would rather be and that they love you no matter what. You feel that they understand you when others don't. Even if you messed up. This creates a bond of trust and love. This is connecting with compassion. This is comfort.

- **They are relational**

Dogs don't go through life ignoring other dogs or people. They are happiest when they are around dogs or people. They love to play because they are wired to be happiest when they are with others. We are the same. We are wired to be happiest when we share life together. Our ups and downs our hurts and our fears. We are not at our best when we are alone.

- **They do this every day – it's who they are. It's who we should be**

Because of all of the things we learned about dogs in the above points, it's easy to see how they fall into doing this every day. They spend their lives focused on others. From the moment they wake up to the moment they sleep, they want to be with others and make them happy. It's their DNA. It's also in our DNA, but most of us have allowed personal fears and troubles to cloud this.