

# 10 Ways to Tell If Your Dog Is Happy

Nearly every doggy parent wants to know if their pup is happy. But how can you tell, beyond the wag of a tail, since he or she can't talk? Researchers have even discovered that happy dogs can laugh. Watch closely for these signs and sounds in your canine.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're like most dog parents, you want your canine companion to be happy, and you're always looking for signs he's content
- There are body language and vocal signals dogs send when they're happy
- One of the most obvious tells that your dog is joyful the "full body wag"
- Happy dogs are actually laughing when they make a particular sound during play

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Dog parents spend a lot — and I mean a lot of time wondering what their canine family members are trying to say through body language and vocalizations. They ask themselves questions like, "Why does she follow me from room to room," and "Why does his tail wag while he's growling," and "She seems hungry. How can she be hungry? She just ate!"

Dogs speak their own language, and in the wild, they generally understand one another because their lives are similar in most ways. In the wild, it's crucial that animals of the same species, especially those that live in packs, are able to transmit messages and information back and forth.

Domesticated dogs may or may not understand each other because they've adapted to their individual histories, environments and the behavior of their humans. So not only are you living with a different species, but one who is far removed from a "textbook" canine thanks to domestication and individual life experiences. No wonder you have so many questions!

The biggest concern most pet parents have is whether their dog is happy. We very much want our furry family members to be happy, because they mean so much to us. Here are 10 signs your dog is a happy camper.

## 10 Signs Your Dog Is Happy

1. His eyes and eyelids are relaxed, he blinks a lot, his gaze is soft and his brow is smooth. His ears are also relaxed, not cocked or pointing. His mouth is open a bit with a few teeth visible (but not bared), his tongue may be lolling and he may even appear to be smiling.

2. She's holding her body in a relaxed posture versus a tense or stiff stance. She's holding her tail high and wagging it with such gusto her whole body is wiggling. Alternatively, her tail may be in a more neutral position, with a softer, slower wag.
3. He has no destructive behaviors, even when he's home alone. Happy dogs generally get plenty of physical and mental stimulation. Bored, under-exercised, under-stimulated dogs are more likely to become destructive, along with dogs who suffer from separation anxiety.
4. She loves to play. Happy dogs are always up for a game or a walk or a ride in the car. Since exercise and play are so natural for dogs, if your canine companion doesn't seem interested, she may be dealing with some pain or an illness, and it's time to make an appointment with your veterinarian.
5. He's belly-up and tongue out. Happy dogs tend to show their bellies and tongues as they wriggle around on their backs. Happy belly displays are different from submissive belly rolls in which the dog's mouth is usually closed and his body is stiff.
6. Her appetite is good, which indicates she's both happy and feeling physically well. A noticeable decrease (or increase) in your pet's appetite can be a symptom of an underlying condition.
7. He's happy barking. Some dogs rarely bark, but those who do tend to have a higher-pitched bark when they're happy that usually doesn't last long.
8. She play bows. Many happy dogs raise their backsides in the air and lower their chests to the ground as an invitation to play with either their favorite human or a doggy friend.
9. He leans into you. A happy dog will often lean into your hand when you pet him, and lean into or keep contact with your body whenever the opportunity presents itself.
10. She's thrilled to see you. Happy dogs are without fail excited to see their human come through the door, even if said human has only stepped outside for a minute to check the weather!

## Do Happy Dogs Laugh?

Okay, so if you're the happy parent of a happy dog, the obvious next question is, "Do dogs laugh?" Believe it or not, the subject has been studied! Researcher Konrad Lorenz first addressed dog laughter in his 1949 book, "Man Meets Dog." Lorenz submits that when the corners of a dog's lips are loose and he begins panting rapidly, it's more or less the equivalent of a laughing human.<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, another researcher, Patricia Simonet, recorded the sounds dogs make when they play, especially a "forced breathy exhalation through the mouth,"<sup>2</sup> which she believes is dog laughter. It seems dogs make this sound even when they aren't playing hard enough to pant.

Simonet then performed a comparative analysis of the "forced breathy exhalation" and panting, and discovered that dog laughter has a different sonic content than simple panting.<sup>3</sup>

*"Playing her recordings to 120 shelter dogs over the course of six weeks, Simonet found that, even in isolation, dogs who heard the sounds of 'dog laughter' stopped what they were doing. Almost all of the dogs went quiet immediately.*

*Many dogs turned physically toward the source of the sound, others were observed to 'smile,' while still others began to engage in play behaviors. The younger the dog, the more likely it was to start making those 'breathy exhalations,' or dog laughs, themselves.*

*From these results, Simonet theorized that regular exposure to these sounds might help shelter dogs minimize repetitive stress behaviors and time spent in shelters."<sup>4</sup>*

For more information on her experiment, read **[Simonet's study results](#)**, which were presented at the Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Environmental Enrichment last July 31 to August 5, 2005.

## **Sources and References**

[PetMD](#)

[Dogster January 3, 2017](#)

<sup>1,3,4</sup> [Dogster, January 3, 2017](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PeTalk](#)

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