

How emotions in animals impact behaviour, learning and wellbeing.

The following 28 wannabe **memes** (ideas worth sharing) were published over a 14-day period on Facebook in September 2017. In addition to the meme candidates, daily FB live sessions were held where the different expressions were explained and discussed. Below are links to the live sessions (each between 15-30 minutes long).

<u>Day 1 (FEAR),</u>

<u>Day 2 (GRIEF),</u>

<u>Day 3 (RAGE),</u>

Day 4 (SEEKING),

<u>Day 5 (PLAY),</u>

<u>Day 6 (CARE),</u>

Day 7 (Wrap up),

In this short e-book, the memes are all presented and explained.

The most shared meme was number 15, and the most liked number 22.

Enjoy!

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Karolina Westlund, ILLIS ABC



Managing emotions isn't about coddling the animal.

It's about ensuring that the animal develops into a socially competent, healthy, and yes, happy individual who can deal confidently with life's challenges.



Strong emotions trigger learning. At the same time, arousal above a certain level makes you stupid. Animals often sensitize with several or all the senses, becoming sensitive to sound, and touch, fast movement, visual stimuli. Habituation is specific. Sensitization generalizes.



Giving treats changes the emotional state – and the animal learns other associations, which means future fear learning is less likely in that situation.



Change the environment – remove or reduce the animal's perception of the triggers.

Or teach new associations, helping the animal relearn that previously scary things or triggers are now neutral or even fabulous, since they predict great things.



Separation-induced crying that young animals do is much reduced if they're alone in a familiar environment than if they're alone in a novel environment. If mom is with the young animal in the novel environment, he's quiet.

How will you use that to boost welfare in the animals in your care?



A young social animal who's been separated from mom is in immediate danger. Keeping warm, getting fed, and surviving predatory attack.

When wild animals are restrained, it's typically because they're caught by a predator and about to die.



Don't ignore the implications of early separations on later personality in animals and in humans.

The social environment when animals – and humans – are young are of major importance, and separation can have huge effects on later social skills and stress sensitivity.



Emotions are key driving forces in determining behaviour.

Sometimes, what animals choose to do is not in their best interest long term, or has no apparent or obvious purpose here and now. Emotional reactions are simply the catalysts of behaviour.







When you're angry, aggressive behaviour is more likely.

So, if an animal shows aggressive behaviour, the person engaging with the animal gets more likely to show aggressive behaviour. Because of affect infection or emotional contagion, not because of a rational decision.

For most people, the term "aggression" involves attack, biting, kicking, lashing out. If you don't distinguish between these three, you might go about solving the problem in the wrong way.

If you're looking at SEEKING, you solve it by enrichment. If it's RAGE, by introducing new things carefully, avoiding FEAR, and teaching the animal to collaborate with handling. If it's intermale or dominance related, it's typically a combination.

Animals do what they do because it works. They can get others to leave them alone or go away by showing aggression. Chances are, if you have an animal showing aggressive behaviour, that that behaviour has a purpose. A desired outcome.

And if you can teach the animal some other way of getting that outcome, you can get rid of the aggression.



When we're looking at behaviour from a welfare perspective, and trying to understand animals' motivations and decision making, and problem behaviour, the animals emotional response is what it's important – not reflexes.



Inadvertent learning often starts with a fearful reaction - if you want your animal to learn something from you, you need to engage pleasant emotional states: SEEKING, PLAY or CARE.



SEEKING is all about expectation, curiosity, anticipation – it causes a pleasurable dopamine surge in the brain.

Animals prefer to work for food even when it's freely available. That dopamine release is reduced when eating.







Feeding your animal in a bowl is a disservice because it doesn't engage the SEEKING system. There's no dopamine fix.

And it might increase the risk of unwanted behaviour, because animals crave SEEKING – they'll find an outlet for that need somehow.

Clickers are predictors of reinforcers, and as such, they engage the SEEKING system. There'll be a surge of dopamine when the clicker is sounded. Not when the food arrives, but when it's predicted.

So if a clicker isn't in your tool box, you should reconsider.



During a play bout, researchers see strong effects on the cortex; many changes in gene expression.

Neural growth factors are activated and about 1/3 of the 1200 examined genes are rapidly modified by play. PLAY helps the brain grow and mature.



PLAY changes the brain, it changes behaviour, personality. Animals develop social skills. They cope better with changes in the environment. They're less prone to develop problems with aggression – or become overly fearful.

PLAY leads to a healthy chemical environment in the brain, that promotes learning.



When it comes to animal training, you have two assets: the quality of your relationship, and the reinforcers you have to offer.

They're in competition with two things: distractors and perceived dangers.

PLAY shifts the balance in your favour.



If something unpleasant is about to happen, it's often best if it's predictable to the animal. If it's unpredictable, the animal won't know when to relax, and could become anxious.

But when it comes to nice things, predictable may be boring – it doesn't engage the SEEKING system.



Animals survive if they pay attention to resources and threats, and it all starts with emotional responses.

Having the emotional perspective in mind helps us understand animals' behaviour, and teach them life skills, how to live with humans - and thrive.



Newborn babies, whether they're mammals or birds, die if they're not taken care of. They need help thermoregulating, and they need nourishment.

They also need CARE – maternal attention, which impacts brain development and personality.



Gentle touch releases oxytocin and endorphins– feel good chemicals. Also, a relaxation response, an activation of the parasympathetic nervous system: a domino effect of healing responses in the body.

So, touching has both short-term and long-term beneficial effects.



Touch is potentially a very powerful tool. But not all animals enjoy being touched. Paying attention to whether the animal leans into being touched or leans away is important information.

Let them initiate the touching, and watch how they interact with each other; where and how do they touch?



Viewer contribution: Alison Willis!



Viewer contribution: Kia von Platen!



Viewer contribution: Sofia Wahlmark!



The core emotions that I've discussed during meme week have immediate survival value, the difference between life and death. And they manifest through behaviour.

CARE, SEEKING and PLAY all lead to increased wellbeing and social skills in animals, and all to some extent help prevent, reduce or eliminate the unwanted emotional states.

We can use them to get happy animals that thrive with humans, and like people – and can deal confidently with the odd strange or scary thing happening without losing it.

If we define happiness as positive emotional states, the three that I just mentioned, CARE, SEEKING, PLAY, all lead to different kinds of happy.

And they all impact the outcomes of your training in beneficial ways.



There are three types of feelings. Sensory, bodily and emotional feelings: what we've been talking about all through Meme Week -FEAR, RAGE, SEEKING, PLAY, GRIEF, CARE, LUST.

For some obscure reason, we pay attention to the first two feelings, sensory and bodily, but not the last, the emotional feelings.

Emotional states in animals are unknown to many people, or neglected, ignored or even ridiculed. And I think we would do animals in our care a huge favour if we started taking those emotional states seriously.

Not only would it benefit them, but it would benefit us too, as we'd get a better relationship to them, and we'd see less unwanted or problematic behaviour.