A Dog's Emotional Cup

Every dog has a cup that needs to be filled—with social connection, security, access to reinforcers, and enrichment.

Some dogs seem to have a full cup most of the time, either because of a genetic pre-disposition, or because they have learned good ways to get a refill.

Most things that dogs do are completely normal—including the annoying stuff, like DIGGING up the garden, CHASING cats, or BARKING at the mailman. But all dogs show signs of stress when their cups get near empty.

Signs your dog may be coping with an empty cup

* hoarding resources, over-protective
* over-reacting, or shutting down when exposed to new things
* restlessness
* slow to recover from exciting events
* changes in appetite
* escalating behaviors to get something or to get away from something
* increased grumpiness, or flare-ups
* intense social appeasement

What refills a dog's cup:

♥ Doing Dog Things: SNIFFING, CHEWING, FORAGING, BARKING, DIGGING, PLAYING
♥ Being included in the family (dogs/humans)
♥ Freedom to move
♥ Freedom to make choices
♥ Ability to control outcomes and get reinforcers
♥ Unconditional love and attention
♥ Good health: nourishing food, no parasites, etc.
♥ Having a safe, quiet place to rest
♥ Predictable routines and interactions
♥ Getting to do things a dog loves to do

What empties a dog's cup:

♦ Social isolation
♦ Long periods of confinement with no enrichment
♦ Poor nutrition, untreated illness, or pain
♦ Denied access to reinforcers
♦ Scary or unpredictable reactions from important humans
♦ Over-stimulation (over-exercised) or not enough
♦ Set up to fail, and then punished for it
♦ No preparation for challenging situations
♦ Unclear training: not knowing how to get reinforcement
♦ No one responding when expressing a need
♦ Too much "impulse control" (i.e. no sniffing, no eating, no exploring, no barking, no doing Dog Things) for too much of the day

Words by Sarah Owings   Art by Lili Chin   Inspired by THE EMOTIONAL CUP by Upbility