



## How Dogs Connect and Heal

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Often, people call, email or contact me on social media asking, “How do dogs heal or offer comfort?”

Dogs have the special ability to bring you into the moment. Whether it be talking about trauma, sadness or joy, they pay attention without judgement. They connect and listen which can be sorely lacking in today’s quick interactions, oftentimes, with people we have never met.

From childhood, dogs have been my “trusted” companions. As an adult they resonate with every bit of my being. I am comfortable in the company of almost all dogs and their people.

None of us are perfect and dogs do not care. They don’t try and prove themselves “right” at someone’s else’s emotional expense. I have coached many, who have shared that until they got a dog, they felt emotionally bankrupt. They bring us to our joyful knees with their way of engaging (cuteness, play, listening, companionship, helping). Many dogs give up their lives to be trained to support humans.

Sure, they can drive us bats doing “doggy” things like barking, jumping and lunging. If dogs could speak English, they will tell us a few things we do, as humans, that simply doesn’t make any doggy sense. They humble us! Dogs are individuals, where almost always, we get what we shape. The effort we put into creating the relationship by teaching matters.

I realized researching my first book *Train Your Dog, Change Your Life*, that dogs change lives, especially mine. I have worked in corporate, retail, have a master’s in counseling & wellness, but have learned MORE from dogs and dog-minded people. It’s changed my life. They teach us to learn from, not be afraid of, differences in lifestyles, values, species cultures.

One thing I know for sure is that you must face your fears. It was horses who encouraged me while interning at UpReach Therapeutic Riding (Goffstown, NH). As with dolphins and whales, you are not going to get a horse to participate unless s/he wants too. Using brute force is simply cruel. Plus, I don’t want too. There must be trust and mutual respect. For me, a carrot in my pocket worked. Talking and massaging encouraged safety and companionship. I want the horse or dog to enjoy being with me.

Whether working with horses or dogs, we learn new ways of learning and collaborating. These skills transfer to other areas in our lives (career, relationships). Dogs live in the moment. They don’t obsess. We do! They teach us patience, understanding, acceptance and love, even we have been jerks.



Is it always easy? No. Nothing meaningful will be. Personally, I could choose easy rather than struggle through. School and college were easy for me. Nine-to-five jobs (20+ years of my life) gave me skills, tuition reimbursement, health benefits and a few close friends. Beyond that I was B.O.R.E.D. to tears with the monotony of corporate cubicles. I couldn't wait to get outside at break, and breathe, then get home to be with the pets, who waited, sometimes not so patiently.

No-one will ever greet you with so much vigor than a dog. Sure, I ask myself, is it because you love me or are you hungry? Who cares – I'm hungry too – so we need each other.

In *Awareness Centered Training – ACT*, I took my beliefs and training skills to a different level, beyond positive, as many trainer / behaviorists have. We don't "break" we "teach". We observe and give puppies/dogs a chance to "think" and show us, which they are doing the moment they join us. Dogs are doing all the behaviors they need to navigate in the "real-world" just need to be give a chance, cue, and time to learn, in a variety of environments.

They are watching, sitting, lying down, coming to us, walking away, and so much more that can be shaped into acceptable, valuable behaviors to integrate into family lifestyles. All we need to do is notice, give it a name and reward, then repeat and practice.

There are many exciting ways to live and learn with dog's life rewards. Simply integrating the basics into daily interactions/relationships teaches the dog what s/he needs to do to get what they need to survive and thrive. The mantra is to be "aware" with balance, relationship, education and well-being.

Easy to remember, B.R.E.W., helps us create healthy, happy and confident dogs.

For the short time we have with our dogs, we can embrace the magic of living and learning with a remarkable species, the dog *Canis lupus familiaris*.

***Enjoy the Journey!***

To learn more about Awareness Centered Training – ACT, visit [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com).

To learn more about the benefits of animal assisted therapy visit [www.newenglandpetpartners.org](http://www.newenglandpetpartners.org)

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