



Does Your Dog Have “Quality of Life”?

This question may not be something that you have considered previously. It is, however, extremely important to your dog. Of course, we all know a dog is not human; however, it has needs, much like we do.

A dog's most basic needs include, but are not limited to, sufficient quantities of good-quality food and fresh water daily to sustain it, adequate shelter, and an annual checkup with vaccinations. In certain parts of the Country, like the Mid-South, your dog will also need to be on a monthly heart worm medicine and, usually, some type of flea and tick preventative. A dog may also occasionally have health problems between its annual trips that necessitate additional trips to the vet.

Much has been written on the “basics” of keeping an animal physically healthy. If you need more information on “basic” care, your veterinarian can provide it to you and you should rely on his or her expertise.

We assume you know the “basics.” We want you to consider something equally important to your animal as its physical well-being. That is its “quality of life.” Quality of life relates to a sense of well-being that stems from satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the areas of life important to an individual, so, “quality of life” is about the things that make life worth living or your dog's emotional and mental health. Have you ever thought what your dog's life is like **to your dog?**

Dogs are pack animals. That means God and nature have hardwired them for life in a group. It also means being alone is not natural for them. When we domesticated dogs, we bred them to do things for us. Working dogs, dogs with jobs, have something to do, and, further, most of the tasks that we bred them for involved being with us, so they were not alone. Today, most dogs are no longer “working” dogs, they are guardians of our home and property or mere pets.

What does this mean to their quality of life? We get dogs when they are young and “socialize” them to accept us as their pack, sometimes so much so that they cannot relate well with other dogs. Then what? While inside dogs have their own problems, because we, as humans, expect them to conform with our expectations of how they should act inside our homes, at least we do not condemn them to a life of loneliness. They enjoy our company and, although it is not the same type of company that they would have in a “pack,” it is, nonetheless, company.

Outside dogs, especially “only” dogs, are not so lucky. Owners may feed and water them every day, see that they get annual vaccinations and are on heartworm medicine and maybe give them a quick pat on the head or occasionally throw a ball for them, but, on the whole, it is a sad and lonely life for the dog. Remember, dogs are pack animals.

The outside dog has no one to play with, no one to hunt with, no one to sleep with, no one to do anything with. Further, dogs do not have our resources. They can't read. They can't watch television. Dogs handle this in a number of ways: some get depressed and just lay around or sleep all the time, others go stir crazy and bark excessively, dig, or chew, maybe even tear up anything and everything they can find, still others, become escape artists. What is that saying - home is where the heart is?

Every dog needs emotional, mental and physical stimulation and it needs more than five or ten minutes a day. It needs to be part of a pack, whether the pack is human or canine. Would you honestly want to live your outside dog's life? Sitting alone, outside, by yourself in a confined area or on a chain hour after hour and day after day and week after week and year after year? Always waiting for someone to feed and water you, maybe pat you on your head once or twice and then leave again? Can you honestly say that does not sound like a horrible, lonely and monotonous existence?

If you have a dog, living outside, by itself, give some thought to your dog's quality of life. If you don't want another dog, consider making your dog an inside dog. If you are not willing to make your dog an inside dog, consider spending more time with the dog, an hour or more each day, or getting another dog, if your dog is good with other dogs. If you can't or won't do anything else, find your dog another home, where its needs will be met, where it will have “quality of life.”

One final note, if you keep a dog as a “guard” dog, it is not going to do you much good out in the backyard if someone breaks into your home. Think about it.