

Do Dogs Think We Are Just Big Dogs?



Have you ever wondered what goes on in the mind of man's best friend? Dogs have been by our side for thousands of years, providing companionship, loyalty, and even protection. But do they see us as fellow canines or something else entirely?

The question of whether dogs perceive us as just big dogs is a fascinating one, and scientists have been studying canine cognition for decades to find the answer. While we may never know for sure what goes on in a dog's mind, there is evidence to suggest that our furry friends see us as more than just members of their family.

The Warmth of Our Unique Scent

Our scent is an integral part of how our dogs perceive us. Dogs have an incredibly keen sense of smell, and they are able to pick up on the unique scent of each member of their family. When we greet our dogs, our scent reminds them of the positive experiences that they share with you, creating a bond that is formed in memory and can last for life.

Dr. Gregory Berns, a neuroscientist at Emory University, conducted a study that found that dogs have a dedicated area in their brains for processing scents. This area, known as the olfactory bulb, is much larger in dogs than it is in humans, and it plays a crucial role in how dogs perceive the world around them.

"When a dog sniffs you, they are not just gathering information about who you are and where you've been," says Dr. Berns. "They are also forming a bond with you based on your unique scent. This bond is incredibly strong and can last a lifetime."



Anthropomorphism

While it's tempting to think that dogs see us as just big dogs, it's important to remember that dogs and humans are two different species with very different ways of thinking and communicating. When we anthropomorphise our dogs, we risk projecting our own thoughts and feelings onto them, which can cloud our understanding of their true nature.

Dr. Alexandra Horowitz, author of "Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know," warns against anthropomorphising our dogs too much. She argues that while dogs are certainly intelligent and capable of forming strong emotional bonds with humans, they do not see us as fellow dogs.

"Dogs are keen observers of human behaviour, and they learn to adapt to our ways in order to get what they want," says Dr. Horowitz. "But that doesn't mean they see us as just big dogs. They understand that we are different from them, even if they don't understand exactly how."



The Role of Olfaction

One of the key ways that dogs perceive the world is through their sense of smell. Dogs have an incredibly powerful sense of smell, and they use it to gather information about their environment, including the other members of their family.

When dogs sniff each other, they are able to gather a wealth of information about the other dog, including its age, sex, health, and emotional state. They can even tell if another dog is pregnant or in heat, just by sniffing its urine.

It's likely that dogs use their sense of smell to gather information about us as well. When they sniff us, they can tell who we are, where we've been, and even what we've eaten. This may be why dogs are often so good at picking up on our emotions – they can literally smell them.



The Evidence

While we may never know for sure what goes on in a dog's mind, there is some evidence to suggest that dogs do not see us as just big dogs. One study published in the journal *Animal Cognition* found that dogs are able to recognise human faces, even when they are shown in profile. This suggests that dogs perceive us as individuals, rather than just as members of their family.

Another study, published in the journal *Current Biology*, found that dogs are able to understand human gestures, such as pointing and gazing, in much the same way that they understand the gestures of other dogs. This suggests that dogs see us as more than just big dogs – they see us as members of their family who are capable of communicating with them in their own language.

While it's impossible to know for sure what goes on in a dog's mind, there is evidence to suggest that dogs do not see us as just big dogs. So the next time you're out for a walk with your furry friend, take a moment to appreciate the special bond that you share. While you may not be a dog yourself, you are definitely more than just a big dog to your canine companion. You are a beloved member of their family, bonded to them by the warmth of your unique scent and the love and care you provide each day.

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