



# Happy Place Index



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# About the Author

## Professor Mark Rowlands

Mark Rowlands (D.Phil., University of Oxford) is Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of Miami. He is the author of twenty-four books, and over a hundred journal articles – and is known within the academic community for his work on animal minds. His best known work is his international best-selling memoir, *The Philosopher and the Wolf*, about the decade he spent living and travelling with a wolfdog. He has lived with dogs for almost his entire life.

In Mark's recent book, *The Happiness of Dogs*, he writes a profound and funny examination of what it means to be fulfilled, both for canines and humans. *The Guardian* called the work "a masterclass in canine philosophy" and said that "by the end, you will envy your dog's every waking moment."

## About Dogs Trust

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest Dog Welfare charity. We believe all dogs deserve to live life to the full.

Since 1891, we've been working for a better future for dogs and the people who love them.

When a dog is in distress, we care for them. When a dog needs a home, we find them a loving family. When an owner needs a helping hand (or paw) – or they just can't cope, we're ready to step in.

For every dog, for every owner, we're by their side through thick and thin, throughout their lives. The bond they have is special to us. It changes lives, making each day happier and more complete. It's why we believe A Dog is for Life.®

We'll never stop fighting to make tomorrow's world a better place for all dogs.

Our passionate and dedicated staff and volunteers have driven our many achievements since then, from changing laws and expanding abroad to supporting thousands of dogs and owners.

Today, every member of the Dogs Trust family plays an important role. From canine carers and volunteers to our chief executive, we're all here to help dogs and their owners now and into the future.

## About Happy Place

Happy Place is Dogs Trust's flagship festive campaign. Simply put, it is a celebration of everything dogs do for us, and everything incredible owners across the country do for their dogs.

For a dog, happiness isn't complicated. A dog's Happy Place isn't about extravagance – it's about the moments, places, and people that contribute to their lives.

It's the smell of adventure, the sound of love, the comfort of belonging, and the freedom to be themselves.

The report demonstrates that a dog's Happy Place isn't limited to a location.

A Happy Place is a state of being.





# Foreword

## The Wonder of Dogs

Dogs give us so much. Their unwavering loyalty, unconditional love, and ability to provide significant physical and emotional health benefits to humans – a special bond that is strengthened by their inherent empathy and ability to lift our spirits when we feel down.

Dogs have the power to make us better people, too. Studies show that growing up with dogs helps foster social skills, emotional intelligence, and a stronger immune system. They can help children develop kindness and respect for living things, increase their self-esteem, and reduce loneliness – it's unsurprising, then, that..

# 97%

of respondents consider their dog to be part of the family.



Even science agrees that dogs make us happier. When you look at your dog, your brain produces more oxytocin. It works both ways, and recent studies have shown that just looking at each other causes your dog's oxytocin<sup>2</sup> levels to go up, too – reinforced by the 87% who agreed their dog's happiness level impacts their own.

Our research shows that since becoming dog owners 60% spend more time in nature, 28% have met and socialised with more people and 35% feel less lonely. And we can give our dogs the same happiness in return.

The human–dog bond is mutual: we both experience happiness, and we both benefit. The festive period gives us all a great chance to fully appreciate this – we spend less time rushing around, consumed in work or life tasks, and we have more time to dedicate to the things, people and animals we love so dearly.

On a biological level, our brains use the same neurological pathway to process our love for our pets and our love for our children. It's the same love hormone. Studies have shown<sup>1</sup> that the same parts of the brain light up when people look at photos of their children and photos of their dogs<sup>3</sup>.

Over the course of my academic career, I've thought a lot about happiness. In my latest book, I argue the case that a dog's capacity for joy, for meaning, for wholesale commitment to being, exceeds that of humans. This does not mean that dogs are always or inevitably happy. Dogs can live unhappy lives just as we can. It does mean, however, that if you give dogs the raw materials for happiness, they will typically do much more with them than we will. This ability to 'make the most of things' is something from which we can learn.

For dogs, a Happy Place can be somewhere physical, like cuddling up next to their owner on the sofa, dozing by the fire, or rolling around in a muddy puddle. But it can also be a feeling, like the excitement of a new toy, the comfort of being with their favourite humans, or the relief of just being somewhere safe.

This report – Dogs Trust's Happy Place Index – is a deep dive into canine happiness, and delves into how dog owners across the country are providing a Happy Place for man's best friend.

I hope you will enjoy reading this as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

Wishing you and your dogs a magical festive break and a Happy New Year

**Professor Mark Rowlands**

# Research Methodology

In order to understand the factors that contribute to a dog's Happy Place, Dogs Trust commissioned an in-depth piece of quantitative insight.

An online survey was conducted by Ripple Research among 5,002 dog owners across the UK and, to create the Happy Place Index, respondents were asked 40 questions, exploring factors such as exercise, health, social life, companionship, and local environment.

The sample was segmented by various demographics, comprising age by generation, gender, ethnicity, geographical area, the type of property they live in (and associated access to a garden), household income, number of dogs owned and how they came to own them.

Where we refer to generations by name throughout this report, please note the following birth years:

Gen Z - 1997–2012

Millennials - 1981–1996

Gen X - 1965–1980

Baby Boomers - 1946–1964

The Silent Generation - 1928–1945

City-level scores should be interpreted as indicative of lifestyle patterns rather than deterministic differences - they reveal tendencies shaped by place, access, and culture, not single factors.

In instances where the question necessitated answers about one specific dog, respondents who owned more than one were told to answer thinking of the dog whose name comes first in the alphabet.

For the purpose of this report we have gendered the dog to be male. Please note that we are not simply talking about one gender of dog, but refer to all dogs.

Fieldwork took place between 17th - 24th October 2025. Ripple Research is a Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partner and, as such, data has been collected adhering to MRS and ESOMAR guidelines to ensure ethical and accurate data collection.





# Introduction

Any dog is an individual, social, animal. A good for a dog is simply what is good for it, though this is not necessarily the same thing as happiness. Some things that are good for dogs make them happy (walkies!) whilst others – trips to the vet, for example – need not.

Whether it makes them happy or not, a good is what a dog needs or wants because it is beneficial to the dog. As individual, social, animals, a dog's *goods* divide into three, partially overlapping, sorts: some a dog has in virtue of being an animal, some he has in virtue of being social, and others he has because he is an individual. Our survey was designed to explore these three dimensions of canine *goods*.

Throughout this report, we will explore three core types of 'good' that contribute to a dog's overall happiness, and view every dog as an individual, social, animal. Some ingredients of their happiness trace back to them being animals. These are what we will call animal *goods* (A). The most obvious of these are food, water, shelter and health care.

Other ingredients of their happiness derive from dogs being social: what we will call social *goods* (S). These include attachment or companionship, affiliation, a sense of safety or security.

Finally, each dog is an individual and may have needs or wants that are specific to them. One dog might like to run. Another, more sedentary, dog may be less enthusiastic.

One dog might be a social butterfly. Another, due to the circumstances of his history, might be far less amenable to social interaction with other dogs. One dog might like to work or train, while another is less interested in this. We will call these idiosyncratic, or individual *goods* (I), and these vary from one dog to another.



## Occurrent versus Non-Occurrent

There is an important difference between these categories of *goods*. Animal *goods* (A) are, typically, what we might call non-occurrent. That is, while you must spend a certain amount of time making sure they are satisfied, you do not have to continually attend to their satisfaction. For example, making sure your dog is suitably fed can be done in the morning and evening. You do not have to spend all day doing it. The same is true of providing water, shelter and veterinary care.

Social *goods* (S) and Idiosyncratic *goods* (I), however, tend to be far more occurrent. Providing companionship and stimulation, and even a sense of security require effort that is, if not around the clock, then at least far more ongoing than satisfying animal *goods*. The same is true of idiosyncratic *goods*. A dog who likes to run will not want to do this all day, but a certain, not insignificant, amount of time must be spent promoting this good. A dog who likes to train may like a break every now and then, but a substantial portion of time will be required to promote this good, too.

# The Canine Happiness Score

To further analyse the data contained in this report, I have devised the formula for a Canine Happiness Score (CHS), helping us with the measurement of the aforementioned *Goods*.

## Animal goods

can be measured directly.

- Is the dog fed appropriately?
- Does he or she have access to fresh water?
- What is the approach to veterinary care?



## Social goods

can be measured indirectly.

- Perhaps the best proxy (indirect indicator) is quality time.
- The more quality time you spend with your dog, the more social *goods* such as companionship, affiliation, and sense of security will be promoted.

## Individual goods

are the most difficult to measure, since they vary from one dog to another.

- Stimulation may be a good proxy for individual *goods*, for what one dog finds stimulating another might not.
- A willingness to find ways of stimulating a dog, therefore, requires an understanding of what makes the dog tick and the ability to distinguish what it really likes doing from what it does not.



# Our Formula

$$CHS = 0.4A + 0.4S + 0.2I$$

The weighting reflects the fact that individual *goods* are more difficult to assess than animal and social *goods* and also not entirely separable from the other *goods*. Satisfying animal and social *goods* will go some way toward satisfying individual *goods*.

For the full workings, please refer to the appendix. Some examples are included below:

**Dog 1:** Routinely left chained in the garden, fed and watered irregularly, rarely or never sees vet, no social interactions with humans or other dogs.

$$A = 0, S = 0, I = 0. \text{ Overall: } 0.4 \times 0 + 0.4 \times 0 + 0.2 \times 0 = 0.$$

**Dog 2:** Cherished member of the family. Rarely or never left on its own. Regularly exercised. Multiple opportunities for social interaction with other dogs. Fed and watered regularly.

$$A = 10, S = 10, I = 10. \text{ Overall: } 0.4 \times 10 + 0.4 \times 10 + 0.2 \times 10 = 10.$$

**Dog 3:** Fed, watered regularly and appropriate access to vet. Little by way of interaction with family. Little opportunity to explore its individual interests.

$$A = 10, S = 0, I = 0. \text{ Overall } 0.4 \times 10 + 0.4 \times 0 + 0.2 \times 0 = 4.$$





# The Foundations of Animal Goods

Animal Goods represent the shared biological and physical needs that all animals depend upon: access to food, shelter, safety, and healthcare. Within this category, regular veterinary care and environmental security act as key indicators of a dog's physical wellbeing – the practical expression of how owners translate care into action.

## Routine Healthcare as a Benchmark for Care Culture

Among all animal welfare indicators, veterinary access is perhaps the clearest test of commitment. It requires ongoing financial and emotional investment beyond day-to-day care, and it reflects owners' awareness of preventative health practices.

An overwhelming

96%



of UK dog owners report taking their dog to the vet at least once a year for check-ups, vaccinations, or preventative care.

More than half (56%) do so every six months – a sign that regular vet engagement is now culturally embedded rather than exceptional.

The frequency of vet visits skews towards younger owners – 70% of Gen-Z and 66% of millennials responded that they took their dogs to the vet every six months – and to Black, Black British, Caribbean or African owners,

85%



of whom said they took their dog to the vet every six months. These findings suggest a new generation of pet owners are redefining responsible ownership, with preventative healthcare becoming an expectation rather than an aspiration.



### Tips

#### Regular visits to the vet and groomer

From clipping nails and cleaning fur to health check-ups and vaccinations – vets and groomers will help keep your dog looking and feeling healthy. While all dogs must visit the vet regularly, only certain breeds will need regular trips to the groomers.

Before you go to either, it's important to get them used to being handled at home. That way they will be comfortable with this before someone else does it.

Then, in between, keep on top of what you need at home such as flea treatment and worming tablets. If you notice any changes in your dog's behaviour or have any concerns about their health, contact your vet for a check-up.

# The Importance of Safe, Stress-Free Environments

The second measure of *Animal Goods* – the provision of a quiet retreat space within the home – captures how owners support dogs' emotional regulation and autonomy. Dogs, like other animals, can become stressed, tired, or overwhelmed, and require a safe, quiet place in the home to retreat to when they choose.

A substantial majority of respondents

**85%**



report that they always have such a space available for their dog.

Older generations – 88% Gen X and 91% of Baby Boomers – are more likely to say that they make sure this space exists compared to 82% of Gen Z and 81% of Millennials. This may not reflect weaker sentiment among younger owners but environmental realities – younger demographics are more likely to live in smaller or shared spaces with limited room for a dedicated retreat. Statistical probability suggests that older owners are likely to have larger residences – or emptier residences in the case of so-called ‘empty nesters’.

The presence of a personal “den” or refuge is critical in mitigating canine stress, preventing behavioural issues, and improving sleep quality – highlighting that emotional comfort is a tangible part of physical welfare.



## Tips

### Make sure they're comfortable

You should ensure that your dog has somewhere to relax and sleep in comfort. A clean, dry, cosy, padded bed, or even a snug blanket in their favourite spot, will be perfect. Ideally give them somewhere quiet they can retreat to undisturbed if they'd like their own space.

This should be away from loud noises or bustling family rooms. Some dogs prefer the nest-like feeling of a crate or doggy den as it makes them feel safe. So, consider trying one if your dog seems uncomfortable in the open.



# The Changing Culture of Preventative Pet (And Human) Care

The data reveals a powerful social shift: the UK is becoming a nation of preventative carers. Pet owners are no longer waiting for illness or crisis before visiting the vet – instead, they are embedding routine, pre-emptive healthcare into everyday life. Younger generations are leading this change. Gen Z and Millennials not only report higher vet attendance but also demonstrate a holistic understanding of wellbeing that includes emotional, social, and environmental factors.

This mindset shift mirrors trends in human health, where preventative wellness – from mindfulness to annual health checks – is increasingly prioritised over reactive treatment. Interestingly, when asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “I take more steps to support my dog’s general health than my own”, the majority of respondents agreed (72%, with 34% saying they strongly agreed). This further emphasises the point that dogs are seen as integral members of modern households. An overwhelming majority

# 97%



of dog owners consider their dog to be part of the family – something we’ll come back to as part of the individual good.



## Tips

**Provide fresh, clean water daily**

Your dog must always have access to fresh, clean water. This is always important but particularly on a hot summer’s day.

As well as providing them with a drink at home, you should also be able to offer them water if you are out for the day or on a long walk.





## **A Two-Way Street: How Caring for Dogs Benefits Us Too**

Scientific evidence increasingly supports what dog owners have long intuited – that our wellbeing and our dogs' wellbeing are deeply intertwined. A large-scale study<sup>4</sup> from Uppsala University in Sweden, found that owning a dog is associated with longer life expectancy and a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Researchers suggested that regular dog walking, outdoor activity, and companionship lower stress and loneliness, while fostering healthier daily routines.

Additionally, a 2024 longitudinal analysis<sup>5</sup> shows that consistent dog ownership correlates with higher physical activity levels across both weekdays and weekends – underscoring how the investment in a dog can yield tangible health dividends for the owner.

In other words, promoting canine happiness also promotes human health. When owners invest time in their dog's care, exercise, and emotional fulfillment, they are also investing in their own wellbeing – physically, mentally, and socially. The data in this report, alongside evidence from the scientific community, underscores this mutual benefit: happiness flows in both directions along the lead.

## **Regional Perspectives: Geography, Lifestyle, and Canine Wellbeing**

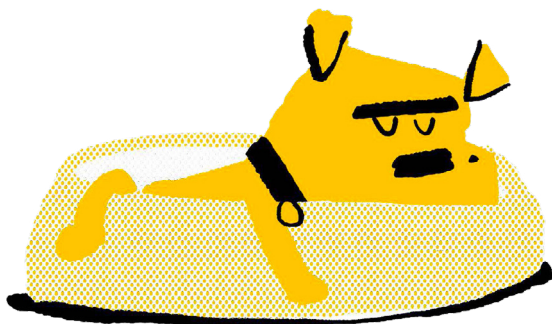
While the UK's Animal Goods scores reveal an impressively consistent standard of canine care nationwide, the underlying data highlight meaningful regional differences in how that care is achieved. These differences are not rooted in attitude, but in the varied rhythms of geography, accessibility, and daily life.



## Urban Strength: Knowledge, Access & Preventative Culture

Regions such as London (8.65) and the West Midlands (8.55) demonstrate the power of urban access to veterinary services and behavioural support. In dense metropolitan areas, preventative care has become professionalised: regular check-ups, dietary management, and routine exercise are viewed as norms rather than luxuries. These scores reflect access to services and awareness of health standards, and this proactive pattern is particularly visible in younger demographics – London's high frequency of six-monthly vet visits (71%) and Gen Z's 70% average underscore a generational shift toward structured, science-based pet care.

Yet, urban success does not come without trade-offs. Limited living space and busy schedules can constrain daily enrichment, leaving some cities, particularly major metropolitans like London, more reliant on professional services to meet dogs' physical and mental needs.



### **Tips**

#### **Pay attention to their diet and nutrition**

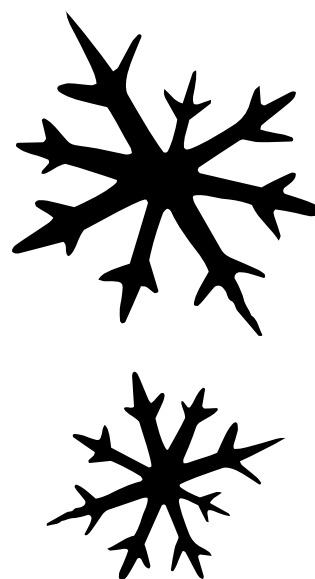
The ingredients in your dog's food can make a difference to their health and wellbeing. Check to make sure you're buying food that is suitable for their size, age and level of activity.

Different dogs have different dietary requirements. Speak to your vet for advice on which dog food is most suitable for yours.

# Coastal and Countryside Balance: Natural Exercise and Freedom

In contrast, regions such as the South West (8.52) and East Midlands (8.51) show the benefits of environmentally enriched lifestyles. Easy access to beaches, fields, and open parks supports regular off-lead exercise and spontaneous outdoor play – a key contributor to both physical health and behavioural wellbeing.

Cities like Exeter, Plymouth, and Bristol show how accessible green space and coastal living may sustain strong Animal Goods scores, even with fewer formal care services. Their routines reflect the wellbeing value of natural exercise and outdoor balance.



## **Tips**

### **Provide appropriate exercise**

Dogs need regular exercise for both their physical and mental wellbeing. Getting outside and going on walks gives them a chance to stretch their legs, have a good sniff and get some fresh air.

Before letting your dog off-lead, just make sure you have trained them to come back when called – and that you are being mindful and respectful of other walkers.

Likewise, ensure they are wearing a collar with an ID tag and that their microchip details are up to date, both of which are legal requirements, in case they do get lost.

Remember, if they are going to be left alone at home, you should always give your dog a walk first and allow them to go to the toilet before you head out.



# Rural Accessibility Gaps: Infrastructure over Intention

At the lower end of the leaderboard, Wales (8.26), East Anglia (8.29) and Yorkshire (8.41) reflect a different challenge. These regions' slightly reduced scores likely stem from limited proximity to veterinary or training services rather than weaker owner engagement.

Cities such as Norwich (8.13) and Sheffield (8.21) highlight how variations in accessibility can subtly shape welfare patterns. In these settings, slightly lower scores may reflect longer travel times to services or fewer enclosed spaces, rather than differences in owner commitment. Across all regions, the consistency of care standards underscores a shared national culture of responsible ownership.

Rural communities often demonstrate strong emotional and social bonds with their pets but face logistical barriers – longer travel times, fewer vets or cost pressures. Nevertheless, their scores remain high, suggesting

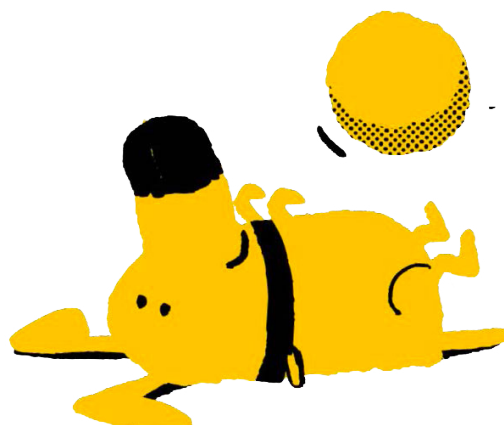
## Scotland: A Model of Balance

Both Edinburgh (8.56) and Glasgow (8.47) exemplify the balanced welfare model, combining structured veterinary care with abundant outdoor environments. Scottish dog owners appear to prioritise exercise and socialisation equally, resulting in harmony between Animal and Social Goods indicators. This equilibrium is characteristic of the broader Scottish pattern: a blend of preventive routines and lifestyle-driven wellbeing.

## The Broader Picture

Across the map, one conclusion is clear: every region in the UK delivers a high baseline of physical care for dogs, but the routes to achieving that care differ.

There is little in these findings to suggest that city size alone predicts better care. Instead, wellbeing is shaped by access and rhythm: urban areas excel in professionalised routines; rural and coastal ones in freedom and natural exercise. What unites them is intent – a deeply ingrained national culture of pet ownership, where canine wellbeing is shaped as much by the flow of human life as by the resources available.



# Animal Goods Leaderboard (Region)

|      |                    |
|------|--------------------|
| 8.65 | London             |
| 8.55 | West Midlands      |
| 8.52 | South West         |
| 8.51 | East Midlands      |
| 8.50 | South East         |
| 8.48 | North East         |
| 8.48 | Scotland           |
| 8.46 | North West         |
| 8.45 | Northern Ireland   |
| 8.41 | Yorkshire & Humber |
| 8.29 | East Anglia        |
| 8.26 | Wales              |



## Animal Goods Leaderboard (City)

|             |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>5.79</b> | <b>Liverpool</b>           |
| <b>5.77</b> | <b>Plymouth</b>            |
| <b>5.71</b> | <b>Belfast</b>             |
| <b>5.50</b> | <b>Southampton</b>         |
| <b>5.49</b> | <b>Newcastle upon Tyne</b> |
| <b>5.42</b> | <b>Norwich</b>             |
| <b>5.31</b> | <b>Birmingham</b>          |
| <b>5.19</b> | <b>Sheffield</b>           |
| <b>5.18</b> | <b>Glasgow</b>             |
| <b>4.97</b> | <b>Edinburgh</b>           |
| <b>4.96</b> | <b>Leeds</b>               |
| <b>4.93</b> | <b>Exeter</b>              |
| <b>4.87</b> | <b>Leicester</b>           |
| <b>4.81</b> | <b>Cardiff</b>             |
| <b>4.79</b> | <b>Canterbury</b>          |
| <b>4.78</b> | <b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b> |
| <b>4.78</b> | <b>Manchester</b>          |
| <b>4.77</b> | <b>Oxford</b>              |
| <b>4.52</b> | <b>London</b>              |
| <b>4.47</b> | <b>Nottingham</b>          |
| <b>4.41</b> | <b>Durham</b>              |
| <b>4.20</b> | <b>Bristol</b>             |
| <b>3.91</b> | <b>Cambridge</b>           |





# The Foundations of Social Goods

If *Animal Goods* capture the fundamentals of wellbeing – food, shelter and health – then *Social Goods* reflect something deeper: the quality of companionship between humans and dogs.

Across the UK, many owners have mastered the art of physical care. Regular vet visits, enriched diets, safe home spaces, and preventative routines have become ingrained in daily life. But as this foundation strengthens, attention is shifting toward a subtler dimension of welfare – time, presence and shared experience.



# The Social Shape of Canine Happiness

Across the UK, the data tells us a story of deep emotional connection – and occasionally modern tension. On average, dogs are left alone for up to five hours in a single period per week, but this varies meaningfully by generation. Baby Boomer owners leave their dogs for the shortest time (just under four hours at 3.6 hours), whilst Gen X leave their dogs just over 4 hours (4.3 hours) suggesting that life stage and routine stability contribute to better companionship.

**Dogs Trust advises that even when dogs cope well with being left alone, they should not be left alone for more than four hours in a single period, and suggests if you are going to be out for longer then to make sure you organise for someone to check in or look after them<sup>6</sup>.**

While most owners clearly care deeply, social time pressures remain a defining feature of modern ownership. Over half (53%) of respondents admitted to walking their dogs less often during the winter months – with one in eight walking them much less often, reducing daily walks to once or twice per week.

Seasonality exposes a key vulnerability in urban and time-poor lifestyles. Baby Boomers are the most consistent walkers, where 64% maintain the same pattern year-round. In London, however, two-thirds (65%) of owners say their walking frequency drops during the colder months.

**53%**



of respondents admitted to walking their dogs less often during the winter months

**64%**



maintain the same pattern year-round.





# Dogs as Family – and Friends

Beneath the routines of feeding, walking, and training lies something deeper. Nearly half of respondents (49%) describe their dog as their best friend, while 40% consider them like their child. This emotional overlap between friendship and kinship reflects a broader cultural shift in the UK: one where dogs increasingly occupy central places in family life.

Generationally, this bond is even stronger among younger owners: 52% of Gen Z and 53% of Millennials describe their dogs as best friends. This may reflect the social realities of modern adulthood – smaller households, more transient living, and digital connections – where the stability and unconditional companionship of a dog provide an anchor for emotional wellbeing.

Modern behavioural science supports this deepening emotional bond. Research has moved beyond outdated “alpha” or dominance models, first inferred from captive wolf studies, toward a more nuanced understanding of canine social cooperation and emotional intelligence. Today’s dogs are recognised as relational and adaptive beings who thrive under calm, consistent human leadership rather than rigid hierarchy.

Bradshaw (2011) and Horowitz (2020)<sup>7</sup> show that domestic dogs flourish when guidance is predictable and reward-based. Structure provides safety, but affection and consistency nurture trust. Meanwhile, experiments modelled on the “secure base” paradigm (Topál et al., 1998<sup>8</sup>; Payne et al., 2015<sup>9</sup>) demonstrate that dogs use their owners as emotional anchors – much like children rely on parents. When owners offer reassurance and routine, dogs experience measurable reductions in stress hormones and improved learning outcomes.

Bekoff and Pierce (2019)<sup>10</sup> highlight that dogs’ happiness depends on opportunities for social play and cooperative engagement, echoing affiliative behaviours found in the wild. Consistent cues and predictable routines enable dogs to anticipate outcomes, reducing anxiety and reinforcing their sense of belonging within the “human pack.”

In essence, dogs are not seeking an “alpha”; they are seeking a confident, compassionate guide.

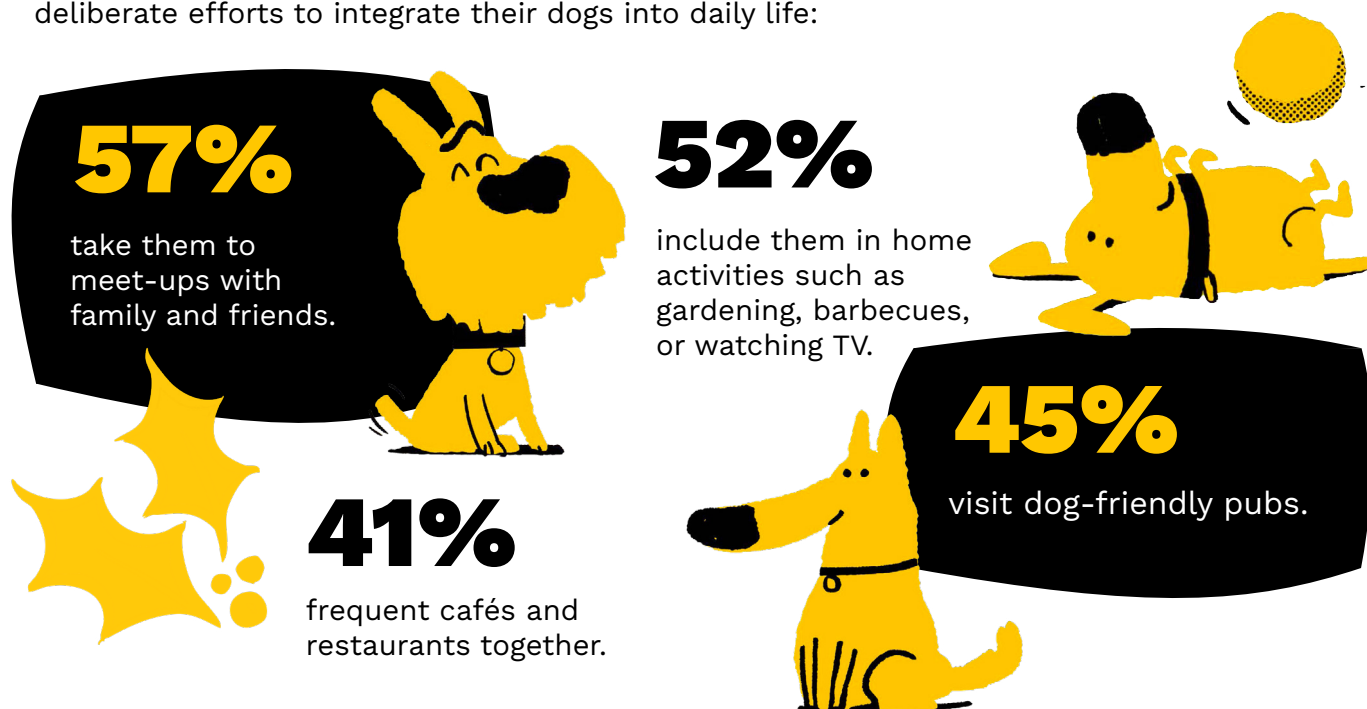
Meeting that need fulfils one of their deepest social drives – and strengthens the emotional bond at the very heart of canine happiness.





## Inclusion as a Measure of Belonging

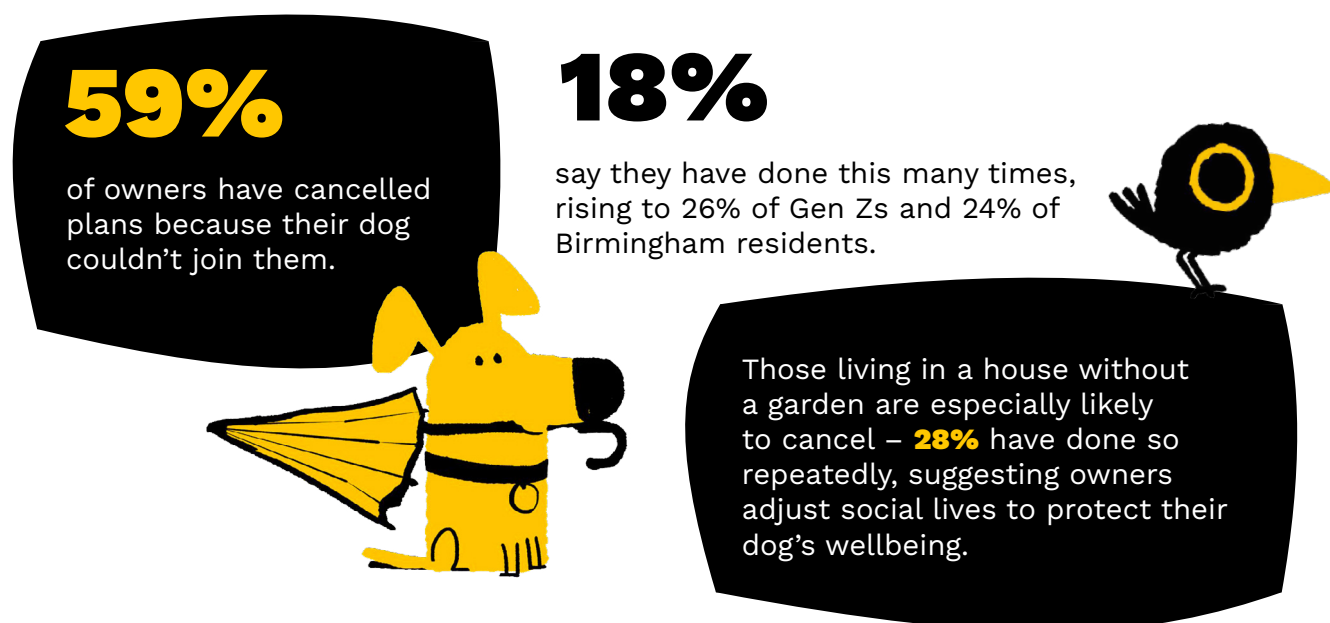
When it comes to inclusion, British dog owners are remarkably generous. A majority make deliberate efforts to integrate their dogs into daily life:



While only 10% bring their dogs to work, these findings show that dogs are active participants in the social fabric of everyday British life.

## Choosing Dogs over Plans

Social commitment goes even further:



Even more tellingly, 67% of respondents have cancelled plans simply because they preferred to stay home with their dog. This rises to 76% of Gen Zs and 71% of Millennials, and to 75% of Londoners – a sign that companionship often outweighs socialising outside the home.

**Dogs are not only cared for – they are chosen, again and again, as company over convenience.**

## Regional and City Patterns: Geography Shapes Togetherness

The Social *Goods* scores make clear that geography plays a defining role in shaping the quality of companionship between dogs and their owners. Across the UK, patterns of inclusion, routine, and shared time are influenced as much by environment as by individual attitude or intent.

### Community and Connection Lead the Way

At the top of the leaderboard, Northern Ireland (5.79) stands out as the most socially cohesive region for dogs. Here, owners demonstrate particularly high levels of interaction and routinely include their dogs in daily activities. This suggests that smaller community networks and steadier living rhythms foster stronger human–canine bonds and more consistent companionship.

Following closely behind are the North West (5.64) and Scotland (5.61), both regions that blend access to outdoor space with a strong sense of community. The presence of open parks, countryside, and coastal paths creates more opportunities for shared activity, while regional culture reinforces daily routines built around companionship. These findings collectively point to a broader pattern: regions in the North and devolved nations consistently achieve higher Social *Goods* scores, highlighting how social cohesion and lifestyle rhythm underpin canine companionship.

### Urban Time Pressure

In contrast, cities such as London (5.04), Bristol (4.20), and Cambridge (3.91) reflect the pressures of urban life. High-density living, smaller properties, and longer working hours restrict both outdoor access and the amount of time owners can spend with their dogs.

Despite these challenges, the data reveal that emotional attachment in these areas remains exceptionally strong. For example, three-quarters of Londoners report that they have chosen to stay home simply to spend time with their dog. This illustrates that the issue is not one of affection, but of time and structure – love is abundant, but opportunity is limited.



## City Highlights

At a city level, the same balance between rhythm, space, and inclusion appears. Liverpool (5.79) and Plymouth (5.77) lead the pack, both characterised by coastal settings, community-driven culture, and accessible outdoor lifestyles. In these areas, where residents are satisfied with their access to green space –



in the North West, 80%<sup>11</sup> in the South West – dogs are active participants in daily routines and leisure time.

Belfast (5.71) mirrors Northern Ireland's wider strength, combining familiarity and local warmth with shared community activity. Southampton (5.50) and Newcastle (5.49) also perform strongly, benefitting from a manageable urban scale and strong local identity.

Cities such as London (4.52), and Bristol (4.20) illustrate how differing urban structures shape owner–dog interaction. In these areas, a faster pace of life, smaller housing stock, and time pressures may naturally constrain daily routines – not from a lack of care, but from lifestyle realities. Each city's rhythm of work, travel, and green-space access creates its own conditions for togetherness, reminding us that variation in *Social Goods* reflects context, not commitment.

## The Broader Picture

Overall, the data show a nation deeply bonded to its dogs. While structural and lifestyle factors shape how that love is expressed, the emotional impulse to include dogs as companions, friends, and even family members remains universal. The story of *Social Goods* is therefore one of connection under constraint – proof that even in a time-poor society, people continue to prioritise the presence and comfort of their pets.

There is no simple link between metropolitan size and social wellbeing, but one factor could be pace – the interplay of time, space, and social rhythm. Wherever dogs are woven into the everyday fabric of life, happiness follows.

**Where community, routine, and outdoor access flourish,  
so too does canine happiness.**



## Social Goods Leaderboard (Region)

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>5.79</b> | <b>Northern Ireland</b>       |
| <b>5.64</b> | <b>North West</b>             |
| <b>5.61</b> | <b>Scotland</b>               |
| <b>5.37</b> | <b>North East</b>             |
| <b>5.32</b> | <b>Wales</b>                  |
| <b>5.09</b> | <b>East Midland</b>           |
| <b>5.04</b> | <b>London</b>                 |
| <b>4.99</b> | <b>West Midlands</b>          |
| <b>4.95</b> | <b>South East</b>             |
| <b>4.91</b> | <b>South West</b>             |
| <b>4.82</b> | <b>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</b> |
| <b>4.54</b> | <b>East Anglia</b>            |



## Social Goods Leaderboard (City)

|             |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>5.79</b> | <b>Liverpool</b>           |
| <b>5.77</b> | <b>Plymouth</b>            |
| <b>5.71</b> | <b>Belfast</b>             |
| <b>5.5</b>  | <b>Southampton</b>         |
| <b>5.49</b> | <b>Newcastle upon Tyne</b> |
| <b>5.42</b> | <b>Norwich</b>             |
| <b>5.31</b> | <b>Birmingham</b>          |
| <b>5.19</b> | <b>Sheffield</b>           |
| <b>5.18</b> | <b>Glasgow</b>             |
| <b>4.97</b> | <b>Edinburgh</b>           |
| <b>4.96</b> | <b>Leeds</b>               |
| <b>4.93</b> | <b>Exeter</b>              |
| <b>4.87</b> | <b>Leicester</b>           |
| <b>4.81</b> | <b>Cardiff</b>             |
| <b>4.79</b> | <b>Canterbury</b>          |
| <b>4.78</b> | <b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b> |
| <b>4.78</b> | <b>Manchester</b>          |
| <b>4.77</b> | <b>Oxford</b>              |
| <b>4.52</b> | <b>London</b>              |
| <b>4.47</b> | <b>Nottingham</b>          |
| <b>4.41</b> | <b>Durham</b>              |
| <b>4.20</b> | <b>Bristol</b>             |
| <b>3.91</b> | <b>Cambridge</b>           |



# The Foundations of Individual Goods

If Animal *Goods* capture the physical wellbeing of dogs, and Social *Goods* the companionship they share, then Individual *Goods* reveal the emotional core of canine happiness – the depth of understanding, communication and mental stimulation that defines the bond between dogs and their owners.





# The Daily Practice of Enrichment

Across the UK, enrichment is part of everyday dog ownership. Nearly a third of respondents (31%) provide mental stimulation for their dogs a few times each week, and a further 29% do so multiple times a day –

# 24%



do this once a day. Games with toys are the most common form of enrichment (29%), followed by food-based activities (22%) and scent-based exploration such as slow walks or new routes (19%). These practices show that owners recognise their dog's need for mental engagement alongside physical exercise – a foundation for both calmness and confidence.

These means of enrichment mirror what ethologists describe as “species-typical behaviours”: opportunities for dogs to think, solve, and play in ways that align with their natural instincts<sup>12</sup>.

In psychological terms, this is the behavioural embodiment of attachment. Owners who view their dogs as companions or family members are more likely to engage in interactive play, consistent training, and shared routines – all key predictors of wellbeing under the Individual Goods framework. The result is a virtuous circle: secure attachment fuels engagement; engagement, in turn, reinforces security.

Generationally, enrichment frequency tends to rise with age, suggesting that time availability and routine stability play important roles. Older owners are more consistent in daily engagement, while younger demographics show greater enthusiasm for structured play but less routine consistency.



## Tips

**Keep their mind active  
as well as their body**

Dogs are active and intelligent animals. So, it's important to provide them with safe and suitable opportunities to exercise their mind, as well as their body.

Great ways to enrich your dog's life include:

- Interactive puzzle-feeders
- Playing with a range of toys
- Scattering treats for them to sniff out
- Reward-based training sessions.

These are perfect for preventing boredom (which might lead to destructive behaviour) and teaching your dog new skills. These activities are also a good way to tire out dogs that need restricted exercise, such as those recovering from surgery.

# Knowing the Dog Within

A defining feature of Individual Goods is the owner's self-perception of how well they know their dog. An overwhelming

97%



of respondents believe they understand their dog's personality, likes, and dislikes, with 56% saying they know them very well. This finding suggests that dog owners feel very confident in their canine emotional literacy capabilities, however scientific research on pet emotion is only in its early stages.

Although pet owners are currently one of the best sources of information because they spend so much time with their animals, understanding how pet dogs and cats are feeling is very difficult and getting it wrong could result in welfare issues for the animals and the risk of injury for humans. Although owner beliefs and anthropomorphisms are problematic in many situations, they are helpful as a starting point for an objective definition of animal emotions<sup>13</sup>.

This sense of attunement is reinforced by daily habits:

83%



83% of owners spend quality, engaged time with their dogs at least once a day, and 61% do so several times per day. Older generations lead this behaviour – 96% of Baby Boomers make daily time for their pets, compared with

79%



79% of Gen Z owners. Women are slightly more consistent than men (86% vs. 81%), and busy Londoners fall behind the national average by about ten percentage points (73%).



## Tips

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as well as their body**

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These are perfect for preventing boredom (which might lead to destructive behaviour) and teaching your dog new skills. These activities are also a good way to tire out dogs that need restricted exercise, such as those recovering from surgery.

# Family, Training and the Modern Owner

Emotional connection and structured care go hand-in-hand. Nearly all respondents (97%) consider their dog a part of the family, demonstrating the depth of integration between species in British households. This sentiment is expressed not only through affection but also through deliberate investment in training and guidance.

More than six in ten

# 61%



owners have used some form of training support. Younger owners lead this trend – 67% of Millennials and 66% of Gen Zs have sought professional or digital training help. Londoners are the most likely to do so (71%), and

# 81%



Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents are the most engaged of all. When it comes to method, traditional approaches remain most trusted: 72% of owners found professional trainers or behaviourists effective, while 71% cited veterinarians as key sources of guidance. Online resources play a growing role, though their perceived effectiveness varies – 44% find social media helpful, compared with 52% for websites and blogs.



## Tips

### **Train them to build their confidence**

Training your dog using reward-based methods is very important and you should start as soon as possible. It will help to keep them safe as well as ensure they grow into confident dogs.

It can also help to prevent behaviour problems from developing. For example, to avoid separation anxiety developing you need to teach them to be comfortable spending time alone.

It may be hard to leave that bundle of fluff. But, if you teach them while they are young, you'll avoid the stress it can cause them as they get older. Other useful life skills include teaching your dog to settle and to walk nicely on lead.



## Regional and City Patterns

The Individual Goods scores reinforce a picture of nationwide strength in emotional connection and mental engagement.

Smaller, slower-paced cities such as Norwich (8.19) and Exeter (8.00) demonstrate how stability and accessible outdoor environments can support daily engagement and enrichment routines. In contrast, large metropolitan areas such as London (7.76) and Birmingham (7.65) maintain high scores through structured enrichment, training, and professional support – reflecting high awareness but busier rhythms.

Regional and city differences here are subtle. They appear to follow not a demographic divide but a pattern of tempo: the faster the pace of life, the more owners rely on structured, time-efficient care to maintain connection and wellbeing.

The consistency of scores nationwide – all above 7/10 – suggests a deeply embedded understanding of dogs as family members, regardless of geography or lifestyle.

## The Broader Picture

Again, pace emerges as a potentially important variable. Owners in smaller, slower-paced communities tend to integrate dogs into daily life more fluidly; urban owners rely on structure and routine to achieve the same ends. Both paths work – but what seems to matter is constancy and understanding.

Across all demographics, 97% of respondents consider their dog a member of the family. This universality underscores that emotional connection is the most stable of the three pillars. Regardless of geography, the human–dog bond in the UK is deeply felt and widely practiced.

**Individual Goods represent the heart of canine happiness – suggesting proof that beyond routine and environment, what matters most is the empathy and attentiveness at the centre of every relationship..**





## Individual Goods Leaderboard (Region)

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>9.64</b> | <b>London</b>                 |
| <b>9.61</b> | <b>South East</b>             |
| <b>9.59</b> | <b>West Midlands</b>          |
| <b>9.55</b> | <b>East Midlands</b>          |
| <b>9.51</b> | <b>North West</b>             |
| <b>9.48</b> | <b>South West</b>             |
| <b>9.45</b> | <b>Scotland</b>               |
| <b>9.42</b> | <b>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</b> |
| <b>9.38</b> | <b>North East</b>             |
| <b>9.35</b> | <b>Wales</b>                  |
| <b>9.31</b> | <b>East Anglia</b>            |
| <b>9.27</b> | <b>Northern Ireland</b>       |



## Individual Goods Leaderboard (City)

|             |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>8.19</b> | <b>Norwich</b>             |
| <b>8.12</b> | <b>Edinburgh</b>           |
| <b>8.00</b> | <b>Exeter</b>              |
| <b>7.88</b> | <b>Plymouth</b>            |
| <b>7.82</b> | <b>Bristol</b>             |
| <b>7.82</b> | <b>Glasgow</b>             |
| <b>7.76</b> | <b>London</b>              |
| <b>7.74</b> | <b>Leicester</b>           |
| <b>7.74</b> | <b>Sheffield</b>           |
| <b>7.73</b> | <b>Nottingham</b>          |
| <b>7.72</b> | <b>Belfast</b>             |
| <b>7.71</b> | <b>Southampton</b>         |
| <b>7.65</b> | <b>Birmingham</b>          |
| <b>7.62</b> | <b>Cardiff</b>             |
| <b>7.61</b> | <b>Durham</b>              |
| <b>7.59</b> | <b>Canterbury</b>          |
| <b>7.56</b> | <b>Manchester</b>          |
| <b>7.54</b> | <b>Newcastle upon Tyne</b> |
| <b>7.49</b> | <b>Oxford</b>              |
| <b>7.49</b> | <b>Liverpool</b>           |
| <b>7.46</b> | <b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b> |
| <b>7.40</b> | <b>Leeds</b>               |
| <b>7.18</b> | <b>Cambridge</b>           |



# **Happy Place Index**

**A Portrait of the  
Nation's Dogs**



# Defining the Canine Happiness Score

The Canine Happiness Score (CHS) provides a holistic measure of canine wellbeing across the UK, combining three distinct but interconnected pillars:



This weighting reflects the idea that physical and social wellbeing are the essential foundations upon which individual happiness rests. The resulting Happy Place Index paints a nuanced portrait of how dogs live, connect, and thrive alongside their owners across the nation.

## A Picture of Balance & Commitment

The data reveals a nation of dog owners who are deeply devoted and increasingly attuned to their pets’ wellbeing. While overall scores range modestly from 7.55/10 at the top to 6.3/10 at the bottom, this narrow spread reflects a remarkable baseline of care – an indication that Britain’s dog culture is defined more by consistency than disparity.

The highest-scoring regions are not necessarily the most affluent or urban, but those that combine community, routine, and outdoor access. Conversely, it could be argued that large metropolitan areas – despite offering better veterinary and training services – face structural constraints: time pressure, limited green space, and smaller homes.

In short, the UK’s dogs are loved and well cared for everywhere, but their daily experience varies subtly with the rhythms of geography and lifestyle.



### Tips

**Show them love and affection**

Avoid telling your dog off as this may worry or confuse them. Instead, praise and reward good behaviour. This will help them to learn how you would like them to behave and will help to build a bond between the two of you. This will help your dog feel safe and cared for. Remember, be gentle and kind.





# Regional Patterns

Northern Ireland (7.55/10) tops the leaderboard, reflecting a balanced combination of social connection and strong owner engagement. Dogs here benefit from frequent interaction and inclusion in daily routines, suggesting that community life and slower pace contribute directly to wellbeing.

The North West (7.54) and Scotland (7.53) follow closely behind, each characterised by consistency across all three pillars. Scotland's performance, in particular, highlights how outdoor access and high emotional attunement combine to produce steady, balanced care.

Mid-ranking regions such as the East Midlands (7.35) and West Midlands (7.33) reflect solid physical care routines but slightly lower social engagement, while the South East (7.3) and South West (7.27) illustrate how lifestyle pressures can subtly reduce shared time without diminishing affection or health outcomes.

At the lower end, Yorkshire & Humber (7.18) and East Anglia (6.99) still deliver strong results in Animal and Individual *Goods*, but slightly lower Social *Goods* scores suggest fewer opportunities for shared activity or community-level engagement. These differences reflect environment and accessibility more than attitude - the care commitment remains universal.

At the city scale, the happiness divide narrows further but mirrors the same story:

- Coastal and coastal-adjacent cities - including Plymouth (7.26), Liverpool (7.21), Belfast (7.20), Southampton (7.12), and Newcastle (7.06) - lead the way. Their proximity to water, walkable parks, and community-oriented cultures support daily outdoor activity and inclusion. Dogs in these environments are more likely to accompany owners in leisure and social life – a reflection of place, not privilege.
- Larger urban centres such as London (6.82), Manchester (6.82), and Bristol (6.65) perform well on physical and individual care, but time constraints and dense living conditions limit shared social enrichment.
- At the lower end, Cambridge (6.32), Oxford (6.80), and Canterbury (6.78) exemplify how faster-paced, high-turnover environments can reduce opportunities for daily consistency. Here, wellbeing is sustained through knowledge and intention rather than time abundance.



## A Nation of Devoted Dog Lovers

Ultimately, The Happy Place Index underscores a defining feature of British life: the profound, mutual bond between people and their dogs. Despite regional differences in pace, access, and routine, the nation's commitment to canine welfare is both deep and widespread.

From London flats to Northern Irish coastlines, dogs across the UK enjoy care, attention and companionship at levels that set a global benchmark for pet wellbeing. The findings tell a story not of disparity, but of shared devotion – proof that love for dogs remains one of the most unifying features of modern British life.

There is little in the findings to support simple conclusions about city size and canine happiness. What we can see is that happiness follows rhythm, not scale: it depends on inclusion, predictability, and access to the natural world. The more dogs are integrated into everyday life – through shared time, open spaces, and emotional consistency – the happier and more secure they become.



## Canine Happiness Score Leaderboard (Region)

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>7.55</b> | <b>Northern Ireland</b>       |
| <b>7.54</b> | <b>North West</b>             |
| <b>7.53</b> | <b>Scotland</b>               |
| <b>7.42</b> | <b>North East</b>             |
| <b>7.40</b> | <b>London</b>                 |
| <b>7.35</b> | <b>East Midlands</b>          |
| <b>7.33</b> | <b>West Midlands</b>          |
| <b>7.30</b> | <b>South East</b>             |
| <b>7.30</b> | <b>Wales</b>                  |
| <b>7.27</b> | <b>South West</b>             |
| <b>7.18</b> | <b>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</b> |
| <b>6.99</b> | <b>East Anglia</b>            |



## Canine Happiness Score Leaderboard (City)

|             |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| <b>7.26</b> | <b>Plymouth</b>            |
| <b>7.21</b> | <b>Liverpool</b>           |
| <b>7.20</b> | <b>Belfast</b>             |
| <b>7.12</b> | <b>Southampton</b>         |
| <b>7.09</b> | <b>Birmingham</b>          |
| <b>7.06</b> | <b>Newcastle upon Tyne</b> |
| <b>7.06</b> | <b>Norwich</b>             |
| <b>7.04</b> | <b>Edinburgh</b>           |
| <b>7.02</b> | <b>Exeter</b>              |
| <b>7.02</b> | <b>Glasgow</b>             |
| <b>6.91</b> | <b>Sheffield</b>           |
| <b>6.88</b> | <b>Leicester</b>           |
| <b>6.87</b> | <b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b> |
| <b>6.83</b> | <b>Leeds</b>               |
| <b>6.82</b> | <b>London</b>              |
| <b>6.82</b> | <b>Manchester</b>          |
| <b>6.8</b>  | <b>Cardiff</b>             |
| <b>6.8</b>  | <b>Oxford</b>              |
| <b>6.78</b> | <b>Canterbury</b>          |
| <b>6.75</b> | <b>Nottingham</b>          |
| <b>6.71</b> | <b>Durham</b>              |
| <b>6.65</b> | <b>Bristol</b>             |
| <b>6.32</b> | <b>Cambridge</b>           |





## Conclusion: A Good Investment in Happiness

Anyone who has spent their life with a dog will be presented with one obvious and unassailable truth: dogs are much better at happiness than we are<sup>14</sup>, though this does not mean that they are always or inevitably happy – dogs can live unhappy lives just as we do. It does mean, however, **if you give dogs the raw materials for happiness, they will typically do much more with them than we will.**

As such they are what we might think of as a good investment in happiness. A better world, according to the most influential moral theory – utilitarianism – is a happier world, and it doesn't really matter whose happiness it is. As such, dogs are a great investment in a better world. Give them a little and they will do so much with it.

## A Nation Deeply Invested In Its Dogs

The report strongly supports a picture of the British dog-owner as heavily invested in their dog's wellbeing. There are regional differences between how this wellbeing is promoted. An average urban dog will visit the vet for preventative care somewhat more frequently than a rural counterpart. A rural dog, on the other hand, is likely to enjoy longer and more varied off-lead exercise. Cities – such as London which tops the animal *goods* leaderboard – are places where animal *goods* such as diet and health care are most easily promoted, but the countryside shines in the promotion of social *goods*. These differences in regional expressions are to be expected – what remains invariant is the underlying sentiment expressed: a demonstrated care for one's dog and his wellbeing.



# The Shape of Canine Connection

In terms of social *goods*, the strong performance of regions such as Northern Ireland – and cities such as Liverpool and Belfast – are driven by high-quality interaction and frequent inclusion in owners' daily lives, as measured by the twin metrics of quality time and canceled plans. In contrast, in cities such as London, dogs seem to be less integrated into an owner's daily and social life and accordingly score noticeably lower on measurements of social *goods*. Animal *goods* track affluence for the simple reason that food and health care, and a residence big enough to provide a dog with its own, dedicated, space, cost money. But social *goods* – for example, spending quality time with one's dog and declining to make plans that exclude them – do not cost anything. Therefore, it is hardly unexpected that social goods do not track wealth in the way, or to the extent, that animal goods do.

## Beyond Size And Surface

There is little in the findings to support any simple conclusions about metropolitan size and the quality of a dog's life – each of the regions, cities and towns we have analysed give a good life to their dogs, as demonstrated in the closeness of their Canine Happiness Scores.

We all care a great deal for our dogs, but some locations excel in some areas more than others. Liverpool (top of the social goods leaderboard) is a big city and Cambridge (rooted at the bottom) is much smaller. Influencing factors may be less obvious or tangible, but involve something like the difficult-to-pin-down idea of the 'pace' of a city, a function of the types of jobs available, the hours worked, and even the role and importance of socialising in the workplace could be argued to factor into the equation.

House of Commons research shows that just under 1 in 10 people working in Cambridge today are employed in the retail and wholesale sector<sup>15</sup> (9.7 percent). These are sectors that require an individual to work away from home, with little to no "work from home" days.

Almost one in four (24.9%) Cambridge employees work in education, whilst another 19.2% are in professional, scientific, and technical jobs – roles such as accountants, lawyers, architects, scientists, or any other professional role. Many of these jobs may necessitate long working hours – and often extra time outside of these in the case of teachers who may be required to carry out marking in their own time – which may naturally impact the amount of quality time these individuals can spend with their dogs.

Liverpool University<sup>16</sup>, on the other hand, suggests that Liverpool is at the heart of the UK's chemical, aerospace manufacturing and production industries and is home to the second biggest digital industry cluster in Europe. One could argue that these sectors involve a more structured work-life balance, with 'typical' working hours and centralised working locations.

The cities and regions that scored highest generally did not do so by excelling in one measure but by being good – but not necessarily the best – across the board. The general pattern is clear. The more a dog is included in its owners' lives, and the more access it has to open space where it can engage in its characteristic canine behaviours<sup>17</sup> – and behaviours peculiar to it as an individual, the happier it will be.

# Playing The Long Game

Caring for a dog is hardly rocket science, but it is nevertheless complex and has these three dimensions: animal, social and individual goods. The key to raising a happy dog is to be good in all of these dimensions and excel in at least one. If, for example, you are very good at promoting animal goods but hopeless at social goods, your dog will be well fed, physically healthy – and, very probably, unhappy. Core competencies must be achieved in all the dimensions and, after that, the better you can excel in one (or more!) of these the better. Caring for a dog is an activity that lasts a lifetime – at least, their lifetime – and to play it well you need a good all-round game.

## Festive Findings: A Season of Shared Joy

The festive period offers a rare opportunity for pause – a time when work slows, routines soften, and families, both human and canine, spend more time together. For Britain's dogs, it's a season that seems to affirm what much of this report has already revealed: our dogs are at the heart of our emotional lives.

## Dogs: The Real VIPs of the Festive Season

When it comes to festive generosity, dogs easily rival (and sometimes surpass) our closest friends. On average, UK dog owners buy five presents for their dogs, spending £25 each – an average total of £125. By contrast, they buy only three presents for their closest friend, at £35 each, totalling £105. In short, owners spend £20 more overall on their dogs than on their best friends.

**This finding is both charming and telling. It reflects not just the humanisation of dogs in modern households but a genuine sense of reciprocity – dogs bring daily joy, and owners express gratitude through giving.**





## Dogs as Family

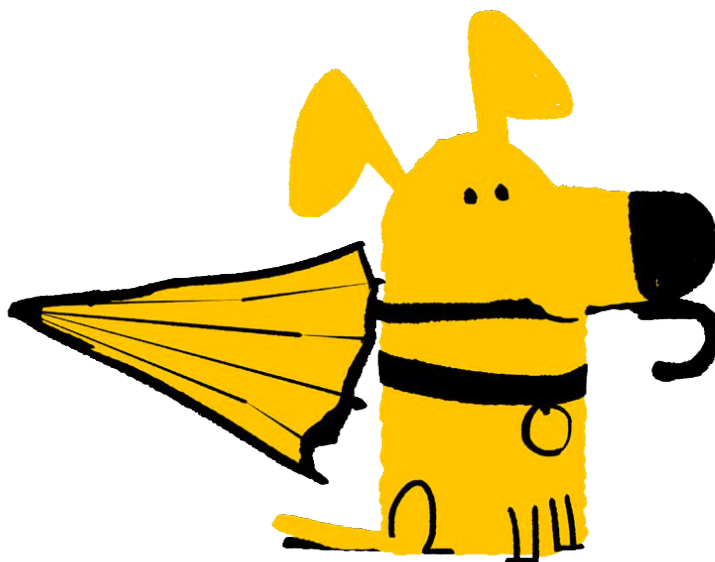
The festive card list offers further evidence of the dog's family status.

**65%**



of owners sign their dog's name in Christmas cards, 'signing' around seven cards on average. Among younger generations, this rises sharply – 71% of Gen Zs and 70% of Millennials will be signing their dog's name this year.

For these cohorts, the dog is more than a pet, they are a family member – an emotional presence whose inclusion in rituals like card-signing symbolises belonging. It reflects the generational redefinition of “family,” one that increasingly includes animals as emotional equals.



## Etiquette and Exercise

However, festive togetherness doesn't always mean universal improvement in care. While 26% of respondents believe public awareness around dog-walking etiquette improves over the holidays, the majority (53%) feel it remains unchanged. Owners of more reactive or “Sensitive Soul” dogs are the most sceptical – only 12% think things improve, suggesting that busy, unfamiliar festive environments may increase stress for some dogs.

And while more time at home means more walks for some, half of respondents (50%) agreed with the statement, rising to 63% among Millennials and 66% among Londoners: “Some owners only walk their dogs properly at Christmas or when family are visiting”.

**26%**

of respondents believe public awareness around dog-walking etiquette improves over the holidays,

**12%**

think things improve, suggesting that busy, unfamiliar festive environments may increase stress for some dogs.

**50%**

agreed with the statement “Some owners only walk their dogs properly at Christmas or when family are visiting”.



## The Seasonal Snapshot

In summary, the festive season reinforces what The Happy Place Index has made clear year-round: dogs are central to modern family life – and they are woven into the rituals that once defined only human connection.

Throughout this report we have explored various factors that contribute to the overall happiness of our dogs – and the festive period gives the majority of us a well-deserved break, and more time to spend with our loved ones.

There's no place happier than a warm, comfortable home, surrounded by the ones we hold dear at Christmas.

It's not just a time for people to slow down – it is when we most clearly see how deeply our happiness, our habits and our homes have been shaped by the dogs who share them. It's in these moments that we really wish our dogs could tell us how they're feeling. At Christmas, a time of warmth, family and gratitude, there's one thing we think they'd say:

**Thank you  
for my  
Happy Place**





# Appendix

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# Scoring Rubric - Canine Happiness Score

Score out of 10=min

$$\text{CHS } \Sigma \frac{(\text{Response Count} \times \text{Score Value})}{\text{Total Responses}}$$

Example:

| Score given | Number of responses | Contribution |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------|
| 10          | 2                   | 20           |
| 9           | 8                   | 72           |
| Score given | 10                  | 92           |

Calculation:  
92/10=9.2→ Overall score = 9.2 / 10





# Breakdown of Questions used for Canine Happiness Score

## Scoring of Animal *Goods*:

**Q1. [ALL]** How often do you think your dog should visit the vet for routine check-ups (including vaccinations and preventative care)? **[single select]**

Every 6 months = 10 points

At least once a year = 8 points

At least every other year = 0 points

I don't take my dog to the vets for routine check ups = 0 points

**Q2. [ALL]** Does your dog have a safe, quiet space in your home to retreat to when they choose to – including when stressed, tired, or nervous? **[single select]**

Yes, always = 10 points

Yes, sometimes = 7 points

No, but I try to find a space when they need it = 4 points

No = 0 points

**Q6. [ALL]** To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I take more steps to support my dogs general health than my own" **[single select]**

Strongly agree = 10 points

Slightly agree = 9 points

Neither agree or disagree = 5 points

Slightly disagree = 2 points

Strongly disagree = 0 points

**Q9. [ALL]** How often does your dog exercise/run around off-lead in an outdoor environment outside of your home (e.g. public park, beach, swimming, dog-exercise facility)? **[single select]**

Every day, multiple times a day = 10 points

Once a day = 9 points

A few times a week = 7 points

Once a week = 4 points

Once a fortnight = 1 point

Once a month = 0 points

Every few months = 0 points

Never = 0 points

Divide raw score by 4 to give the overall Animal Goods score

## Scoring of Social Goods:

**Q8. [ALL]** In a typical week, what's the maximum amount of time your dog would spend alone in a single period? **[sliding scale]**

1 - 12 hours - 2 hours or less = 10 points, 2-4 hours = 5 points, over 4 hours = 0 points

More than 12 hours [exclusive]

My dog is never left alone [exclusive]

**Q19. [ALL]** How often do you spend quality time with your dog? **[single select]**

Quality time in this instance is focused around reciprocal interaction and observable dog engagement. This could be structured (walks, training, enrichment) or unstructured (cuddling, sitting together), but not simply being in the same room while distracted (e.g., owner on phone/TV).

Several times a day = 10 points

Once a day = 8 points

A few times a week = 4 points

Once a week = 2 points

A few times a month = 0 points

Once a month = 0 points

Rarely = 0 points

Never = 0 points

**Q24. [ALL]** In which of the following situations do you usually include your dog? **[select all that apply]** - Given the select all format, we have allocated 1 point for each of options 1-10 inclusion

Visiting a dog-friendly café or restaurant

Visiting a dog-friendly pub

Running errands

Meet-ups with family or friends

Bringing your dog to work or the office

Spending time together while working from home

Shopping trips

Activities at home (e.g., gardening, barbeques, watching TV, reading)

Holidays or trips away

Day trips or outings

None of the above [exclusive]

**Q26. [ALL]** Have you ever cancelled plans because you preferred to stay at home in the company of your dog? **[single select]**

Yes, many times = 10 points

Yes, a few times = 5 points

No = 0 points

Divide raw score by 4 to give the overall Social Goods score.

## Scoring of Individual Goods:

**Q17. [ALL]** How often do you provide mental stimulation/enrichment for your dog(s)? **[single select]**

Every day, multiple times a day = 10 points

Once a day = 8 points

A few times a week = 5 points

Once a week = 1 point

Once a fortnight = 0 points

Once a month = 0 points

Every few months = 0 points

Never = 0 points

**Q18. [ALL]** How well do you think you know your dog's personality (e.g. likes and dislikes)? **[single select]**

If you own multiple dogs, please think of the one whose name comes first alphabetically for this question.

Very well = 10 points

Somewhat well = 7 points

Not very well = 0 points

Not well at all = 0 points

I don't think my dog has a personality = 0 points

**Q20. [ALL]** Do you consider your dog to be a part of your family? **[single select]**

Yes = 10 points

No = 0 points

I don't know = 0 points

**Q22. [ALL]** Have you used any form of training or guidance with your dog(s)? **[single select]**

**Yes = 10 points**

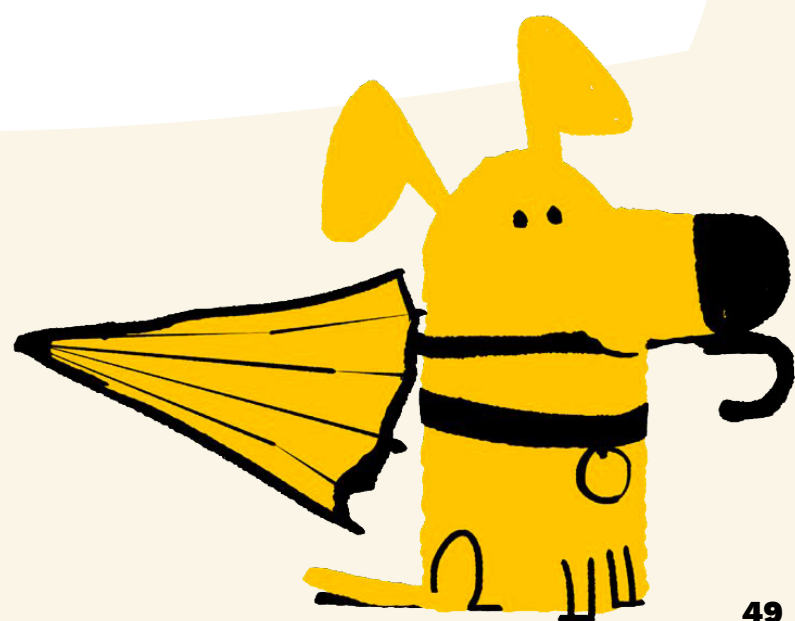
No = 0 points

I don't know/remember = 0 points

Divide raw score by 4 to give the overall Individual Goods score.

# Scoring Summary (Region)

| Region             | Animal Goods | Social Goods | Individual Goods | Canine Happiness Score (CHS) |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Northern Ireland   | 8.45         | 5.79         | 9.27             | 7.55                         |
| North West         | 8.46         | 5.64         | 9.51             | 7.54                         |
| Scotland           | 8.48         | 5.61         | 9.45             | 7.53                         |
| North East         | 8.48         | 5.37         | 9.38             | 7.42                         |
| London             | 8.65         | 5.04         | 9.64             | 7.40                         |
| East Midlands      | 8.51         | 5.09         | 9.55             | 7.35                         |
| West Midlands      | 8.55         | 4.99         | 9.59             | 7.33                         |
| South East         | 8.50         | 4.95         | 9.61             | 7.30                         |
| Wales              | 8.26         | 5.32         | 9.35             | 7.30                         |
| South West         | 8.52         | 4.91         | 9.48             | 7.27                         |
| Yorkshire & Humber | 8.41         | 4.82         | 9.42             | 7.18                         |
| East Anglia        | 8.29         | 4.54         | 9.31             | 6.99                         |





## Scoring Summary (City)

| Region                     | Animal <i>Goods</i> | Social <i>Goods</i> | Individual <i>Goods</i> | Canine Happiness Score (CHS) |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Plymouth</b>            | 8.44                | 5.77                | 7.88                    | <b>7.26</b>                  |
| <b>Liverpool</b>           | 8.50                | 5.79                | 7.49                    | <b>7.21</b>                  |
| <b>Belfast</b>             | 8.43                | 5.71                | 7.72                    | <b>7.20</b>                  |
| <b>Southampton</b>         | 8.44                | 5.50                | 7.71                    | <b>7.12</b>                  |
| <b>Birmingham</b>          | 8.59                | 5.31                | 7.65                    | <b>7.09</b>                  |
| <b>Norwich</b>             | 8.13                | 5.42                | 8.19                    | <b>7.06</b>                  |
| <b>Newcastle upon Tyne</b> | 8.38                | 5.49                | 7.54                    | <b>7.06</b>                  |
| <b>Edinburgh</b>           | 8.56                | 4.97                | 8.12                    | <b>7.04</b>                  |
| <b>Glasgow</b>             | 8.47                | 5.18                | 7.82                    | <b>7.02</b>                  |
| <b>Exeter</b>              | 8.62                | 4.93                | 8.00                    | <b>7.02</b>                  |
| <b>Sheffield</b>           | 8.21                | 5.19                | 7.74                    | <b>6.91</b>                  |
| <b>Leicester</b>           | 8.46                | 4.87                | 7.74                    | <b>6.88</b>                  |
| <b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b> | 8.66                | 4.78                | 7.46                    | <b>6.87</b>                  |
| <b>Leeds</b>               | 8.41                | 4.96                | 7.40                    | <b>6.83</b>                  |
| <b>Manchester</b>          | 8.48                | 4.78                | 7.56                    | <b>6.82</b>                  |
| <b>London</b>              | 8.65                | 4.52                | 7.76                    | <b>6.82</b>                  |
| <b>Oxford</b>              | 8.47                | 4.77                | 7.53                    | <b>6.80</b>                  |
| <b>Cardiff</b>             | 8.37                | 4.81                | 7.62                    | <b>6.80</b>                  |
| <b>Canterbury</b>          | 8.36                | 4.79                | 7.59                    | <b>6.78</b>                  |
| <b>Nottingham</b>          | 8.54                | 4.47                | 7.73                    | <b>6.75</b>                  |
| <b>Durham</b>              | 8.56                | 4.41                | 7.61                    | <b>6.71</b>                  |
| <b>Bristol</b>             | 8.51                | 4.20                | 7.82                    | <b>6.65</b>                  |
| <b>Cambridge</b>           | 8.29                | 3.91                | 7.18                    | <b>6.32</b>                  |



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 [dogstrust.org.uk](https://dogstrust.org.uk)

@ [straydogs@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:straydogs@dogstrust.org.uk)

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