Mentally Healthy: Assessing Quality of Life from a Behavioral Perspective

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What is QoL & why care?
What causes poor QoL?
What does poor QoL look like?
How to measure & interpret QoL?
What to do about poor QoL
I: What Is Quality of Life?
Dogs experience core emotions
Quality of Life = Ratio of Positive/Negative Affect
Dogs are staying in shelters longer
Are there more behaviorally challenged dogs in shelters now?
Dogs on Legal Hold
Five Freedoms

♦ Freedom from hunger and thirst
♦ Freedom from discomfort
♦ Freedom from pain, injury or disease
♦ Freedom to express normal behavior
♦ Freedom from fear and distress
QoL Vs. Quality of Care
II: What Causes Poor QoL
Acute and Chronic Stress
♦ Personality differences
♦ Coping strategies
♦ Previous experience
Typical Shelter Stressors

- Noise
- Noxious odors
- Social isolation
- Confinement
- Everything is new
- Lack of control
- Unpredictability
- Loss of attachment
Vicious Cycle!

LoS -> Chronic Stress -> Behavior & Health Problems

Chronic Stress
III: What does Poor QoL Look Like?
♦ Frustration
♦ Over Reactivity
♦ Excessive arousal*
♦ Aggression*
♦ Conflict
♦ Fear
♦ Depression/Passivity
♦ Repetitive behavior*
♦ Stereotypies
♦ Disrupted sleep patterns
♦ Reward sensitization*
Anhedonia & Learned Helplessness

- Loss of enjoyment in previously appreciated activities or rewards
- Inability to learn to avoid aversive events
Long-Term Stay Dogs

♦ Less likely to play with unfamiliar people
♦ More aggressive to dogs
♦ Rested more
IV: How to Measure & Interpret
Donning his new canine decoder, Professor Schwartzman becomes the first human being on Earth to hear what barking dogs are actually saying.
Physiological Measures

- Corticosteroids (cortisol)
- Heart Rate Variability
- Activity (accelerometers)
Cognitive Bias Test

Positive bias linked to better daytime sleep in the shelter
QoL Scale for Euthanasia Decisions
### Behavioral Rehabilitation Center Learning Lab

#### Good Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The dog...</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/All of the time</th>
<th>Agree/Most of the time</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree/Occasionally</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree/Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plays (with objects, toys, people, dogs, etc.)</td>
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<td>Engages in social interaction (with people or dogs)</td>
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<td>Engages in exploration (sniffing, foraging)</td>
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<td>Expresses a range of other natural canine behaviors (urine marking, chewing, digging, rolling)</td>
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<td>Has the ability to relax and rest (including deep sleep)</td>
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<td>Demonstrates the ability to make effective behavioral choices (e.g., chooses/learns to move away from fear inducing stimuli)</td>
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<td>Has an overall positive affective state</td>
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<td>Does not display excessive behavior to the point of abnormality (compulsive, repetitive, self-injurious)</td>
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<td>Does not spend a significant portion of its time in a state of fear or anxiety</td>
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<td>Does not have a physical condition that requires regular treatment/handling that causes extreme fear or anxiety</td>
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<td>Is free of physical pain/suffering</td>
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<td>Is eating consistently</td>
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<td>Is drinking normally</td>
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<td>Is urinating and defecating normally</td>
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Parameters

♦ Who should assess?
♦ Which animals should be assessed?
♦ How often should they be assessed?
♦ Where should assessments take place?
♦ What time of day/night?
V: What to Do to Remedy
Make Sure Intervention is Warranted

Is this dog resting or shut down?
Resist Over or Under Reacting
In-Kennel Enrichment
Group Housing
Mental Stimulation
Get Out of Shelter
Behavioral QoL is Every Bit as Important as Physical Health
WE ARE THEIR VOICE™

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