



Paint Your Pet's Behavior



About the Experiment

Animals show many different behaviors every day. They may play and greet other animals, and their behavior may change during an activity or experience, such as a sudden thunderstorm. Have you ever noticed your pet's behaviors? Normal behaviors like playing or grooming tell us that an animal is happy and relaxed. When animals become stressed, bored, or sick, they may show 'abnormal behaviors' like biting, hiding, or pacing. It's important to identify and understand animal behaviors and their causes to ensure they are happy and stress free. Use this activity to learn more about different animal behaviors. Get creative painting or drawing!



Ages
4-11



Time
30 mins



Difficulty
Easy



What You'll Need for the Experiment

- Paper plates (or a sheet of paper)
 - Paint/markers/colored pencils/crayons
 - Paint brushes if using paint
 - Popsicle sticks
 - Glue (or tape)
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Let's Do This!

1. Choose a pet or animal to study its behaviors. You can study your pet, a family or friend's pet, or another animal, such as in a zoo. Select three different behaviors that the pet or animal shows (examples are below).
2. Paint or draw the pet or animal expressing its behavior on the paper plate (or sheet of paper). Repeat this for the other two behaviors.
3. If you're painting, let your paper plate or sheet of paper dry after you paint your picture.
4. Glue or tape a popsicle stick to the back of your paper plate.
5. Now you have three animal masks or puppets, or new artwork to hang up.

What did you learn?

1. What pet or animal did you choose and why?
2. What behaviors did you choose? Why did you choose these?
3. What do these behaviors tell you about the pet or animal?
4. Do you share any of the same behaviors? If so, how do these behaviors make you feel?
5. If you chose any negative or abnormal behaviors, how can you change the situation to make the pet or animal feel happy and stress free?

Examples of normal and abnormal animal behaviors



Animal: Rats, mice (pictured), hamsters

Behavior: Wheel Running

Rats, mice, and hamsters exercise by running on a wheel. It's kind of like humans running on a treadmill! These rodents are nocturnal, which means they are more active at night and likely to use their wheel at this time.



Animal: Rats, mice, hamsters (pictured)

Behavior: Burrowing/nest building

Rats, mice, and hamsters like to dig, burrow, and build nests for hiding food, sleeping, and staying warm. It's important to give rodents enough bedding and even extra materials like toilet paper or shredded newspaper to perform these behaviors.



Animal: Dogs

Behavior: Playing

Sometimes when dogs are playing or want to play, they do a 'play bow'. A play bow is when the dog stretches its front legs out and leans on its elbows to where its chest is almost touching the ground, but its rump stays in the air.



Animal: Dogs

Behavior: Tail wagging

One way dogs show that they are happy or excited is by wagging their tail.



Animal: Dogs

Behavior: Growling

Dogs will growl to show they are angry or sometimes scared. When dogs growl, they pin their ears back, show their teeth, and pinch up their nose.

 <p>Animal: Cats Behavior: Laying on their back</p> <p>When a cat lays on its back and shows its belly, it's showing signs of comfort and trust.</p>	 <p>Animal: Cats Behavior: Sleeping</p> <p>All animals sleep, including cats. Cats will sleep when they are tired or feeling relaxed. Cats will sleep about 15 hours per day!</p>	 <p>Animal: Cats Behavior: Hissing</p> <p>When cats are angry or feel frightened, they start to hiss by showing their teeth. The cats also pin their ears back and arch their back. Their hair stands up.</p>
 <p>Animal: Birds Behavior: Feeding</p> <p>All animals, including birds, spend time eating. Birds love fruits and vegetables as part of their diet.</p>	 <p>Animal: Birds Behavior: Preening</p> <p>Birds do a behavior called preening, where they use their beak to position and clean their feathers. It is normal for birds to spend a few hours each day preening.</p>	 <p>Animal: Birds Behavior: Bathing</p> <p>Birds bathe as a way to keep their feathers clean. No need to give them a bath - just give them a pan of water and they will bathe themselves.</p>
 <p>Animal: Horses Behavior: Cribbing</p> <p>Horses 'crib' when they are bored or stressed. They bite an object like a fence with their upper teeth, arch their neck, then suck in air, and make a grunting sound.</p>	 <p>Animal: Horses Behavior: Foaling</p> <p>Foaling is the act of a horse giving birth to a baby. Horses typically give birth to one foal per year.</p>	 <p>Animal: Horses Behavior: Sleeping</p> <p>Horses only need 2 to 3 hours of sleep per day! Horses can sleep standing, but for deep sleep they have to be laying down.</p>

		
Animal: Cows Behavior: Grazing	Animal: Cows Behavior: Drinking	Animal: Cows Behavior: Grooming
<p>When cows are grazing, they are eating the grass in a pasture. Cows will graze for 7 to 12 hours per day.</p>	<p>Cows need fresh water to drink every day. Cows drink 30 to 50 gallons of water per day.</p>	<p>Cows groom themselves to stay clean. They lick their hair with their tongue or use a brush in their pen to scratch against.</p>
 Animal: Sheep Behavior: Suckling	 Animal: Sheep Behavior: Flocking	 Animal: Pigs Behavior: Farrowing
<p>A lamb is a baby sheep. Lambs drink milk from their mothers, which is called suckling.</p>	<p>When sheep flock, it means they are staying close in a group. Flocking helps the sheep stay protected from predators.</p>	<p>Farrowing is the act of giving birth to baby piglets. Typically, a pig will give birth to about 10 piglets at one time.</p>
 Animal: Pigs Behavior: Rooting	 Animal: Chickens Behavior: Dust bathing	 Animal: Chickens Behavior: Perching
<p>Pigs like to root, which means they will dig their snout into the ground in search of food or to cool off.</p>	<p>Chickens don't bathe in water. They bathe in dust by digging a small hole in the dirt and rolling around in it. The dust keeps the chickens' feathers clean.</p>	<p>Chickens perch to take a nap, see what's going on around them, and protect themselves from predators.</p>

Animal Behavior Research from the Agriculture Research Service

Agriculture Research Service (ARS) scientists observe farm animals' behaviors to make sure we give them the best care. Here are some projects the scientists are working on:

ARS scientists give chickens new toys to see how these changes can support positive [behavior](#)

ARS scientists are studying pigs' behavior to see how it changes as they become [hot](#).

Bovine Beer Belly? It's Actually Better for [Cows](#).

First Meal is Vital for Calf and Piglet [Survival](#).

Wiping Out Scrapie in Goats, the Genetic [Way](#).

Keeping Sows [Comfortable](#).

Scientists are giving pigs toys to see how they change the pigs' [behavior](#).



Animal Welfare Information Center

The Animal Welfare Information Center at the National Agricultural Library provides information about animal wellbeing and how to house and care for animals.

- [Animal Welfare Information Center: Housing, Care and Welfare](#)

