

Sensitivity

The sensitive person (or animal) is eager to maintain social harmony, and is therefore attuned to others and their feelings. Such persons are the essential grease of society, which, though flexible and able to tolerate high degrees of conflict, nonetheless requires overall agreement and mutual sensitivity in order to survive. Sensitivity to one another makes our living together possible.

Examples

1 Dogs

Dogs are often very sensitive. My dog Biscuits knew when I was not feeling well. On one occasion—I had a headache, a slight fever—I stretched out on the couch in the living room. Biscuits clearly knew I was not feeling well. She went to the side of the couch, jumped up onto my lap, and stretched her muzzle across my chest. I could hear and feel her breathing. She clearly knew that I was not feeling well, and her instinct was to comfort me. Did I give off some odor special to my malaise? Did the tone of my voice indicate my feelings? When I got up from the couch she would follow me around, as though monitoring my condition. She made me feel better. She was the best doctor in the world, for what ailed me.

2 Extreme feeling

One of my children suffered from mental illness. My wife and I drove across two states to visit him, after a complex operation. We arrived in his city about an hour before the end of visiting hours at the Psychiatric Hospital. During the drive I had been acutely aware of the operation that was taking place, although I thought I was good at concealing my anxiety. (I wasn't). Upon arrival at our motel, a half mile from the Psych Hospital, I realized I had only a half-hour to make visiting hours. Without any discussion I started sprinting toward the Hospital. (I had no idea how sensitive-wired I was to the operation's outcome.) I arrived just after visiting hours had ended; I pounded on the nurses' window, was allowed to go in, and embraced my child. I had had no idea I was at that extremity of feeling.