

BASED ON THE FIVE DOMAINS OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Do You Truly Know Your Pet?

A wellness self-assessment for every pet owner

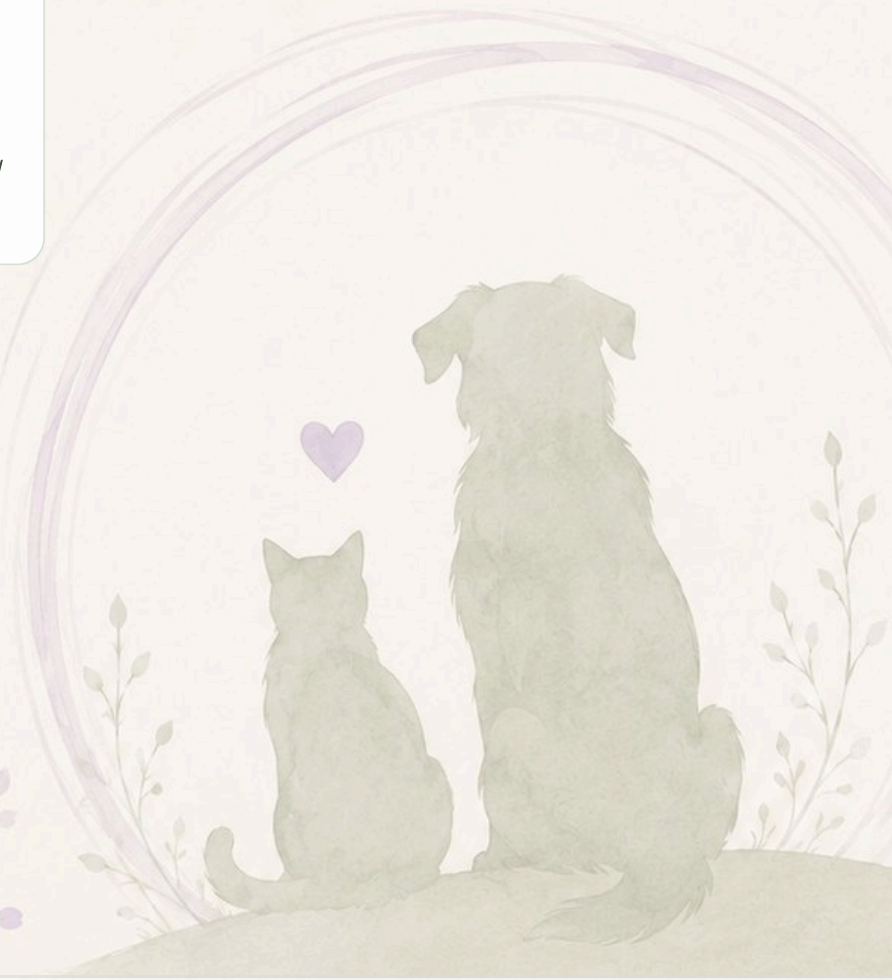
What this guide is

This is a science-backed self-assessment that helps you explore five key areas of your pet's life — through your eyes, and theirs.

Based on the Five Domains of Animal Welfare, it is designed to help you see your pet more completely: their nutrition, environment, health, behaviour, and emotional world.

Notice where you hesitate — that gap is often where your pet is waiting to be heard.

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The Five Domains of Animal Welfare

1. NUTRITION

Food, water & digestion

What your pet eats and how their body uses it

2. ENVIRONMENT

Home, safety & comfort

Space, agency, enrichment and sense of security

3. HEALTH

Body, pain & vitality

Physical wellbeing, pain signals and sensory health

4. BEHAVIOUR

Actions, fears & needs

What your pet's behaviour is communicating

5. MENTAL STATE

Emotions, joy & soul

The inner experience shaped by all other domains

The Fifth Domain — Mental State

Domains 1–4 all flow directly into your pet's emotional and inner experience. This is where everything connects.

How to use this guide

- 1 Work through each of the five domains and answer honestly.
- 2 Tick the box for every statement that is genuinely true for you and your pet — each tick is one point.
- 3 Read *Why it matters*, *Signs to watch*, and *Quick wins* inside each domain.
- 4 Notice where you hesitate — that gap is often where your pet is waiting to be heard.
- 5 When you've worked through each domain, total your ticks on the final page to see your score and what it means.

Self-assessment scoring: Each domain has 10 statements. Tick every statement that is genuinely true for you and your pet. Total out of 50 on the final page — no score is a judgment, every gap is an invitation.

Based on the Five Domains Model — Mellor, D.J. (2017). Operational Details of the Five Domains Model and Its Key Applications to the Assessment and Management of Animal Welfare. *Animals*, 7(8), 60. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani7080060>

Nutrition

Tick each statement that is genuinely true for you and your pet today. Every tick is a real welfare win — and each statement is something worth knowing about them.

FOOD & ENJOYMENT

- My pet eats with genuine enjoyment, not just out of habit.
- I know my pet's favourite food — and which foods they dislike.
- Their meals offer some variety in texture, flavour or presentation.
- Their portion size suits their body, age and activity level.
- I've checked their body condition recently (ribs easy to feel, not see).

DIGESTION, WATER & COMFORT

- My pet is comfortable after meals — no bolting, bloating or distress.
- I'd notice quickly if their appetite or droppings changed.
- Fresh, clean water is always available in more than one spot.
- I know how my pet prefers to drink (still bowl, running, fountain, etc.).
- Their diet matches their species' real needs (e.g. hay-first for rabbits, wet food for cats, constant forage for horses).

WHY IT MATTERS

Nutrition shapes not just physical health but emotional experience. What your pet eats, how much they enjoy it, and how their body processes it all feed into their daily wellbeing — the Five Domains recognise both physical sufficiency *and* positive feeding experience as essential.

SIGNS TO WATCH

- Bolting food, vomiting after meals, or bloating
- Weight changes, dull coat, or persistent low energy
- Decreased drinking (especially cats) or sudden excessive thirst

QUICK WINS TODAY

- Body-condition check: feel the ribs — you should feel them easily but not see them
- *Cats*: add wet food or a water fountain — cats chronically under-drink from still bowls
- *Rabbits & guinea pigs*: hay = 80% of diet, always available; guinea pigs need daily vitamin C
- *Horses*: near-constant forage access prevents colic

Domain 1 score: ___ / 10

Environment

Tick each statement that is genuinely true of your pet's daily world.

SAFETY & RETREAT

- My pet has a private retreat space they can choose at any time.
- They feel safe in every room they have access to.
- They can settle calmly when guests, deliveries or noise happen.
- I know which sounds, smells or situations they dislike — and reduce them.
- They have agency: they can choose where to rest, hide, or seek contact.

ENRICHMENT, SPACE & CLIMATE

- My pet gets daily mental stimulation suited to their species.
- I know at least two activities or games they genuinely love.
- They have enough space to move, stretch and express natural behaviours.
- They can move freely between warmer and cooler spots as they choose.
- Their setup meets species essentials (e.g. N+1 litter boxes for cats, a bonded companion for rabbits/guinea pigs, daily turnout for horses).

WHY IT MATTERS

Animals need *agency* — the ability to choose where to rest, when to seek contact, when to hide. Removing this choice creates chronic stress even in otherwise well-cared-for pets. Environmental quality shapes emotional state every single day.

SIGNS TO WATCH

- Pacing, repetitive behaviours, or over-grooming
- Hiding excessively or avoiding favourite areas
- Destruction or aggression that appears sudden

QUICK WINS TODAY

- Add a safe retreat in each living area — a high spot for cats, a quiet hide for small animals
- *Cats*: N+1 litter box rule — one more box than the number of cats
- *Rabbits & guinea pigs*: deeply social — they thrive with a bonded companion of their own species
- *Horses*: daily turnout and herd contact are essential, not optional

Domain 2 score: ___/ 10

Health

Tick each statement that is genuinely true. Prey animals hide pain — this domain is about what you actively notice, not what you assume.

PAIN, POSTURE & PREVENTION

- I know my pet's normal posture, gait and movement well enough to spot subtle change.
- They've had a full vet check within the last 12 months (6 for seniors/exotics).
- Their teeth, ears, eyes, nails and coat are checked regularly.
- I understand that silence and stillness can mean pain, not contentment.
- I know the species-specific red flags (e.g. rabbit/guinea pig not eating for 4–6h = emergency).

AGEING & VITALITY

- I adapt their environment as they age (ramps, softer bedding, easier food access).
- I give a senior or recovering pet extra patience, time and space.
- I notice changes in energy, sleep or interest early — not weeks later.
- Preventive care (parasite control, dental, farrier, vaccinations) is up to date.
- There are no health concerns I've been quietly postponing.

WHY IT MATTERS

Prey animals — rabbits, guinea pigs, horses, and even cats — are hardwired to *mask pain*. Showing vulnerability in the wild is dangerous. This makes detecting discomfort your active responsibility. Silence never means all is well.

SIGNS TO WATCH

- Withdrawal, changes in grooming, or altered posture
- Eating more slowly, skipping meals, or teeth grinding
- Any sudden behaviour change — health signal first, training question second

QUICK WINS TODAY

- Learn your pet's normal — so any change is visible early
- Annual vet checks minimum; biannual for seniors and exotics
- *Rabbits & guinea pigs*: not eating or no droppings for 4–6 hours = veterinary emergency (gut stasis)
- *Horses*: regular dental floating + farrier visits are preventive, not optional

Domain 3 score: ___ / 10

Behaviour

Tick each statement that is genuinely true. Behaviour is always communication — these statements help you listen.

READING THE SIGNALS

- I can read my pet's species-specific stress signals (e.g. dog whale-eye, cat flattened ears, rabbit thumping, horse white-eye).
- When my pet does something puzzling, I ask "what need is being met?" before correcting.
- I rule out a medical cause first when behaviour suddenly changes.
- I never use punishment for fear-based behaviour — I know it deepens fear.
- I know my pet's specific triggers and work to reduce exposure to them.

MEETING THEIR NEEDS

- My pet gets focused 1-to-1 attention every day — not just shared space.
- I build positive associations around things they find difficult.
- I notice how my own mood and energy affect their behaviour.
- They get to express natural species behaviours (sniff, dig, forage, chew, run, graze).
- I trust that "bad" behaviour is a message — and I try to translate it.

WHY IT MATTERS

Every behaviour serves a function. What looks like "bad behaviour" is almost always communication — a message about a need, a fear, or a physical discomfort. Understanding the *why* changes everything about how you can help.

SIGNS TO WATCH

- **Dog:** whale-eye, lip licking, yawning, stiff body, tucked tail
- **Cat:** flattened ears, dilated pupils, puffed tail, crouching low
- **Rabbit:** thumping, freezing, flattening to ground, teeth chattering
- **Horse:** white-eye, flared nostrils, high head, tight lips

QUICK WINS TODAY

- When confused by a behaviour, ask: "What need is my pet trying to meet?"
- Any sudden change: rule out a medical cause first — vet before training
- Never use punishment for fear-based behaviour — it deepens fear
- Identify one trigger; reduce exposure while building positive associations

Domain 4 score: ___ / 10

Mental State

Tick each statement that is genuinely true. This domain holds everything the others build toward — the inner life of your pet.

JOY & EMOTIONAL LIFE

- I can name at least three things that bring my pet genuine joy.
- My pet experiences something playful, pleasurable or rewarding every day.
- We share one daily ritual of fully present, quiet contact — not just proximity.
- I notice my own emotional state before interacting — I know they read it.
- My pet has the company they need for their species (social animals are not left alone all day).

BOND, GRIEF & BEING SEEN

- I believe my pet has a real inner life — emotions, preferences, memory.
- I acknowledge their grief or stress after losses and household changes.
- I make space to simply listen — without asking anything of them.
- I trust my intuition about what they may be feeling, and check it gently.
- I see my pet as a whole being — not a role they play in my life.

WHY IT MATTERS

Research documents grief, joy, anticipatory emotions, and deep social bonding in mammals and birds. Your pet's inner life is real and complex — and they are exquisitely sensitive to your emotional state, often carrying it for you without you realising.

SIGNS TO WATCH

- Withdrawal, reduced appetite, or sleep changes after a loss
- Clinging or avoiding after household changes or new people
- Playing less, seeming flat, or losing interest in formerly loved things

QUICK WINS TODAY

- Establish one daily ritual of fully present, quiet contact — not just proximity
- Notice your own emotional state before interacting — your pet reads it immediately
- *Dogs, horses, rabbits & guinea pigs:* deeply social — ensure adequate companionship
- If a loss has occurred, acknowledge it: gentle routine, familiar scents, patience

Domain 5 score: ___ / 10

Body Language Guide

Relaxed and stressed signals look very different species to species. Use this to tune in — and to spot early stress before it escalates.

DOG — RELAXED

- Loose, wiggly body; soft, half-open mouth
- Tail wagging at medium height (not stiff)
- Soft eyes, relaxed ears, approaching confidently
- Play bow — front down, rear up — invites interaction

DOG — STRESSED / FEARFUL

- Whale-eye: white of eye visible
- Lip licking, yawning, or sniffing ground out of context
- Stiff body, tail tucked, ears flat or pinned back
- Growling = communication, not "bad" — never punish it

RABBIT — RELAXED

- Flopped on their side — maximum trust and comfort
- Binkying (leaping and twisting mid-air) = pure joy
- Gentle tooth grinding (purring); nose barely twitching
- Stretched out in their space; grooming themselves or companions

RABBIT — STRESSED

- Thumping hindfoot — alarm or frustration signal
- Freezing rigidly in place — extreme fear response
- Loud teeth chattering — pain or serious distress
- Bar biting or circling — often signals insufficient space

CAT — RELAXED

- Slow blinking at you — a gesture of trust; blink back
- Tail held high, tip curved; headbutting or rubbing on you
- Showing belly: high trust (does NOT always invite touch)
- Trilling, chirping, or soft purring in your presence

CAT — STRESSED / FEARFUL

- Flattened ears, dilated pupils, whiskers pulled back
- Puffed tail, low crouched posture, or arched back
- Hissing or spitting — always a last warning, not aggression
- Hiding persistently or avoiding food: investigate a cause

HORSE — RELAXED

- Low head carriage; one hind foot resting; soft, slow eye
- Relaxed lower lip; slow rhythmic chewing
- Mutual grooming with herd members

HORSE — STRESSED

- White-eye, flared nostrils, high tense head carriage
- Tight lips, tail wringing, excessive blinking or yawning
- Repetitive weaving, crib-biting, or box walking — chronic stress signals

Small mammals & birds: Guinea pigs "wheek" with excitement and purr contentedly. Hamsters freeze or stuff cheeks when scared. Birds fluff feathers in contentment — the same behaviour with lethargy signals illness. When in doubt, observe without interrupting and note what preceded the behaviour.

Giving Your Pet Their Best Life

True welfare is not the absence of suffering — it is the active creation of positive experiences. Here is what that looks like, every day, for each species.

DOGS

- Exercise matched to age, breed, and individual energy — sniff walks count as much as runs
- Mental enrichment daily: puzzle feeders, scent work, novel environments
- A dedicated retreat they are never disturbed in
- Positive, force-free training — it builds trust, not just compliance
- Social time with you, and with other dogs when they enjoy it

CATS

- Vertical space — cat trees, shelves, window perches — height equals security
- Multiple small meals or puzzle feeders to satisfy their natural hunting drive
- Scratch surfaces (horizontal and vertical) in several rooms
- Litter boxes: N+1 rule, in quiet private spots, scooped daily
- Window views, safe outdoor access, or indoor foraging for environmental richness

RABBITS & GUINEA PIGS

- A bonded same-species companion — both species suffer profoundly alone
- Unlimited hay (80%+ of diet) and constant fresh water
- Several hours of free roam space daily — not cage-only
- Hides, tunnels, and foraging enrichment in their living area
- Exotic-specialist vet, annual checks minimum

HORSES

- Daily turnout — horses were not built to stand still
- Herd or companion contact every day — horses are deeply social animals
- Near-constant forage access via slow feeders or hay nets — prevents colic and boredom
- Work that is progressive, appropriate, and respects clear communication
- Regular dental floating, farrier visits, and parasite management

SMALL MAMMALS (HAMSTERS, GERBILS, GUINEA PIGS)

- Housing large enough for running, burrowing, exploring, and separating areas
- Deep substrate for burrowing: hamsters need at least 15–20 cm
- Correct social setup: guinea pigs and gerbils need companions; hamsters are mostly solitary
- Chew materials always available — teeth grow continuously
- Wheels and enrichment matched to species and size

BIRDS

- Out-of-cage time daily for flight, exploration, and social bonding
- Foraging enrichment — food should require some effort, not just sit in a bowl
- Natural light cycles and ideally outdoor air when safe
- Flock companions or intensive daily human interaction (species-dependent)
- Regular vet checks — birds are masters at hiding illness until it is critical

A life worth living. *The Five Domains remind us that welfare means more than preventing suffering — it means creating the conditions for curiosity, comfort, joy, and connection. The most powerful thing you can do is observe closely, adapt continuously, and truly listen.*

What Did You Discover?

*Add up your ticked boxes across all five domains — out of 50.
No score is a judgment. Every gap is where the real conversation wants to begin.*

40–50

Deeply in tune — a strong, living foundation

You understand your pet deeply across most domains. The statements you hesitated on are not gaps in your care — they are the next layer of knowing, where even the most attentive owners discover nuances they sensed but could never quite name.

- Sit with each unticked statement as a week-long observation — notice what your pet shows you.
- Check which domain had the most blanks: that is almost always where the richest messages are waiting.

27–39

Well connected — with doors left unopened

Your relationship has warmth and real care, but this exercise has revealed places where your pet has been communicating something you have not yet had the language to receive. Those gaps are not a failure — they are an invitation. Animals are patient: they keep showing and waiting for the moment we are truly ready to hear.

- Use the Quick wins on your lowest-scoring domain page — even one small change opens a new channel.
- Watch your pet this week with this question: "What are you showing me that I keep interpreting as something else?"

14–26

Growing awareness — you are beginning to truly see

You came here because something in you knew there was more to understand — that instinct is invaluable. Unticked statements are not evidence of neglect; they are evidence of honesty. Most owners never ask them at all. Your pet has a rich inner life — fears, joys, needs they have been carrying quietly. This guide is your map of where to begin.

- Choose the domain with the most blank boxes — read its Quick wins and apply just one thing this week.
- Bring genuine curiosity into daily contact: "Who are you, really?" is the most powerful question you can ask.

0–13

An invitation — your pet has never stopped communicating

This is not a low score — it is an honest beginning, and the most honest beginnings are often the most powerful. Your pet has not given up: they are still communicating, still hoping. What this score reveals is not what kind of owner you are — it reveals how much is waiting to be discovered together. The fact that you opened this guide means you have already begun.

- Start with the Body Language reference page — an immediate new way of seeing what your pet is already doing.
- Know that even one insight from a session can shift a relationship in ways that last a lifetime.

Every statement in this guide has an answer. Your pet knows every single one.

Animal communication is not guessing what they might say. It is listening to what they are already saying — in a language most of us were never taught to hear.

Book an animal communication session

If this guide opened questions you cannot answer alone, let's listen to your pet together — and hear what they have been trying to tell you.

Book a Session with Karolina

karolinaanimalcommunicationssession.as.me/schedule/281a7641

*Based on the Five Domains Model — Mellor, D.J. (2017). *Animals*, 7(8), 60. doi.org/10.3390/ani7080060 | This guide is educational and does not replace veterinary care. Always consult a qualified vet for health concerns.*

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