

# UNLEASH SOME SUPER SCIENCE

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## Catch This Yawn!

Have you ever seen a friend yawn, and then found yourself yawning as well? Scientists call this contagious yawning." Some dogs spread the yawns as well. Does yours?

### Instructions:

- 1) Sit on the floor in front of your dog and get her attention by calling her name.
- 2) Think about a time you were very, very tired and imagine your best friend yawning. This should give you the urge to yawn. Make eye contact with your dog and let the yawn go. Feel free to make some noise as you do it.
- 3) Repeat several times, making sure you have eye contact with your dog as much as possible, and see if your dog follows suit.

## The Science: Open Wide!

Don't worry if your dog just stares at your yawning face or dives in for a quick kiss. In one experiment, only about half of the yawned-at dogs yawned back. Yawning is a bit of a mystery. Scientists know that animals yawn when they are tired, bored, or stressed, but it isn't clear how yawning helps in any of those situations.

Contagious yawning is even more of a mystery! Some scientists have wondered if it is a form of empathy, or understanding how someone feels. They found that when people "catch" a yawn, they use the same parts of the brain that are used in feeling empathy. In humans, children begin to catch yawns at about age fours, about the same time that they start understanding other children's feelings. Puppies join the contagious yawning club around seven months old. Whatever the cause of the contagion, no other animals have been found to share a yawn across species.

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