

Dogs: Body Language 101

Signs of a HAPPY/Content dog:

- Head up or in normal position
- Tail relaxed/wagging (full range of motion)
- "Grin" on face (mouth open with corners of the mouth wrinkled)
- Ears in relaxed/normal position
- Able to sleep/eat
- Playing with or chewing on toys
- Eyes move freely (not focused on any one subject for more than a few seconds). Can look longer but must be "soft" eye



Signs of a YEILDING dog:

- May try to lick the face or mouth of a more assertive dog
- May paw gently at the face of a more assertive dog
- Head down/low (may be turned away from assertive dog/person)
- Tail low/tucked (may wag weakly)
- Ears held back/low
- May roll on his back with belly exposed
- May urinate while back (common

crouching or on his
back for puppies)



Signs of a FEARFUL or STRESSED dog:

- Head down/held low (may be turned away from other dogs/people)
- Tail low or tucked between legs (may wag weakly)
- Mouth closed/may see wrinkles at corners of mouth
- Ears held back/low (if tall ears: they may stick out to the sides or be folded against the head)
- Hair on the back may be raised (esp. near the tail)
- May roll on his back with belly exposed
- May urinate while crouching or on his back
- May “freeze” and be stiff all over/glassy eyed or will show body tension and stiff movements
- May try to run away (usually with tail tucked and head low)
- May growl, snap, show teeth or whine
- May repeatedly bark with a short, high-pitched yap or yelp
- May be constantly moving, restless or have decreased activity levels; won't sleep or rest
- May try to hide in or behind things
- Quick yawning (looks nervous, not tired)
- Excessive drooling, “ropes”
- Trembling
- Feet sweaty (leaves paw prints that evaporate quickly) Disinterested in food
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- Excessive and/or sudden hair loss
- White rim of eye showing more than usual
- Muscle ridge visible around the eyes or mouth
- May show calming signals like lip licking, ground sniffing, shaking (like when wet) or scratching (like he has an itch).

Fearful



Stressed



Signs of an ASSERTIVE dog:



- Head held high

- Whiskers flared forward

- Tail held high and stiff (may wag stiffly or just at the tip)
- Mouth closed
- Ears up/forward
- Direct eye contact
- Hair on the back may be raised (but not usually near the base of the tail)
- Movements may be stiff or jerky
- Looks like he's standing up on his toes May growl
- May try to put his head and/or paws over another dog's back or shoulders
- Mounting another dog



Signs of a PLAYFUL dog:*

- Play bow (front legs on the ground, butt up in the air, tail wagging)
- Pushing/nudging another dog with his nose while tail is wagging
- Wrestling silently or with play growling
- Playing chase/tag
- Tug-o-war
- Barking at each other in a playful tone
- Pulling on another dog's collar**

*NOTE: the above playful situations can quickly turn aggression. Learn to watch body language for and stiffness and listen to the dog's vocalizations



into changes

** This can be dangerous & life threatening if the dog being held by the collar lies down & rolls over. This action can cause the jaw of the 'holding' dog to get wrapped/trapped in the collar. It usually causes one dog's airway to be cut off, while panicking the other because he's trapped by his jaw. If they cannot be properly 'flipped' back into position to untangle the collar, one dog can suffocate & the other may break his jaw. Discourage any collar grabbing.

Signs of an AGGRESSIVE dog:

- Head and tail held high and stiff
- Stiff body movements
- Direct eye contact
- Lips curled/ teeth showing
- May growl or bark menacingly (deep and throaty)
- Hair on back may be raised (but not usually near the base of the tail)
- Shoves, throws or pins another dog to the ground while growling
- Bites & shakes another dog's neck or shoulders while giving a serious growl (not a play growl) (not to be confused with playing where the dog's body will be supple & relaxed)
- Tries to bite people/strong bite risk



Look at the full picture being presented by the dog when reading body language – many signals overlap.

Warning Signs:

- Freezing
- Mouth closing
- Lips drawing forward
- Facial tension
- Ears erect and forward
- Eyes round, pupils dilated, “hard” stare
- “Whale eye”: eyes round with whites visible
- Arousal level varying rapidly and unpredictably

Raised Hackles equals uncertainty, arousal, not necessarily aggression.

Watch the Tail Position

- Wagging tail does not always mean happy
- Watch tail carriage and know what is normal for that breed/individual
- High=arousal; Low=fear, uncertainty

Appeasement Behaviors/Calming Signals:

- Yawning
- Lip/nose licking
- Shaking off
- Paw lift
- Scratching
- Looking away/turning away
- Sniffing

Remember that we can mimic their calming signals to help them feel comfortable

- Approaching sideways, not head on
- Turning head/body away, looking away with eyes
- Yawning
- Lip licking
- Blinking
- Relaxed breathing