

Understanding Body Language and Behavior

CAT BODY LANGUAGE



Cats can be subtle!

Almost imperceptible shifts in body language can be confusing and surprising.



What does body language tell us?

Understanding a cat's threshold for handling and interaction, and their signals to indicate when they're reaching that threshold, helps you to know when to give them space and gives them the confidence to know that they're safe with you. They tell us how they're feeling with their eyes, ears, tail, body position and interest in interaction. We just have to listen!

Pupils and Eye Shape

What do a cat's pupil size and eye shape tell us about their emotional state?

Dilated Pupils

- Pupil wide open
 - Context: low light?
- Fear or impending defensive behavior
- Look at the whole body



Constricted Pupils

- Look at the whole body
- Alert
- Defensive behavior
- Playful
- Bright light



Blinking, soft eyes

- Combined with soft body
 - Relaxed
 - Attention seeking
 - Appeasing
 - Sleepy



Tail Position and Energy

A cat's tail has a story to tell

Tail tight around the body

- Fearful
- Alert
- On guard



Tail loose and waving

- Comfortable
- Social
- Seeking interaction
- Relaxed



Tail twitching

- Look at whole body
- Pupils, ears, coat
- Context
- Typical for this cat?



Body Posture

A cat's body posture is one of the best ways to read how they're feeling

Clenched body posture

- Fear or vigilance
- Fight or flight
- Avoidant
- Please don't pet me!



- **Clenched body**

- **Crouched**
- **Tail hidden**
- **Pupils wide**
- **“Army crawl”**
- **Ears alert**



Clenched, alert body position

- Upright body position
- Tail around body
- Pupils wide
- Ears alert
- Slight paw raise



Clenched body, give them space

- Paws and tail tucked under/ around body
 - Bracing for flight
- Wide pupils
- Stare



How to respond to a fearful or vigilant cat

- Give them space
- Positive reinforcement- good treats go a long way!
 - Allow them to choose
 - Never force the interaction
 - Reinforce their fear or lack of trust
 - Allow them to hide

Other stress signals

- Lip licking
- Yawning
- Sudden bursts of energy
- Paw raise
- Inability to settle

Loose or relaxed body posture

- Attention seeking
- Interested in play
- Curious
- Comfortable



Relaxed body posture

- Soft eyes and face
- Paws exposed
- Tail comfortable
- Ears up and alert
- Oval/ dilated pupils



Loose body posture

- Paws and legs exposed
- Tail out and hanging low
- Oval/ constricted pupils
- Ears alert



Soft body

- On her side
- Belly exposed
- Paws loose
- Soft eyes and face
- Little biscuits
- Sleepy and relaxed



Things to remember when working with a seemingly loose, attention seeking cat

- Proper introductions
- Pet on face and cheeks
- Allow them to seek attention
 - Self pet
- Avoid full body pets
- Offer play
- Watch for other signs
 - Tail, pupils, coat
 - Petting related aggression
 - Frustrated attention seeking



Belly up

- Comfortable
- Feels safe
- Attention seeking
- It's a trap!



Vocalizations

- Meow
- Purr
- Chirp
- Chatter
- Growl
- Hiss
- Yowl





When the pieces don't add up

When they're conflicted, we're conflicted

What do we see?



Does she want a visit?



Just wants to play?



Fearful?



Curious guy?



What's happening here?



Things to remember

- Look at the whole body
- Always let them approach
- Limit full body pets
- Let them seek attention on their terms
- No “forced loving”
 - Reinforces fear and damages the bond
- Learn their threshold

THANK YOU!!!!

QUESTIONS?