

Dog Body Language Basics

Dogs use a combination of visual and physical cues to express their emotions and intentions. It's essential to consider the overall context and combine multiple cues to get a more accurate understanding of a dog's feelings and intentions. Every dog is unique, and their body language can vary, so getting to know your specific dog's signals is crucial for effective communication and ensuring their well-being.

Tail Wagging

A wagging tail doesn't always mean a dog is happy. The speed, height, and direction of the wag can indicate different emotions.

- **Broad, Loose Wag** Usually a sign of a happy and relaxed dog.
- **High, Stiff Wag** May suggest excitement or alertness.
- **Low Wag or Tucked Tail** Can signal submission or fear.

Tail Position

- **Tail Held High** A tail held high can indicate confidence, alertness, or excitement.
- **Tail Tucked Between Legs** A tucked tail typically suggests submission, fear, or anxiety.

Ears

- **Forward and Perked Ears** This often indicates attentiveness, curiosity, or excitement.
- **Backward or Flattened Ears** Ears laid back can be a sign of submission, fear, or discomfort.

Eyes

- **Soft and Relaxed Eyes** A dog with relaxed eyes is usually comfortable and content.
- **Dilated Pupils** Enlarged pupils can be a sign of excitement, stress, or fear.
- **Hard Stare** A direct, unblinking gaze can be a sign of stress and a warning signal.

Body Posture

- **Relaxed Body** A dog with a loose, relaxed body posture is typically at ease and content.
- **Arched Back** When a dog arches its back, it may be feeling threatened or anxious.
- **Stiff or Rigid Body** A stiff body suggests tension or unease.
- **Cowering or Low Body Position** A dog that cowers or lowers its body shows submission or fear.
- **Raised Hackles** Raised fur along the back can indicate excitement, fear, or aggression.

Mouth and Lips

- **Relaxed Mouth** A relaxed, open mouth with a lolling tongue is a sign of comfort.

- **Snarling or Baring Teeth** This is a clear sign of aggression or discomfort.
- **Yawning** Dogs often yawn when they are anxious or stressed.

Vocalizations

- **Barking**
 - *Alert Bark:* A single or a few sharp barks to alert you to something unusual or suspicious.
 - *Territorial Bark:* A repetitive, protective bark, often in response to perceived threats or intruders.
 - *Playful Bark:* A high-pitched, repetitive bark when a dog is excited and wants to play.
 - *Lonely or Bored Bark:* Continuous barking, often when the dog is left alone or lacks stimulation.
 - *Fearful Bark:* A bark that indicates fear or anxiety, usually accompanied by other signs of distress.
 - *Warning Bark:* A deep, growling bark that can indicate stress/ a warning.
- **Howling**
 - *Communication with Other Dogs:* Dogs may howl to communicate with other dogs, especially in response to sirens, other howling dogs, or noises from a distance.
 - *Separation Anxiety:* Some dogs howl when left alone due to separation anxiety or to distress.
- **Whining**
 - *Attention-Seeking Whine:* Dogs often whine to get your attention or when they want something, such as food, play, or a walk.
 - *Anxiety or Stress Whine:* Whining can be a sign of anxiety, fear, or discomfort.
 - *Pain or Discomfort Whine:* If a dog is in pain or discomfort, they may whine to communicate their distress.
- **Growling:**
 - *Warning Growl:* A low, deep growl is a warning sign that the dog feels threatened or uncomfortable.
 - *Playful Growl:* Dogs sometimes growl playfully during interactive play, but it's usually accompanied by other playful behaviors.

Play Bow

When a dog extends its front legs and lowers its head while keeping its rear end elevated, it is an invitation to play. This posture is often accompanied by a wagging tail.