




BODY LANGUAGE BASICS— DOGS



Dogs use a combination of visual and physical cues to express their emotions and intentions. To get a more accurate understanding of a dog's feelings and intentions, consider the overall context when you're evaluating your dog. Every dog is unique, and their body language can vary, so getting to know your specific dog's signals is important.

TAIL WAGGING



A wagging tail doesn't always mean a dog is happy. The speed, height, and direction of the way 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.
-  **"WHALE EYE"** When a dog looks sideways without turning its head, you can clearly see the sclera (white of the eye). The side eye can also look like a "whale eye" when the white makes a half moon shape around the iris. This indicates stress and fear, and can be a signal that the dog may feel the need to defend themselves/bite soon.
-  **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 their back, they 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 their body shows submission or fear.
-  **RAISED HACKLES** Raised fur along the back can indicate excitement or fear and defensiveness.

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 discomfort. If you don't listen to these warning signals, the dog may progress to a bite.
-  **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 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 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 their front legs and lowers their head while keeping their rear end elevated, it is an invitation to play. This posture is often accompanied by a wagging tail.