

Reading Dog Body Language

Learning to read dog body language is a very critical part of being confident and competent when interacting with them.

Dogs are always paying attention to our bodies. Learning what signals mean in “dog speak” will help prevent you from sending the wrong message to the dog.

Dog Body Language

Ears:

Pinned back = fear

Held high, openings forward = alert, aroused, angry

Mouth:

Corners pushed forward (aggressive pucker) = offensive threat

Corners pulled back (fear grimace) = defensive threat

Teeth showing (snarling) = offensive or defensive depending on position of the corners of mouth. The exception is the ‘smiling’ dog (submissive grin).

Eyes:

Dilated pupils = fear or anger

Whale eye (whites showing) = discomfort

Direct eye contact = threat or challenge

Hard stare = offensive threat

Tail:

Tucked between legs = fear

Held high (flagged) and stiff = anger

Wagging below the horizon of back = usually friendly

Wagging at or above the horizon of back = signifies arousal (good or bad)

Body Posture:

Body leaning back = fear/defensive

Body leaning forward = arousal, challenge, anger/offensive

Body fluid (relaxed muscles) = relaxed

Body stiff (tense muscles) = fear or anger depending on other body postures

Raised hackles:

Hair on back standing up (piloerection) = fear or anger.

Obvious warning signs of aggression (offensive or defensive)

- Snarling
- Growling
- Lunging
- Snapping
- Biting

Subtle warning signs of discomfort

- Closed mouth (tight jaw)
- Stiff body
- Frozen body

Displacement Behaviors (stress signals)

- Tongue flick
- Lip lick
- Yawning
- Blinking
- Shaking off
- Scratching self
- Sniffing something

Avoidance Behaviors

- Turning head away
- Turning body away
- Walking away