

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. Learn 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 pulled forward (aggressive pucker) = offensive threat

Corners pulled back (fear grimace) = defensive threat

Teeth showing (snarling) = offensive or defensive depending on position of 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 = fear or anger depending on other body postures

Hackles:

Raised hackles = 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

Avoidance Behaviors

Turning head away
Turning body away
Walking away