

## Body Language of Cats

Lori Smith, Caring Hands Humane Society Kennel Manager (316) 283 0839

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**RELAXED/FRIENDLY:** *EARS:* forward, *TAIL:* soft or upright *WHISKERS:* straight *FUR:* flat *PUPILS:* dilated

**ANNOYED:** *TAIL:* tip twitching *WHISKERS:* pulled back against face *EARS:* flat against head

**AGGRESSIVE:** *EYES:* staring directly *PUPILS:* narrow *TAIL:* hair puffed and thumps ground or swishes rapidly *LIPS:* snarled *FACE:* forward *BUTT:* upwards

**SCARED:** *HAIR:* raised on tail/back *TAIL:* close to body or lashing *WHISKERS:* flat on face *EARS:* flat on head *BODY POSITION:* crouched sideways *PUPILS:* large

**SICK:** *EYES:* droopy *TAIL:* between legs *EARS/WHISKERS:* odd positions

(Tails are main indicator of mood, BUT eyes, ears, legs and mouth play important roles in determining the feelings and messages a cat is sending out. Reaction to anger, fear or other stimuli is not an intentional response; it is based on a cat's reflexes. For this reason, they may show the same signs when fearful or when being aggressive.)

### TAIL POSITIONS

(Typically a tail in the upright position is a greeting. Fluffed up or curved in various positions can signal other feelings, as listed below in better detail. Tails that are lowered can signal somewhat of a lower feeling or mood. Any tail lashing about in various degrees is a tail that is very expressive. A clear observation of the eyes, ears, whiskers and hair placement should be made prior to handling this cat.)

Straight up and down = CONFIDENT/FRIENDLY

Tucked around the body=PREFERS TO BE LEFT ALONE

Inverted U shape=KITTENS=PLAYFULNESS/ADULTS=DEFENSE AGGRESSION

Curled/tucked under body=FEELS THREATENED

Slightly Flicking=INDECISIVE/CONTEMPLATIVE

Flicking suddenly/rapidly=ANXIOUS/AGGITATED

Flicking constantly=CRITIQUEING SURROUNDINGS

THUMPING=ANNOYED /FRUSTRATED--COULD LEAD TO ATTACK

Lashing back/forth=LIKELY TO ATTACK

Between legs=SUBMISSIVE/DEFEAT

Upright without bristling=GREETING/NO THREAT

Upright, gently quivers=HAPPINESS/EXCITEMENT TYPICALLY IN ANTICIPATION (food)

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Upright with tip tilted=GREETING WITH RESERVATIONS

Slightly raised, but gently curved=INTERESTED

Gentle downward curve, tip curved up=TOTAL RELAXATION/CONTENTMENT

Tail still but tip slightly twitching=SLIGHTLY IRRITATED/AGGITATED

Tail still but tip actively swishing=VERY IRRITATED/ANNOYED

Swishing from side to side=EXTREMELY ANGRY

Arched tail and bristled=READY TO ATTACK/DEFEND IF NECESSARY

Upright/fully bristled tail=AGGRESSION /DEFENSE

Fluffed out and lowered tail=FEAR/AVOID CONFRONTATION

## VOCALIZATIONS

(There are approximately 100 different feline vocalizations in cats. As compared to about 20 in dogs, you can imagine how much there is to learn about communicating with or to a cat! Here are some basic few.)

Meowing=used with people, varies in definition (sounds like a 'basic meow')

Mew=used to locate another cat (typically higher pitched and sounds like a question mark at the end)

Growl=warning to keep distance

Hiss=keep away/defensive sound

Spit=(short popping sound) occurs with hissing if surprised or threatened

Screech/Shriek=defensive/aggressive/outraged/possibly pain (loud, shriek, similar to a scream in a human, such as if you accidentally step on a cat's tail)

Chirping=friendly greeting

Yowl=fright/confusion/disorientation/anxiousness (sounds like YOWL and is a longer drawn out sound with a question mark at the end, different than a female in heat's yowl)

Moan=(drawn out/sad) about to vomit/older cats=disoriented (shorter sound than the yowl, but similar in strength, although sometimes sound is cut short abruptly at the end)

Purr=Content/illness

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