

## Body Language of Dogs

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Dog body language is not always an easy thing to distinguish. When you think your dog is telling you something, it may in fact be something else altogether. Due to the complexity that body language can be in canines, I have compiled a brief summary of common behaviors as a very basic guideline. If you should encounter any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. We will do our best to answer your questions.

Basic dog introductions can bring forth many different body language signals that mean very different things. When introducing a dog to another dog, human or another species, always keep your dog on a leash until you can be certain no altercations will happen. This list should help you to better identify what is friendly and what is in fact not friendly in greeting rituals.

*A couple general rules for eye signals are: The larger the pupil size, the more aroused or emotional the dog is. The smaller the eye shape, the more pacifying and submissive that signal is. Expressive eyebrow movements on dogs are very similar to a human's emotions.*

**DIRECT EYE TO EYE STARE** is a challenge. It is an aggressive signal that is typically given by a confident dog who is socially confronting another.

**EYES AVERTED TO AVOID DIRECT STARE** is a dog saying that s/he doesn't want any trouble. It is a sign of submission, but could have some fear tendencies.

**EYES BLINKING** are a pacifying gesture to a threat stare that tells the other s/he wishes to lower the level of confrontation, but not give up much status.

*A couple general rules for mouth/face signals are: The more teeth/gums exposed, the greater the threat. If the mouth is pulled back into a C shape, the aggression is based more on dominance. If the mouth is pulled back and stress wrinkles are apparent on the rear corners, then it is more fear based. Mouth signals typically need to be associated with the rest of the dog's body language to draw a final conclusion.*

**MOUTH RELAXED** is when the mouth is slightly open and tongue is usually visible, loosely draped over teeth. This is a happy and relaxed dog.

**MOUTH CLOSED** (see other body positions) is a sign of interest or attention directed at something of interest.

**LIPS CURLED** and exposing some teeth usually is a sign of annoyance or threat. This may or may not be accompanied by a low growl.

**YAWNS** seem very simple and nonchalant, when in fact they are a very commonly used expression to diffuse a situation. Dogs will also yawn when they are stressed or anxious.

**LICKING FACES** of dogs or humans is an appeasing gesture to submit or acknowledge who is boss. When a puppy does this, it can be a food request.

**LICKING THE AIR** is an extreme pacifying gesture. This is typically fear based submission.

*Tail signals have many different meanings. I will only cover the basics or most common to avoid any confusion. A good rule of thumb is the higher the tail is positioned; the more dominant the dog is reacting. The lower the tail, the more the dog is submitting to the authority figure. The speed the tail is moving indicates arousal and excitement. A tail that seems to vibrate rather than swing side to side is NOT a tail wag, but rather a pure sign of emotion and excitement. Remember proper breed placement of tails when noting tail position. (ie: a Husky tail is naturally up and curled, where as a Greyhound carries their tails low.)*

**BROAD TAIL WAG, USES HIPS TO SWING TAIL** is a sign of respect for the person or dog that s/he is directing it at.

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**BROAD TAIL WAG** (no use of hips) is a simple and casual, friendly gesture. This can be seen during play.

**TAIL DOWN, BUT NOT TUCKED** can mean a sign of physical or mental discomfort.

**TAIL UP AND CURLED SLIGHTLY OVER THE BACK** is a very confident signal from a confident dog. This is a behavior to alert you to approach cautiously, whether it be you approaching or a dog. A sharp bend in the tail adds a serious threat to any tail position.

*Body language is a complex, yet simple thing to read. Any attempt the dog does to make him or herself look larger is a sign to represent his authority figure. Anything done to make the dog look smaller or appears to be puppy like in behavior is done to represent submission. These are pacifying gestures to let the other dog/human know that s/he does not wish to have any altercation. A pointing body or eyes at another dog represents a threat and authority, from a very confident dog. A turning body, head or eyes looking away are ways to also calm and pacify the situation.*

**BODY SLOPED FORWARD, FEET BRACED** is a way to accept a challenge or fight. This is usually a response to a threat or another dog's failure to back down.

**HAIR BRISTLES (aka pilo-erection)** is when the hair stands up on the neck, shoulders, tail and/or back. This is a sign of rising aggressive feelings in a dog and could be indicative of a possible fight. When the bristles are just on the shoulders it is often a sign of fearful aggression when a dog feels threatened but feels s/he may be forced to fight.

**LOWERED BODY, WHILE LOOKING UP** is a gesture to try and pacify an authority figure.

**MUZZLE NUDGES** are used to acknowledge you or another dog and means about the same as licking. This can also be a dog's way to ask for something.

**DOG ROLLS ON SIDE OR EXPOSES BELLY** is a passive submission and is fairly equal to groveling!

**PAW ON SHOULDER, STANDING OVER A DOG or PLACING HEAD OVER BACK OR SHOULDERS** of another dog is an assertion of top dog tendencies. This is how a dog displays social status to another dog.

**SHOULDER BUMP** is a vigorous way to assert social authority. Another way to do this is to lean into the dog or person.

**ONE LEG RAISED** is a sign of insecurity or stress.

**ROLLING ON THE GROUND** is a happy and content dog!

**DOG CROUCHES WITH FRONT LEGS EXTENDED AND REAR BODY/TAIL UP** is a standard play bow and can also let the other dog know that the rough behavior is not to be taken seriously.

*When a dog feels threatened by another dog, they may also try and diffuse the situation or possible altercation by sniffing the ground, digging at something, staring off another way or scratching oneself.*