

Canine Communications:

Defensive threat body posture: Indicates a dog is being self-protective. This is seen in a dog who is fearful and would prefer to run from the situation but may bite if cornered or provoked. It is very important to be aware of what to look for when you see a dog get nervous. You will need to remove your dog from the stimuli and toss her a few treats. An overstimulated dog may have difficulties eating the treats, but she knows they are available. **Do not put the dog in the situation again.** Removing the dog from the stimuli prevents the dog's behavior from escalating. Always avoid using any sort of correction on the dog. If the dog is barking while showing defensive signs, then do not correct the barking it will make her more fearful.

Signs of defensive threat body posture:

- Whale eyes (white of eyes are showing)
- Tail down or fully tucked under the dog.
- Piloerection (the fur on the dog's back and neck are raised)
- Ears back or flatten against the head. ➡
- Pupils dilated. ➡
- The corners of the mouth pulled back. ➡
- Body lowered. ➡
- Body leaning back. ➡



Offensive Threat Posture: Indicates a dog is aggressive and ready for attack and will more than likely do so at the slightest provocation. A growl often accompanies this posture. A dog will exhibit this posture if someone or something is ignoring her stress signals. When viewing offensively aggressive dogs, their outline resembles straight lines. You will need to remove your dog from the stimuli and toss her a few treats. An overstimulated dog may have difficulties eating the treats, but she knows they are available. **Do not put the dog in the situation again.** Removing the dog from the stimuli prevents the dog's behavior from escalating. Always avoid using any sort of correction on the dog. If the dog is barking while showing defensive signs, then do not correct the barking it will make her more fearful.

Signs of Offensive Threat Posture

- Tail up and stiff may be stiffly wagging
- Piloerection (raised hackles)
- Pupils dilated
- Ears forward and stiff
- Nose and/or muzzle wrinkled
- Corners of mouth forward and held tightly
- Mouth closed
- The mouth resembles a C-shape (Agonistic Pucker)
- Furrowed brows and forehead ➡
- Stands tall and forward on toes
- May lean forward (distributing weight onto the forelegs)
- Eyes focused and/or staring. ➡
- The body standing still or moving very slowly.



Canine Communications:

Submissive body posture: Indicates a dog is afraid. If your dog is displaying fearful behavior no one should approach or attempt to pet her.

Signs of submissive body posture:

- The tail is completely tucked ➡
- Round eyes
- Whale eyes (whites of eyes showing)
- Eyes looking away
- The corners of the mouth pulled back ➡
- Ears pinned back ➡
- Rolls onto back
- Grovels (moving close to the ground)
- Freezes
- Urinates or defecates
- Expresses anal glands



Stress Think of stress signals as a warning that a thunderstorm is approaching. She is politely telling you that she is uncomfortable and that you need to stop what you are doing. If you see your dog showing any of the following signs gently remove your dog from the stimuli, while tossing them treats.

Signs of Stress Signals:

- Licking lips and/or nose (quick or exaggerated) ➡
- Tongue flicks
- Spatula Tongue
- Fidgeting
- Averts eyes (no direct eye contact)
- Turning head or body away
- Yawning ➡
- Sniffing the ground
- Walking slowly
- Holding one paw up
- Grabbing treats ruff
- Freezing
- Wrinkled mouth or face
- Walking in a curve or hunched posture
- Shaking off (dog shakes like she is wet even though she is dry)
- The dog will stop taking treats



Extreme Stress Signals:

- Drooling, panting. ➡
- Sweaty pads
- Round eyes or Whale eye (whites of eyes showing)
- Shaking



Canine Communications:

Play Bow Posture: Indicates a dog would like to play with a person or another dog. Owners can imitate a play bow by placing their hands simultaneously on the ground or their knees to elicit similar responses from their dogs.

Signs of play bow:

- Tail up and wagging
- Ears up
- The mouth is open with the tongue visible
- The front end lowered.
- Friendly eye contact (if the dog is confident)
- Body relaxed.
- The elbows touch the ground.



Relaxed Body Posture Indicates a dog is relaxed and comfortable with her surroundings. A relaxed dog is not moving with any degree of urgency. None of her muscles are tense. The tail is in a relaxed position for her breed type. The head and neck are relaxed but held upright. The mouth can be open and even smiling. When viewing a relaxed dog from a distance, she will have a round and curved body outline; she's wiggly, bending back and forth at the waist between body and loin and dancing around. This is a dog who is content in her environment and is enjoying her surroundings.

Signs of relaxed dog posture:

- Ears up and moving back and forth.
- Head high
- Corners of mouth relaxed.
- Soft eyes (minimal white showing)
- Stands equally on all four legs (weight evenly distributed)
- The tail held in a relaxed position or softly and slowly



Canine Communications:

Aggressive Body Language: These are signs your dog will show you right before they react or bite often, they can be subtle and hard to understand like when a dog freezes or confuses a “prey” bow for a “play” bow. Some dogs raise their hackles (the fur down their back) as a sign of arousal or play. This is why it is very important to look at the dog's whole body, and if you are unsure calmly defuse the situation by giving your dog space to escape the situation.

Micro signals:

- Showing teeth (different than submissive grinning)
- Stiff or freezing
- Leaning forward
- Agonistic Pucker (C shape mouth) ➡
- Whale eyes (whites of eyes showing)
- Pupils Dilation
- Hard stare (often in confident dogs)
- Furrowed Brow (wrinkled eyebrows)
- Ears Flat back on the head (often in fearful dogs)
- Weight Shifting (Moving away)
- Ears forward
- Airplane Ears (ears pointed to the sides) ➡
- Pinched ears (ears on the side of head pulled in)
- Long Lips (fear-based)
- Short lips
- Tongue Flick
- Yawn
- Spatulate Tongue (with no reason to release heat) ➡
- Tension Ridges
- Hypersalivation
- Flared Whiskers
- Head Over (often in Confident dogs)
- Stiff legs
- Lumpy Whisker Bed ➡
- Paw over
- Prey bow (elbows do not touch the ground)
- Straight Spin
- Mounting and clasp
- High Flapping waving quickly
- Rolling over
- Freezing
- Respiration rate
- Barking
- Signs of pain ➡





Canine Communications:



Interpret Proper Play: Proper dog play includes Play fights, fleeing, chasing, growling, sneezing, and mounting. Signs of good play are exaggerated and bouncy movements, play breaks from chasing and fighting, and Role's reverse or example; Chaser becomes chased, roles switch between who is on top and the bottom, and biting is back and forth. Self-handicapping: biting with no force, a large dog will lie down or let a little dog push them over. As your dog gets older their play will change so always be watching your dog's behavior to see what they are telling you.



Play Body Language:

- Play Bow: The front end is lowered. (Elbows touch the ground) →
- Tail: Tail up. The tail is softly and slowly wagging. →
- Mouth: the mouth is open with the tongue visible. The corners of the mouth are relaxed. →
- Eyes: Soft eyes. (Minimal white showing) Friendly eye contact (if the dog is confident) →
- Ears: Ears up and moving back and forth.
- Head high
- Stands equally on all four legs (weight evenly distributed)



Closely monitor any big dog and small dog. Be ready to interrupt if the chase becomes "real" or prey-like. If stiff, or if 2 or more dogs chase one dog if dogs are playing with no breaks. Always be watching your dog to see if they seek you out, get interested in another object, or smell they want a break from play. If a dog rolls on their back.



Stop playing when: A big dog chases a small dog, this is dangerous and can trigger the prey drive in the big dog. If you notice a "bully" when one dog does all the chasing, and biting, and is always on top, or pinning another dog so they can't get up.

Stop play body language:

- *Neck holds
- *One dog is Standing over another
- *Mounting or humping
- *One dog is Standing over another
- *Snarl or growl (without a sneeze to follow.)
- *Tail tucked.
- *Ears pinned back.
- *Tension in the face.



Canine Communications:

Consent check-ins: Studies show that having some element of choice and control over their environment is as rewarding for dogs as food and treats. Choice is a cornerstone of positive reinforcement-based dog training and can be applied with great results to daily interactions with your dog. Our favorite way to help a dog exercise choice is to employ Consent Checks. This simple tool will allow your dog to better communicate with you and give you greater insight into what they do and do not find enjoyable in your interactions.

1. Invite the dog to interact. Without getting into your dog's space, encourage your dog to come over, pat your leg, or call the dog's name. do not use treats!
2. Observe. If the dog is interested in interacting, they will move to approach a soft and relaxed body. If not, they may walk away, look away, or even just stay put.
3. If the dog moves towards you, engage in the interaction for 3-5 seconds, then stop and retract your hands for 5 seconds. What does your dog do?
4. If your dog reengages, continue the interaction (it's still a good idea to check back in periodically)!
5. If your dog disengages, respect their choice and don't reengage. Instead, try a different activity, like offering a treat or a toy. Or give them space.

Why are consent checks so important? They allow dogs to have control over their environment and choices in their interactions. It is easy to forget that we control every interaction our dogs have with their environment! Finding ways to provide them with choice and control in their daily lives as well as to respect their body language signaling they want to continue or end an interaction can help prevent them from escalating their behavior.

Practicing consent checks often makes dogs more likely to solicit interactions from you, especially shy or fearful dogs that feel safer knowing they will not be forced into an interaction. Think of a personal relationship; are you more likely to feel trusting and comfortable with a person who does not listen when you ask for space, or with someone who respects your boundaries?

Signs of Disengaging

- Not moving
- Moving away
- Looking away
- Lip licking.
- Leaning away
- Exposing belly

Signs of Reengaging

- Moving towards you
- Reinitiating touch
- Nudging or licking
- Rubbing body against you
- Leaning into touch
- Gently pawing you