

# KINDRED PAWS

## ANIMAL TRAINING



### Canine Body Language

Dogs communicate through body language, and they use this communication to avoid conflicts and coexist with other dogs and people. Being able to read this body language will help you develop a bond based on trust and understanding with your dog, and help you identify when your dog feels stressed or overwhelmed.

#### A note on breeds

Some breeds may find it harder to communicate based on their appearance. For example, dogs with lots of skin may find it harder to show tension around the face, or dogs with no tails cannot show us arousal by wagging their tail. It is important that we consider the context in which behaviour occurs, look at the entire body and don't rely on one signal, and appreciate that dogs are individuals that have preferred methods of communication.

#### Identifying and Interpreting Calming Signals

The term 'calming signals' is used to describe the body language of dogs that are used to avoid conflict, invite play, prevent bad things happening, and avoid threats. Thus the aim of these behaviours is to calm down a situation, whether it be to help another dog feel safe and show they are not a threat, or to communicate to another dog or person they need space.

Picking up on these signals will help you identify when your dog is uncomfortable with a situation and needs space or time to de-stress.

#### 1) Head turning

This can be a quick or prolonged movement. The dog will turn their head away from what is making them uncomfortable. Example 1) a dog is uncomfortable with the attention they are receiving from a human, they will turn their head away (either quickly or prolonged). Example 2) when two dogs meet it can be a stressful situation - the dogs may simultaneously turn their heads away to indicate they have peaceful intentions.

#### 2) Turning body away

This is an extension of the head turn - a clearer way to communicate they do not want to be involved in the current situation anymore or to avoid a potentially threatening situation.

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### 3) Licking lips, nose or a tongue flick

This can be a very brief behaviour however it says a lot! Often accompanied by the head turn, a dog that lip licks is displaying a calming signal. This can indicate the dog is feeling uncomfortable, be a signal to another dog or person to give them space, or signal that they have peaceful intentions.

### 4) Freezing

Freezing of the body in a stiff position can indicate stress. Remember to look at the whole body and the context of the situation.

### 5) Slow movements

Walking or moving slowly is a calming signal to diffuse a situation.

### 6) Play Bow

Chest on the ground and bottom in the air! This is an invitation to play and relax a situation. The opposite of this may be a dog sitting down to indicate they do not want to play.

### 7) Lying down

Can be used to calm down other dogs.

### 8) Yawning

A commonly missed calming signal that your dog is feeling overwhelmed or stressed, and may need space or want to diffuse a situation.

### 9) Sniffing

Consider the context of this behaviour. Sniffing is a normal behaviour to explore an environment. However, sniffing during an interaction can be similar to a head turn indicating they want out of the current situation, or they want to calm down another dog. Example 1) two dogs are playing chase and one suddenly stops to sniff the ground indicating they want the chase to stop, the other dog would stop chasing or also sniff if they had good manners. Example 2) a dog sniffs the ground as another approaches, showing a lack of interest or as a signal to the other dog to slow down.

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### 10) Body blocking

Physically using their body to stand between and separate a situation or interaction. Example 1) Standing between a valuable resource and another person or dog in an effort to control the situation and indicate they do not feel comfortable with the potential outcome if the individual and object get close. Example 2) A dog standing between two other dogs playing - trying to diffuse and break up the play as they were becoming overwhelmed.

### 11) Wagging tail

This doesn't mean friendly dog. A wagging tail is an indication that the dog is aroused (high energy, not sexual). Important to look at the context for this behaviour.

### 12) Paw Lift

Can be an invitation to play or used as a calming signal.

### 13) Shake off

Shaking of the body used as a calming signal when a dog is stressed. Think 'physically shaking away your worries!' - not that a dog isn't stressed anymore after a shake, but that the dog is trying to settle themselves and diffuse the situation.

### Other important body language signals

Dogs use all parts of their body to communicate.

- Eyes

Showing white = fearful or about to snap

Hard stare = alert, excited, and aroused

Soft and indirect = calm and relaxed

Squinting = appeasing and friendly greeting

- Ears

Folded back but relaxed = appeasing

held back but stiff and tight = fearful

pricked forward = alert and aroused

- Mouth

lips pulled back = appeasing or fearful

tense and closed = unsure

relaxed and open = calm and friendly

Puckered forward/lip lifted = fearful

- Tail

tucked under = fearful or appeasing

hanging low = relaxed and friendly

gently waving = relaxed and friendly

held high = tension or arousal

stiff rapid wagging = may indicate aggression