



Canine Body Language

Knowing and understanding what your dog is saying is imperative to changing their behavior. You will know when your dog is stressed before they growl, bark, lunge, or bite, allowing you to make better decisions more quickly. When we can read our dog's subtle signs, we are able to act before the unwanted behavior even begins! We're also able to better understand why our dog behaves in a certain way and predict future behavior more accurately.

Many people find that their dog's behavior issues dramatically decrease once the household can read the dog's body language. Below are links to resources that will help increase your fluency in dog body language.

Videos:

- [Understanding Dog Body Language](#)
- [Part II: Understanding Dog Body Language](#)
- [Fearful Behavior in Dogs](#)
- [Warning Signs to a Bite](#)
- [Learn How to Read Your Dog's Behavior Better](#)
- [Shut Down Dogs](#)
- [Petting Consent Test](#)

Webinars:

- [Canine Body Language: The Hidden Message](#)
- [Canine Body Language Video by Dr. Sara Bennett](#)
- [ASPCA Webinar Slides on Canine Communication](#)

Articles:

- [Whole Dog Journal Dog Body Language Dictionary of Stress](#)

Pictures:

- [Canine ladder of aggression](#)

Collection of additional resources:

- [Dog Body Language Collection from Eileenanddogs](#)
- [ldogspeak.org](#)

FAQs

Is growling bad? Are there "bad" forms of communication?

As strange as it sounds, I prefer a dog who growls at me. This means that they're communicating their discomfort and giving me a chance to change what I'm doing to avoid a bite. It's important to not punish them for growling. Warning signs are simply communication, and while they may be saying things we don't like, communication is always a good thing. If we punish them for growling, we're teaching them to not communicate with us. We aren't changing the underlying emotional state or teaching them a more appropriate behavior. It's like taking the batteries out of a smoke alarm; the fire is still there you just don't know about it. This is how we get "unpredictable" bites. Additionally, we should respect them when they say

they are uncomfortable.

Dogs can also learn to not giving warning signs when they aren't heeded. If it doesn't work, then why bother?

More about why growls are important here:

[Growling in Dogs](#)

[Four Things You Should Know About Your Dog's Growl](#)

[Getting Rid of the Growl](#)

[How to Handle a Growling Dog](#)

What should I do when I notice signs of stress?

When you notice signs of stress, you should calmly and quickly assess the situation to determine the cause of your dog's stress. Without punishment or "correction," find a way to get your dog out of the situation by either removing the dog (hands-free is the best option) or by removing the trigger. Remember to be calm! It's very easy for humans to make a situation worse through their own escalation of stress, fear, and threatening actions. Make a note of the who, what, when, and where of the situation to better identify triggers and common threads. We can then determine how to manage or modify those triggers!

What if my dog has no warning signs?

It is highly unlikely that your dog displays absolutely no warning signs prior to an act of aggression. The more likely scenarios include your dog displaying subtle signs, signs that you're not familiar with, and/or very quick signs of escalation. Try to learn about canine body language and to study your particular dog. Many people find that videoing their dog throughout the day helps them to see their body language better. Dogs who do not display warning signs are typically the result of punishment, specifically punishing warning signals.

Body Language Resources for Kids

There are some great resources about body language specifically for kids:

[How to Interact](#)

[Living with Dogs and Kids](#)