

What is Your Dog Trying to Tell You?!



Paw Pals

By Laura Garber

Dogs are not verbal; they are body language readers! This means that dogs give a world of information in their posture and movement and it is only for the most obvious messages that they will bark or growl. So if we become fluent readers of our dogs' body language, we can avoid doing things that make them uncomfortable or that they find threatening, and everyone will be the safer and happier for it!

In the wild, a canid (the genus of canine species that includes dogs and wolves) wants to avoid fights whenever possible in order to avoid injury and conserve valuable energy. So, much of a dog's behavior is about conflict avoidance. She will give signals to let others know when she feels uncomfortable or threatened while also trying to indicate that she herself means no harm.

Or she may do what are called displacement behaviors,

like sniffing the ground or scratching or grooming herself. These are natural behaviors but are notable because they occur at odd, unexpected times.

And, lastly, one of the most misunderstood gestures in dog body language is the "tap out", which looks a little like a rollover or belly rub request but is instead a dog's way of trying to avoid some type of handling that is making her uncomfortable, like grabbing her collar, putting on a harness, or being brushed.

If these low level signals are ignored, it can force your dog to intensify her behavior in order to be "heard", and this can mean progressing to growling, showing teeth, even snapping or biting.

If your dog is giving some body language that you don't understand or is behaving in a way that confuses you, you should ask an adult... because the thing about dog body language is that, the more of it you watch, the better you get at interpreting it, so a dog-knowledgeable adult can help translate your dog's messages to you.

After all, the most important thing in any great relationship is good communication!



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Maybe you've seen your dog do some of the following:

- tuck her tail between her back legs or up under her belly,
- lower or turn her head away
- cower, make her body smaller, or turn away
- move away, duck, or back away in avoidance
- raise a front paw
- pin her ears back against her head
- do quick tongue flicks to her lips or nose
- yawn when she's not tired, often in an exaggerated manner
- avoid eye contact or give whale eye, showing lots of eyewhites
- stiffen or tense her body



Go to <https://www.doggiedrawings.net/freeposters> for some great posters on dog body language.