

Dog Body Language 101

Signs of a happy/content dog:

Head up or in normal position
Tail relaxed/wagging (full range of motion)
“Grin” on face (mouth open with corners of the mouth wrinkled)
Ears in relaxed/normal position
Able to sleep/eat
Playing with or chewing on toys
Eyes move freely (not focused on any one subject for more than a few seconds)

Signs of a fearful or stressed dog:

Head down/held low (may be turned away from other dogs/people)
Tail low or tucked between legs (may wag weakly)
Mouth closed/may see wrinkles at corners of mouth
Ears held back/low (if tall ears: they may stick out to the sides or be folded against the head)
Hair on the back may be raised (esp. near the tail)
May roll on his back with belly exposed
May urinate while crouching or on his back
May “freeze” and be stiff all over/glassy eyed or will show body tension and stiff movements
May try to run away (usually with tail tucked and head low)
May growl, snap, show teeth or whine
May repeatedly bark with a short, high-pitched yap or yelp
May be constantly moving, restless or have decreased activity levels
Won’t sleep or rest
May try to hide in or behind things
Quick yawning (looks nervous, not tired)
Excessive drooling, “ropes”
Trembling
Feet sweaty (leaves paw prints that evaporate quickly)
Disinterested in food
Shallow or rapid breathing
Excessive and/or sudden hair loss
White rim of eye showing more than usual
Muscle ridge visible around the eyes or mouth
May show calming signals like lip licking, ground sniffing, shaking (like when wet) or scratching (like he has an itch).

Signs of a yielding dog:

May try to lick the face or mouth of a more assertive dog
May paw gently at the face of a more assertive dog
Head down/low (may be turned away from assertive dog/person)
Tail low/tucked (may wag weakly)
Ears held back/low
May roll on his back with belly exposed
May urinate while crouching or on his back (common for puppies)

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Signs of an assertive dog:

Whiskers flared forward
Head held high
Tail held high and stiff (may wag stiffly or just at the tip)
Mouth closed
Ears up/forward
Direct eye contact
Hair on the back may be raised (but not usually near the base of the tail)
Movements may be stiff or jerky
Looks like he's standing up on his toes
May growl
May try to put his head and/or paws over another dog's back or shoulders
Mounting another dog

Signs of an aggressive dog:

Head and tail held high and stiff
Stiff body movements
Direct eye contact
Lips curled/ teeth showing
May growl or bark menacingly (deep and throaty)
Hair on back may be raised (but not usually near the base of the tail)
Shoves, throws or pins another dog to the ground while growling
Bites & shakes another dog's neck or shoulders while giving a serious growl (not a play growl)
(not to be confused with playing where the dog's body will be supple & relaxed)

Signs of a playful dog:

Play bow (front legs on the ground, butt up in the air, tail wagging)
* Pushing/nudging another dog with his nose while tail is wagging
* Wrestling silently or with play growling
* Playing chase/tag
* Tug-o-war
* Barking at each other in a playful tone
* Pulling on another dog's collar**

NOTE: the above playful situations marked with a "" can quickly turn into aggression. Learn to watch body language for changes and stiffness and listen to the dog's vocalizations

**** This can be dangerous & life threatening if the dog being held by the collar lies down & rolls over. This action can cause the jaw of the 'holding' dog to get wrapped/trapped in the collar. It usually causes one dog's airway to be cut off, while panicking the other because he's trapped by his jaw. If they cannot be properly 'flipped' back into position to untangle the collar, one dog can suffocate & the other may break his jaw. Discourage any collar grabbing or remove the collars during play or when dogs are together.**