

Dog Body Language 101 - By Chris Puls

Created by Chris Puls of Dog Scouts of America www.DogScouts.org

Stress Signals (in no particular order):

- Lowered Tail/body (crouching)
- Stiff or rigid body or movements
- Dog won't take treats
- Ears back for prick ears or down for drop ears
- Slow movements or responses
- Urinating/defecating and/or expressing anal glands
- Dog avoids eye contact (with human and/or with whatever stresses him)
- Freezing in place or dropping into a down and freezing
- Pacing, circling or non-stop movement
- Zooming full speed (trying to get rid of pent up stress)
- Excessive shedding
- Excessive drooling (ropes or puddles)
- Vocalizations such as whining, "huffing" (raspy panting), moaning or growling
- High pitched barking, often frantic sounding
- Stretching ("play" bow or full body)
- Trembling/vibrating
- Hair along the back stands up
- Yawning (especially repeatedly)
- Licking lips
- Penis crowning
- Rolling over onto side or back
- Resisting pressure on the leash, pulling away (esp. when "fighting like a fish")
- Shallow/rapid breathing, holding breath
- Muscle ridges around back of the mouth or around the eyes
- White showing in the eye ("Whale eye")
- Dilated pupils
- Sweaty paws (leaving foot prints)

Signs the dog is trying to calm down others around him:

- Looking away from the stressor
- Yawning
- Moving in an arc when approaching a stressor or unknown
- Licking lips
- Full body shake as if wet (releasing some tension)
- Raising a paw slightly off the ground
- Scratching at the neck or side with a hind foot
- Sitting or lying down
- Sniffing the ground
- Blinking more rapidly than normal (relaxed eyes)

Signs that the dog wants a scary or unknown person/thing to move away (can also be pre-fight signals):

- Hard stare (maintained for more than 3 seconds)
- “On their toes” trying to make themselves appear larger -or-
- Lowering the head/neck with staring (as in a border collie stare)
- Showing teeth or flexing lips
- Ears forward and alert
- Aggressive barking
- Body tension/stiffness or freezing
- Hair over shoulders (or along entire back) stands up
- Marking behavior (urination or defecation) often with lots of kicking afterward
- Tail held high and wagging stiffly or quickly (sometimes just at the tip of the tail)
- Whites in the eye showing

Signs a dog wants to play or get attention:

- Entire body relaxed, no tension
- Play bow (holding front legs only flat on the ground with butt in the air)
- Full wagging tail, relaxed wagging or wagging the tail in a circle
- Rolling over (with fully relaxed body) “flopping” on the ground
- Pawing gently
- Gentle nose bumps
- Ears in a relaxed position
- Full body wiggle
- Grin in the mouth, open mouth with relaxed lips
- Happy/playful bark often one bark at a time or a drawn out bark almost a howl

Things dogs do when they are confused about what is expected of them (may indicate excessive stress):

- Increased activity (pacing, circling, zoomies, jumping up, humping)
- “yappy” stressed barking, may including nipping or biting
- Marking behaviors (urination/defecation)
- Sniffing the ground
- Wandering or running away (avoidance)
- Stretching
- Yawning
- Full body shake (as if wet)
- Looking away from the stressor
- Biting another object or dog (rapidly biting or shaking a toy, or directing aggression to another dog or person)
- Taking treats with a “hard mouth” (biting fingers with the treat)
- Seeking attention/reassurance from others (dogs or people)
- Hiding (going to a crate, tunnel or under a corner table for example)
- Licking the stressor (dog or person) or air licking/lip licking
- Rolling on side or back
- Freezing in place, often in a down position
- Glazed eyes/ “zoned” out