



DOG BODY LANGUAGE

People often misunderstand the body language and vocal sounds of dogs. This can lead to difficulties with training, social interactions, and daily management. The important thing to note about all of these behaviors is the context in which the dog shows them. Dominance is an outdated model based on an experiment involving wolves and is no longer used in wolves or dogs. Furthermore, it's not useful as it doesn't say WHY the dog is doing the behavior. Here is a list of some important dogs' behaviors and what they mean.

Tail Wag: indicated a willingness to interact, but not necessarily in a friendly manner.

Hair Stands up/ Hackles up: arousal, not necessarily fear based, but frequently is.

Rolling on the Back/Looking stiff and turning head away: overwhelmed, asking for more distance. If reached for at this moment, the dog may become aggressive (NOT a sign of "submission").

Rolling on the Back/Side while wiggling with relaxed eye contact: attention seeking behavior. Some dogs learn to greet strangers this way.

Turning Head away: a sign of discomfort and requesting more distance from a dog or person. IT can also be seen as an attempt to avoid conflict.

Lip Licking when NO FOOD is present/ Drawing back the corners of the mouth/panting when its not hot/yawning in situations where the dog is not tired/tucking or lowering the tail: nervous behaviors indicating anxiety about the situation or interaction.

Lick an Unfamiliar person/dog in the face/hands: not a "kiss", but a sign that the dog is anxious. In some dogs, this can be a learned greeting behavior.

Licking inanimate Objects: can be a sign of gastrointestinal disease or normal play behavior.

Humping/Mounting another dog or person: this indicated social anxiety about the individual being mounted (NOT "dominate" behavior).

Directly approaching a dog/person: very rude greeting behavior. Dogs with appropriate skills make a curved path to greet another dog/person and then do short butt sniff.

Staring at another dog/person: a distance increasing request.

Mouthing: this can be a play behavior or a displacement of nervous energy. Read the context of the behavior to determine which.

Trembling when not cold/whining: anxiety, fear, or excitement depending on the context.

Sitting with/ near an unfamiliar person: may be keeping that person “under surveillance” and may be more proactive/aggressive if the person moves or attempts to interact with the person.

Following a familiar person: can be a desire to be with the person or a fear about their departure. Can also be a desire for protection from a situation, person, or another dog.

Wrinkling the nose with the lips pulled back, showing most teeth: a warning that a bite is likely to occur.

Retraction of the lips vertically showing only the front of the teeth: frequently called a “submissive grin” but is a sign of social anxiety, not a sign of “submission” or a threat of aggression.

Becoming still with a stiff body: this can be very brief (less than a second) and is a sign of fear.

Growling: can be play behavior especially during tug of war. Usually is a distance increasing request directed towards people or other dogs. It is a clear indication of discomfort, and it is not a good idea to teach a dog not to growl as they may stop growling and just bite without warning the next time.

Leaving the area where people/animals are: the dog would like some quiet time. There may be a lot of activity in the house, the dog may not feel well, or the dog may just want a nap, but following the dog at this time can lead to aggression.

Racing around wildly with a tucked tail: play behavior frequently called the “zoomies”.

Barking: many different meanings! Can be an alarm, a warning, a distance increasing request to people or dogs, a greeting, an expression of excitement, a sign of distress, or an attention seeking behavior. Read context clues to see what the dog intends!