



## Canine Body Language 101

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### Have you ever wondered what your dog is trying to communicate with you?

Dogs “speak” mostly with their bodies, often relaying very little with their vocal cords. We can learn a lot about our companions by understanding their body language, which in turn allows us to help them be successful in a variety of situations.

We will go over the most common types of emotions, and the body languages that are associated with them. It is extremely helpful for dog owners to be in tune with their dog’s body language. By familiarizing yourself with these common signs, you will find that your dog is very good about communicating how he is feeling. Body language can change rapidly and we must pay close attention in new situations.

Children often have a hard time reading a dogs body language and can easily put a fearful dog in a situation where they may have to make themselves more clear (bite). Always monitor your dogs body language very closely when they are interacting with children.

### **HAPPY, RELAXED, READY TO INTERACT**

- Play bow
- Relaxed facial expression, mouth slightly open. Tongue may be lolling to one side.
- Squinty eyes that look more almond shaped
- Wiggle butt
- Tail wagging fast, either side to side or round like a helicopter
- Turning over with a loose tail and loose open mouth (soliciting a belly rub)

### **NERVOUS, TENSE, UNSURE OF INTERACTION**

- Tail tucked under the body or hanging very low
- Freezing in place or shaking
- Lip licking
- Whites of the eyes showing - “whale eyes”
- Hyper-salivation (drooling)
- Panting when not physically tired
- Yawning when not tired
- Avoiding eye contact
- Ears back and flat to the head
- Rolling over on back with tail between the legs
- Peeing in place

- Piloerection – hair standing up. (can mean multiple things)
- Paw lifted

## **DEFENSIVE and OFFENSIVE - MUST KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE**

**This body language is clearer to recognize and should always be taken seriously. You will likely see multiple signals as the dog becomes more serious.**

- Tense closed mouth
- Hard stare accompanied by a stiff body
- Body leaning forward
- Tail held high and erect with little movement
- Piloerection – hair standing up (can mean multiple things)
- Air snapping
- Growling
- Display of teeth
- Head held high and ears up and forward

**If you are seeing defensive/offensive body language it is time to seek the advice of a professional trainer.**

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).

Written by the Wayside Waifs Canine Behavior Team  
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