

Stress Signals

It is important to know when our dogs are stressed, because they become more reactive. These signals are our dogs' way of telling us when a situation is too much for them to handle, and it is our responsibility to help them through it or get them out of it.

- Sweaty paws
- Dilated pupils - physiological response to an adrenaline "dump"
- Whale eye
- Flaring whiskers
- Tense body - dog may move slowly and have a stiff appearance and movements
- Furrowed brow - muscle ridge around eyes
- Tense mouth - muscle ridge around eyes
- Uninterested in food
- Excessive or frantic energy level
- Increased or decreased energy level
- Shallow breathing
- Rapid panting with corner of the mouth drawn back and tension in face
- Holding breath - often right before a bite
- Excessive shedding - dander may also appear on coat
- Flight reactions
- Excessive drooling
- Freezing - dog will hold VERY still, often right before a bite
- Increased heart rate and respiration
- Any behavior you haven't seen before may be a precursor to aggression.

Displacement Behaviors and Calming Signals

- Scratching
- Yawning
- Shaking
- Sniffing
- Looking away from the threat

These behaviors are often used by the dog in the same way to indicate stress, to calm themselves or others in the environment down and avoid any aggression. The difference between them is the functions they are serving for the dog. There can be more than one meaning for the same signal. *Displacement* signals are used to distract the dog or person through the use of out-of-context behavior in hopes to divert attention. *Calming* signals are used to try to calm down themselves or others in the environment.

Stress Signals

You may see your dog lip licking or yawning in an attempt to calm down another dog, or even you. They may be used to show they are not a threat, or to talk to and negotiate with the other dog to avoid aggression.

Marking territory can have the opposite effect in stressful situations. Nervous dogs may mark as a sign of insecurity, however this often agitates the dominant dog rather than calming them down.

Stress Signals and Calming Signals

- Looking away
- Lip-licks
- Nose-licks
- Slow blinking
- Yawning
- Shake offs
- Scratching
- Paw lift
- Slow careful movements
- Sitting or laying down
- Moving slowly in an arc as approached

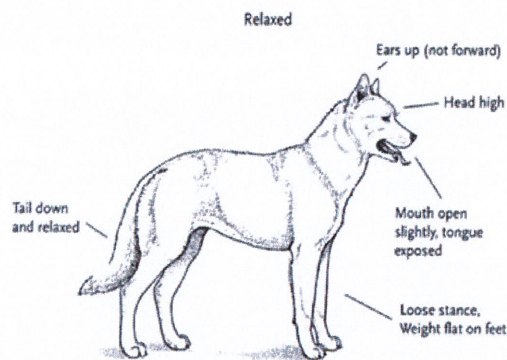
These signals are used in multiple ways. They may communicate "I'm friendly and mean you no harm" or "you're stressing me out and I'm unsure if you may become aggressive. I want to calm down the situation to show you I'm not aggressive."

In unknown situations and when trying to initiate play, dogs may use these signals to make the other dogs feel more comfortable and encourage them into play. They are trying to show they have non-aggressive intentions.

We are able to use some of these signals to help our dogs calm down as well. By yawning and looking away when your dog is nervous we reassure and communicate visible relaxation signs just like they do with other dogs. When we use our dog's natural body language it is much easier understood.

Body Language - Visible Cues - Notice that these pictures show several signals occurring at the same time. It is important to observe the whole picture.

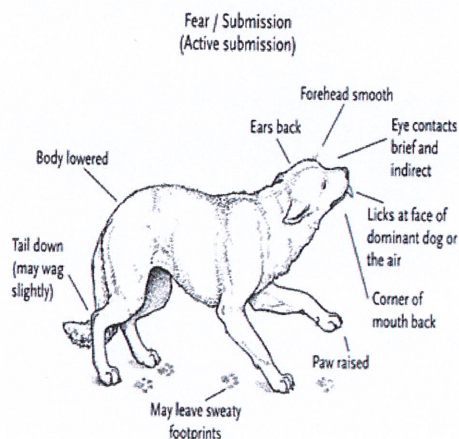
Stress Signals



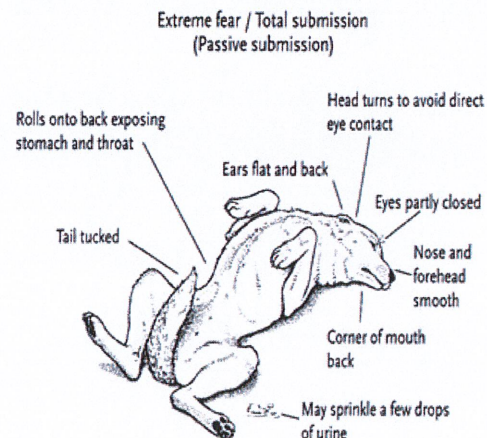
This array of signals communicates a relaxed, reasonably content dog who is unconcerned and unthreatened by any activities going on in its immediate environment.



This is the basic invitation to play. It may be accompanied by excited barking or playful attacks and retreats and may be used as a “punctuation mark” to indicate that any perceived tough behavior was not meant as threat.

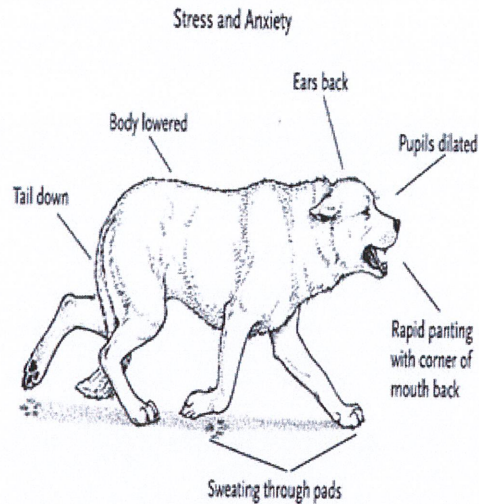


This pattern of signals communicates that the dog is somewhat fearful and is offering signs of submission. Most of these signals are designed to pacify the individual who is of higher social status in order to avoid confrontation.

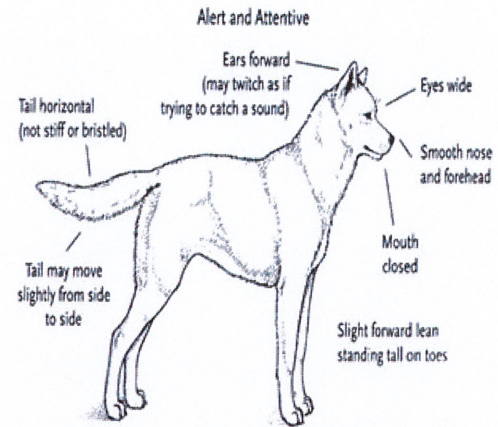


This pattern of signals indicates total and submission. The dog indicates its lower status and grovels before the higher-ranking animal to pacify it and avoid confrontation.

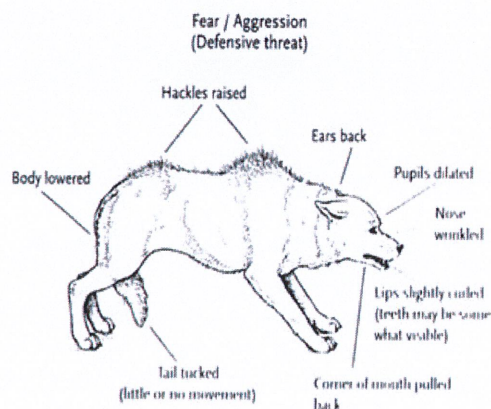
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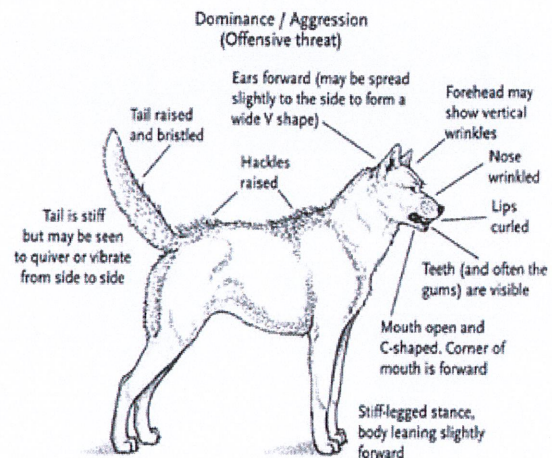
This is a pattern of signals which communicate that a dog is under stress. The source of the stress may be social or environmental, and the signals are not being specifically addressed to any other individual.



When something of interest is encountered or enters the environment, these signals communicate that attention is now being paid to them and the dog has entered a state of alertness.



This set of signals communicate that the dog is frightened but is not submissive and may attack if pressed. These signals are addressed aggression directly toward the individual who is



These signals are given by a very dominant and confident animal, who is communicating both its social dominance and threatening if it is challenging.



Tips For Training

Dogs are like children; they need boundaries and limitations.

Boundaries help dogs feel secure. Dogs will test the boundary constantly in the beginning, but if the line is firm, they will relax, respect the line and feel more secure.

Be the leader of your pack.

Being a leader means you have confidence and you know where you are going. Dogs read your body language, the same as they do with other dogs. Your posture needs to be tall with your shoulders back, your head high, and you are in control. Your dog will respect this and feel secure in your hands.

Move with a purpose.

When you are heeling with your dog, be sure in your steps, move confidently. If you have a confident dog, you need to show your leadership. If you have a shy dog, you may have to coax them, but still be sure you know where you are going.

Give your dog a job, they want to work.

Your dog needs to work for everything: petting, food, toys, going through a door, in short, everything that holds a meaning for them. Working can be as simple as a 'sit' or as complicated as a group of commands. An example might be: sit and wait for food.

Mark the Moment – Timing is so important!

Marking good behavior is the key for communicating with your dog. Watch your dog carefully for the behavior you are looking for and then mark the behavior the moment it happens. You can mark good behavior with your voice, 'yes', or a sound like a clicker.

Be consistent, dogs love routine!

Dogs feel secure when they can predict what will happen. Keep a routine with your dog, as much as possible. Feed them at the same time, walk them at the same time, play with them at the same time, and relax at the same time.

Praise, praise, praise!

Catch your dog doing something right and praise/reward them for it! If you only pay attention to bad behavior and do not praise good behavior, you are not teaching your dog what you want. Example: You arrive in a new city and you tell your cab driver all of the places you don't want to go. Will the driver know where you want to go? Tell your dog what they are doing right!

Pack your Patience.

Training with your dog requires patience. Try to stay calm. Everything may not be perfect, and that is okay. You are leaning right along with your dog. If you get frustrated, your dog will feel it and react most likely in a negative way. Remember to breathe, count to 10 if you need to, and try again.

Take every opportunity to train with your dog.

Your routine and home life presents many opportunities for you to train with your dog.

Train now and you will enjoy the relationship you have with your dog for their lifetime!

Take the time to train with your dog. If you are consistent with your training, you and your dog will have a bond. The human animal bond is so special, and you both will feel the benefits.

Be the leader, train together, have fun together!

Basic Command Words

Heel – This is used when walking on a leash and the desired position is at your side, with the dog's head at your knee.

Let's go – This is used for a casual walk with no expectation of the dog being directly at your side (knee). There should be no pulling or tugging, just a pleasant walk.

Sit – This is used to establish leadership with your dog. As a way to break up the heeling exercise, if reaching a curb and preparing to cross a street (safely), when feeding your dog (sitting before getting food), before petting, before going outside, when people enter the home, etc. Sit can be a way for your dog to work.

Leave It – This can be used for a variety of situations. It should be used when the dog is going after something that is not acceptable: another animal, garbage, or any kind of distraction.

Off – This is used for when the dog is “up” on anything. Use it when the dog is jumping on a person (including yourself), on a counter, on a door, on the couch, on the bed, etc. **Do not use the word ‘down.’**

OK – We use this as a release from a command. It's OK to eat the food, go out the door, etc.

Stay – This command means do not move. It is different from wait (explained below). It is used when you expect the dog to be in the same position for 1 minute or 5 minutes.

Wait – This command is used when something will come next, but the expectation is that the dog will remain in the same general position. Wait for your food after the sit command, wait for the door to open, wait for the OK.

Come – This command can only be used if the dog is either under your control (leash) or is reliable for this command. It must be practiced with a leash and then a long lead (10-20 feet) . Do not use this command unless you are sure the dog will come (the dog is consistently coming when called). If used from a distance and the dog does not come, make yourself small, use a high tone, and encourage it to be with you. Then go back to training on a leash or long lead.

‘Come’ is one of the most difficult commands to train for a reliable result. The danger of using this command and not having a positive result is that the dog learns he doesn’t have to do it and there is nothing you can do to reinforce it. Very important! Every time the dog comes to you it must be a positive experience. If you are frustrated because the dog is not coming, do not react. Always Be Positive! Anytime the dog comes to you, it is a good thing!

Down – This command is used when you want the dog to lay on the ground. It is not used for any other position (such as jumping up). This can be a difficult command for the dog because it puts the dog in a vulnerable position and dogs do not like to be vulnerable. When training for this, first put the dog in a sit and then teach down. Later, after the dog understands what down means, and is reliable, it can be used to put the dog in a down position without sitting first.

Give/Drop It – This command means release whatever is in the dog's mouth. It must be taught with expectation and calm authority for the dog to release the object. After the dog understands the command, expect the dog to release the item. If the dog refuses, make the object ‘dead’ (see handout). Lots of praise for giving is a must!

No Bark – When a dog is barking at an inappropriate time, you can give the command “no bark.”

No Bite – This is used especially when you have a puppy that is learning appropriate behavior. Give the command then replace your hand, etc. with a toy or an appropriate item.

Uh-Uh – vocal correction, sound from the back of your throat, meant to sound like a mother dog's growl to a puppy, used to stop a negative behavior.

You are teaching your dog a new language, English. Dogs communicate through tones: high for praise, middle for commands and low for correction. **Say it once and wait them out. Most dogs have perfect hearing, so don't repeat or get louder.** If you don't have time to wait them out, DON'T ASK FOR IT!