

Signs of Stress

Aware owners are always on alert for the small, specific signs of stress to prevent unpleasant reactions. Appeasement and deference signals don't always indicate stress, but they're important everyday communication tools for keeping peace in social hierarchies. Dogs often present them in calm interactions.

A lower-ranking member of a social group offers the behaviors to a higher-ranking member to promote group tranquility and his own safety. When offered in conjunction with other behaviors, however, they can also indicate stress. Appeasement and deference signals include:

- Slow movement: lower ranking dog appears to be moving in slow-motion.
- Lip licking: lower ranking dog licks at the mouth of the higher ranking member.
- Sitting, lying down, and exposing underside: lower ranking dog offers submission by lowering body posture, exposing vulnerable parts.
- Turning head away, averting eyes: lower ranking dog avoids eye contact, exposes neck.
- Avoidance is another stress signal. A dog will turn away, shut down and evade a handler's touch, and treats. His brow may furrow, and muscles on the forehead and around the eyes may develop ridges.

Displacement behaviors are efforts to resolve an internal conflict for the dog - unrelated to hierarchy. They include:

- Rapid eye blinking.
- Nose licking - dog's tongue flicks out once or multiple times.
- Chattering teeth.
- Scratching.
- Shaking off as if wet, but the dog is dry.
- Drooling may be an indication of stress, a response to the presence of food or an indication of a mouth injury, or digestive distress.

More general signs of stress:

- Excessive grooming: the dog may lick or chew paws, legs, flank, tail and genital areas to the point of self-mutilation.
- Hyperactivity: frantic behavior, pacing, sometimes misinterpreted as ignoring or blowing off owner.
- Lack of attention and focus: the stressed brain has difficulty processing information.
- Leaning and clinging: the dog seeks contact with human as reassurance.
- Lowered body posture: slinking, acting "guilty" or "sneaky." These are misinterpretations of dogs' body language- attributing human characteristics to them.
- Mouthing: willingness to use mouth on human skin. It can be puppy exploration or adult poor manners, but can also be an expression of stress, ranging from gentle nibbling (flea biting) to hard taking of treats to painfully hard mouthing, snapping or biting.
- Panting: rapid shallow or heavy breathing. It can be normal if the dog is warm or has been exercising.
- Stretching: to relax stress-related tension in muscles. May also occur after sleeping or staying in one place for extended period.
- Stiff movement: tension can cause a noticeable stiffness in leg body and tail movements.
- Sweaty paws: damp footprint" can be seen on floors, exam tables, rubber mats.
- Trembling may be due to stress - or cold.
- Whining: high-pitched vocalization, irritating to most humans. While some may interpret it as excitement, a dog who's excited to the point of whining is also stressed.

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How To Interpret Your Dogs Body Language



Dogs can't talk, but they have an incredibly expressive tool for sending messages - their own bodies.

If humans were half as good at reading their signals as they are at reading ours, we'd have a lot less miscommunication between our species.

What Are They Saying?



The various parts of your dog's body work together to tell the complete story and unless you read them

all, you may miss something important. It can be difficult to pick out small signals until you've become an educated observer. Study photographs, watch videos and observe dogs to hone your skills.

Despite a widely held belief, a wagging tail doesn't always mean a happy dog. The following abridged Canine-English dictionary will help you become a skilled translator. Remember that breed characteristics can complicate the message. Note that if body language vacillates, it can indicate ambivalence, which may precede a choice toward aggression.

Tail

- **Tucked under:** submissive, appeasing, deference or fearful.
- **Low and still:** calm, relaxed.
- **Gently waving:** relaxed, friendly
- **Low-to-medium carriage, fast wag:** submissive, appeasing or happy, friendly.
- **High carriage, vibrating or fast wag:** tension, arousal, excitement; could be play arousal or aggression arousal.



Ears

- **Pinned back:** submissive, appeasing, deference or fearful.
- **Back and relaxed:** calm, relaxed, friendly.
- **Forward and relaxed:** aware, friendly.
- **Pricked forward:** alert, excitement, arousal, assertive; could be play arousal or aggression arousal.

Eyes

- **Averted, no eye contact:** submissive, appeasing, deference or fearful; may be a subtle flick of the- eyes or may turn entire head away.
- **Squinting or eyes closed:** submissive, appeasing.
- **Soft, round eyes:** calm, relaxed, friendly.
- **Eyes open wide:** confident, assertive.
- **Hard stare:** alert, excitement, arousal; could be play arousal or aggression arousal.
- **Whale eye:** eyes wide open with the whites showing.



Mouth

- **Lips pulled back:** submissive, appeasing or fearful; may be also lifted in a submissive grin or aggressive grin.
- **Licking lips, yawning:** stressed, fearful-or tired.
- **Lips relaxed:** calm, relaxed, friendly.
- **Lips puckered forward, may be lifted in a snarl:** assertive, threat.

Hair

- **Piloerection** (hair standing on end) **or raised hackles:** arousal. While it can indicate aggression. Dogs may also piloerect when they're fearful, uncertain or engaged in excited play.

Body Posture

- **Lowered rump, hackles maybe raised:** submissive, appeasing or fearful.
- **Standing at full height:** confident, relaxed.
- **Shoulders lowered, hindquar-**

