

A Brief Look at the Body Language of Dogs

Excerpts from Sarah Kalnajs, *Body Language of Dogs* (DVD)
Turid Rugaas *Calming Signals: On Talking Terms with Dogs & Barking* (Books & DVDs)
Maureen Ross, M.A., *Train Your Dog, Change Your Life* (Book)

Most of the time, we don't recognize signals that our dogs give us until it is too late. Our dogs are giving cues and signals with their body language all the time. Here are a few:

- ♦ Signs of Stress (in context): Most signs of stress to watch for come in sequences (clusters), not alone. It is essential to look at the **WHOLE DOG** and **WHOLE PICTURE**.
 - 🐾 Penis Crowning (arousal and can escalate to aggression)
 - Females – Unknown – could be pheromones
 - 🐾 Lowered Head
 - 🐾 Teeth Clattering
 - 🐾 Sweaty Paws
 - 🐾 Lip Licking (invasive – other thing happening too)
 - 🐾 Tongue Flicking
 - 🐾 Dilated Pupils – Whale Eyes – Whites Exposed
 - 🐾 Tap-Outs
 - 🐾 Bunny Eyes
 - 🐾 Freezing
 - 🐾 Closed Mouth
 - 🐾 Tucked Low Tail
 - 🐾 Pacing
 - 🐾 Stiff Posture
 - 🐾 Excessive Shedding
 - 🐾 Over Stretching (not the relaxing play bow)
 - 🐾 Trembling
 - 🐾 Muscle Ridges (around forehead / eyes)
 - 🐾 Urogenital Check-Outs --- Assessing if it is still there, but I believe this is a form of displacement, not just checking to see if equipment is still intact).
 - 🐾 Spatial – Invasive (males & females)

- ♦ **Stress Vocalizations:**
 - 🐾 Stress Panting – Dry/Shallow
 - 🐾 High Pitch Whining
 - 🐾 Happy Panting
 - 🐾 Dry Heavy Panting
 - 🐾 Excessive Salivating – Panting – Whining (again --- Clusters and can happen with Submissive Licking)
 - 🐾 Cheek Puffing

- ♦ **Calming Signals (Turid Rugaas):** We don't recognize them (and some dogs never learn them or have them taken away) so we don't offer them as calming signals. This can become a social deficit, excluding dogs from playing in a pack with out dogs.

It is important to look at the "WHOLE PICTURE".

- 🐾 Yawning
 - 🐾 Looking – Away
 - 🐾 Sniffing – (dogs sniff in Technicolor) Keep in context with the situation and other behaviors. Dogs love to sniff. Sniffing does not always mean stress.
 - 🐾 Sneezing: Learned and/or often do. This is usually not stress. Dogs love it. Snorting is sometimes an indication of excitement.
 - 🐾 Scratching / Excessive shedding: Again, excessive shedding is very noticeable in clumps on the floor. Scratching happens in context with the surrounding criteria / environment / happenings.
 - 🐾 Blinking
 - 🐾 Shaking Off
 - 🐾 ARCing ... the dog chooses to arc away from a situation
- ♦ **Sequences:** You can see clusters like yawning /lip licking / nose licking
 - 🐾 Sniff / Lip Lick / Shake-Off
 - 🐾 Tail / Tongue Flick
 - 🐾 Look-Away – Trembling ... etc.
 - 🐾 Yawning – Lip Licking – Blinking
 - 🐾 PAW RAISE ...

Distance Increasing Signals: People and dogs have spatial bubbles. DIS is when dogs are trying to increase spatial distance from what is stressing them out. It is the lowest level before escalation. They simply try to pull-back and move-away.

- 🐾 Sub-Thresholds: Barking / Lunging
- 🐾 Barking: Dogs bark for a variety of reasons, one being because they are dogs and can send messages. They bark from boredom or to make something go away which is very rewarding for even a small Yorkie. There is an alarming bark and an announcing bark (they're home or they're here).
- 🐾 Reading the signals to recognize thresholds is vital for trainers / behaviorists and dog owners.
- 🐾 Pilo-Erection: Middle back – top – back – watch tail position and thresholds. This can be accompanied with a high – fast – flagged tail.
- 🐾 High – flagged and TIPPED tail with Pilo is a highly aroused / dominate dog telling you to MOVE-AWAY.

**Both dominant and submissive "extremes" have equal potential to bite
It is like a Type A and B Personality ... Balance is key**

Distance Decreasing Signals: The opposite of DIS, the dog is in YOUR SPACE. There can be submissive lip licking, licking you, frontal care seeking, meet / greet.

- 🐾 Submissive (also submissive urination)
- 🐾 Ground Scratching
- 🐾 Freezing –
- 🐾 Pant & Pause (dogs will hold their breath)
- 🐾 Very brief look-away
- 🐾 Whale Eyes
- 🐾 Easy Wagging Tail – Circle Tail (friendly)
- 🐾 Play bows (can be submissive, to relieve stress, solicit play and stress-relieving)
- 🐾 DO NOT PUNISH – PUSH – They are scared enough. It's confidence they need.
- 🐾 Submissive Grin: No sound, afraid --- Lips pulled back --- not always bad

Marking Signals: Male & females mark. Dogs leave urine in their bladder, so can continue marking. Dogs together will urinate on each other, then on the urine, then on the surrounding area. They are doing this for a couple of reasons and at different intensities depending on the dog.

- 🐾 Dogs (wolves) mark territories so they know their territories and warn others that this is their territory.
- 🐾 Domestic family dogs mark too for the same reasons. In a pack they mark on each others urines sometimes over and over again.
- 🐾 Don't confuse this with the meet / greet ritual of sniffing and sometimes having a peeing and urinating party.

Hard Eyes: The head is usually turn-away when a human approaches. The eyes are whale-eyed, sometimes whites showing, but noticeably different then "soft eyes) which are inviting. You know when you see a dog with HARD EYES. They are warning you to BACK-OFF. So, BACK-OFF. It is a physiological message / signal to GET AWAY FROM ME and DON'T COME ANY CLOSER. Oftentimes, it is accompanied by a low-growl.

- 🐾 The dog will often back-up with hard eyes.
- 🐾 Forward stance – Ears erect & forward
- 🐾 Heightened Posture (mouthy) or slinking away --- BOTH are message to BACK-OFF

Soft Eyes: A dog with soft eyes is usually friendly, may be a little apprehension due to previous associations, but you can tell a soft-eye from a hard-eye. It is distinguishable because it is open and you don't FEEL AFRAID. Look at the WHOLE DOG / BODY LANGUAGE. Is it slouched, forward, backward, relaxed, excited? Proceed accordingly for each individual dog.

Muzzle Punching: If you have been muzzle punched you know it. Your jaw and nose hurt. The dog, usually very quickly, jumps to your face. You may be bent off, and they jump up and clock you.

Resource Guarding: Dogs are by nature resource guarders (scavengers). RG drives (hard wired) is stronger in some dogs. Dogs can resource guard anything from a toy to the neighborhood. Factors are genetic and DEFINITELY, nature/nurture. Socialization, desensitization and positive training are essential key ingredients, as is a guidelines / boundaries in the home and around toys. Children are especially sensitive to this, as they will give dogs too many toys and too much freedom. Supervision by adults is a must.

***Genetics Loads the Gun, Environment Pulls the Trigger,
We make Choices on how to nature / nurture and for well-being***

Resource Guarding can begin around food and escalate. It is about space, you, location, and proximity.

Energy Levels: Dogs who are reactive have hard time learning anything because they are not focused on what you trying to teach. Dogs that are responsive are grounded and calm. This requires a calm pack leader / teacher.

Roll-Over versus Tap-Out:

- 🐾 Roll-Over: Belly-up, rolls over, petting is okay. They generally roll over on their own.
- 🐾 Tap-Out: Head down, body flips, usually slowly into a roll. It can be accompanied with submissive licking –

Displacement Behaviors: Displacement Activity that is performed to changed the motivation in a given situation in order to escape. The individual tries to achieve a sense of security by performing an activity that feels safe with and connects with pleasure.

***DPB is something you do to look busy when you don't really know what you should be doing!
If I don't see it ... it's not there.***

Some forms of DPB (be mindful that these need to be observed in context --- Whole Body:

- 🐾 Marking Territory
- 🐾 Inappropriate increase in activity
- 🐾 Stretching
- 🐾 Yawning
- 🐾 Shaking Off
- 🐾 Sniffing
- 🐾 Looks-Away

Is this Play, Taught, Safe or Not? All dogs should be positively trained to respond to a sit, down and stay and be safe around children. Children should be taught how to respect dogs. Dogs that have been ignored develop their own coping / survival skills, some that include destructive behavior to alleviate boredom. One dog in a play bow may be doing just that, while another may be getting ready to top it off with a jump-up and muzzle-punch.

Family Systems & Getting to Know Your Dog: Families come in different sizes, cultures and value systems. So do dogs. They have higher and lower ranking motivators, different likes and dislikes, and are hard wired more for one behavior than another.

We have more dogs today in the USA than ever before. The good news is that we have plenty of available resources that more positively teach us how to train and live with dogs.

The bad news is that not all of them are taught in a way that most families, especially first time down owners, can effectively use. If they were, we would not still be euthanizing millions of dogs under the age of three every year. That is a resounding message, that even with the resources, something is amiss. Could it be we have too many resources? Are we trying to do too much? Dogs are pretty simple in their expectations of us, but I wonder about us for them.

There is a “quick-fix” and “electronic” mentality. Watch Cesar Milan on National Geographic and “fix the dog.” Super-dog-nanny will do it in one hour. It is not always that simple or realistic, but sometimes it helps, if kept in perspective.

Getting to know YOUR dogs is crucial for anyone handling dogs, whether families or professionals. Getting to know the dog’s thresholds (start-stop, how much and when), and “triggers” (what causes this dog’s behavior and pushes it over the edge) can prevent dog abuse and humans getting hurt.

Unfortunately, many people do not understand dogs, even those with big hearts and/or working with them daily. Dogs are a distinct and different species from human. To learn about behavior requires two things: learning about dog behavior through the dog’s eye --- observation, education, mentoring, doing AND learning about the people who live with the dogs.

Dog Trainers are abundant. They use a variety of methods to teach a dog and owners a set of signals that produce mostly predictable-reliable outcomes if used consistently. For example, “watch-me & sit” means look at me, and put your rump on the ground.

Dog trainers can teach simple behaviors or complicated behaviors. **Good trainers** can teach families, not just dogs. They engage user-friendly sequences to teach behavior chains (i.e. sit, wait, go get it, come), that can be used at home, not just in the training environment.

Some trainers know enough about **basic learning theory**, and have taken at least Psych 101, to be able to help modify simple problem behaviors such as digging, chewing and jumping.

One difficulty is that what often seems like a simple behavior problem is actually the symptom of a larger, more complicated underlying problem. Dogs live with humans, usually several (family). Some dog trainers will put a band-aid on the symptom (i.e. barking, jumping) which is temporarily helpful, but without the knowledge, background or experience to identify and treat

the underlying reason for the dog's behavior. Things can become increasingly worse, and unknowingly exacerbated by family members, friends and wannabe dog trainers.

Behaviorists use techniques based on fundamental scientific principles to modify an animal's behavior for the benefit of both the animal and the family/owners. They are specially trained and skilled in recognizing problems and their precursors such as aggression, separation anxiety, and status-related conflicts with people or other dogs.

Behaviorists have training in **behavior and family systems** (dynamics of how families interact), not just dog training. To be able to recognize how the family interactions may be affecting the dog, a behaviorist can assess family dynamics including children, culture, belief systems, coalitions, alliances and how they may be contributing factors.

A behaviorist will do an intake that includes piecing together history, lifestyle, nutrition, grooming, health, well-being and look at the dog in context with the family - lifestyle. Oftentimes, it requires journaling behaviors and the owner's cooperation and willingness to video behavior.

Collaborating with the dog's Veterinarian may be necessary if a dog requires medication has a medical condition. The dog must have an evaluation to rule-out health issues that could cause an erratic change in behavior. Abrupt or traumatic lifestyle changes can cause conflicting change.

As a dog owner / advocate you can ask for credentials, experience (including education) and if this person has treated specific behavioral problems.

Always do your homework and ask specific questions pertinent to your issues. Behaviorists are professionals and will oftentimes request a home and/or office visit with whole family to assess the dynamic of how the family engages with each other and the dog.

To do this comfortably and effectively, you need to trust the behaviorist.

Enjoy the Journey ~ it's all a learning experience ~