

Dog Body Language: Application

Croney Research Group



Understanding Dog Body Language

- ↑ Increases human recognition of fear in dogs
- ↑ Increases the number of physical features used to assess welfare
- ↑ Improves ease and accuracy of assessment of welfare



Good Things Happen When Caretakers Understand Dog Body Language!

- Recognition of welfare concerns
- Advocacy for dog welfare improves
- Avoidance of potentially undesirable or unsafe situations increases
- Dog physical, emotional, and behavioral well-being is promoted
- Caretakers can make informed interventions or changes
- Likelihood of undesirable behaviors decreases
- Positive experiences increase
- The human-animal bond is better protected



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Dog Body Language can be Confusing the Untrained Eye!

People often...

- Recognize happiness in a dog regardless of experience with dogs
- Focus their attention on vocalization and movement
- Accurately interpret barking regardless of experience with dogs

However,

- People may miss many additional important details

Learn More: [At-a-Glance: Decoding Body Language](#)

When Interpreting Dog Body Language, Always Consider the Context!

Environment: Sights, sounds, smells, novelty, textures, people, other dogs, temperature

Physiological/Physical: Is the dog feeling well? Are they in pain?

Historical: How has the dog responded to similar situations previously? What has occurred?



A small, scruffy brown dog with dark eyes is looking out from behind a chain-link fence. The dog's fur is a mix of light brown and black. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a blue and white striped fabric.

Body Language Application

#1: Prevent & Manage Fear

If you see signs of stress or fear, assess the environment and context to identify and remove potential concerns



Body Language Application

#2: Meet & Greets

When approaching a dog, watch their body language and adjust accordingly

A photograph of a person sitting on a light-colored, shaggy rug. The person is wearing blue jeans and a colorful, patterned shirt. They are surrounded by several puppies of various breeds, including white, tan, and brown. The person's hands are visible, gently touching the puppies. The background is a green wall.

Body Language Application

#3: Social Interactions with People

Continued observation of dogs during interactions with caretakers (handling, husbandry, medical treatments) and visitors ensures dogs are comfortable and promotes safety

A photograph of two dogs, one white with brown patches and one black with brown patches, playing with a blue, textured toy. The white dog is on the left, and the black dog is on the right. They are both looking towards the camera with interest. The background is a blurred green field.

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#4: Social Interactions with Other Dogs

Monitor dog body language during social interactions within the home pen, when in play yards and when in play groups to avoid problems with bullying or aggression

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#5: Puppy Socialization & Early Exposure

- Use body language to guide puppy exposure
- Interactions and exposures should always be positive (not neutral or negative)



A German Shepherd dog is captured in mid-air, performing an agility jump over a hurdle. The dog is in profile, facing left, with its front legs tucked and back legs pushing off. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green trees and a white fence. The dog has a black saddle and tan legs and chest. Two semi-transparent white text boxes are overlaid on the right side of the image.

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#6: Environmental Enrichment

Activities are only enriching if the dog perceives them as positive. Monitoring body language can help ensure your environmental enrichment is effective



Body Language Application

#7: Low Stress Handling

Accomplished with gentle, calm, and predictable handling, using body language to evaluate success, and adjusting techniques when needed to reduce fear during veterinary visits and husbandry care

When Caring for Dogs, **Avoid:**

- Dismissing body language cues
- Interpretation based on only one body part
- Disregarding any behaviors including vocalizations
- Overlooking the context
- Using body positions and interactions that cause fear

Human Body Language to Use when Communicating with Dogs

- Look away (avert gaze)
- Approach in a curve to the side of the dog
- Turn your body to the side
- Crouch down, avoid leaning over
- Keep hands and arms at sides
- Stay quiet, limit talking or speak softly

Human Body Language to Avoid

Some behaviors that are acceptable in humans can feel threatening to dogs:

- Staring
- Approaching in a direct/straight path
- Leaning over
- Reaching out a hand
- Hugging



Learn More:

- [Body Language Handout](#)
- [At-a-Glance: Decoding Body Language](#)



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