

Can You Read Your Dog's Body Language?

The dog park is a great place to socialize your dog. In addition to having fun legally running off leash, your dog will surely meet other canines at the dog park. Like humans, every dog has a different personality. Some are more energetic, loving to romp around and play, while other dogs may be shy or prefer to stick close by their owner. Dogs will tell you how they're feeling through their body language.

Learning to understand their signs will help you determine your dog's needs, as well as predict how other dogs you encounter will behave. Dogs use nonverbal communication to let you know if they're friendly or to be avoided. Observing a dog's face, eyes, mouth, tail, ears, and posture can tell you a lot about a dog's feelings. While most dog park visitors are friendly and sociable, recognizing a dog's body language will increase your enjoyment and safety when interacting with dogs.

The overall demeanor of a dog can be observed by the way he approaches another dog. Most dogs will greet one another face to face and then instantly sniff each other's butts (there's just no nice way to say it!). Scent is an instinctual part of a dog's makeup, so it is perfectly natural for them to behave this way.



"I'M FRIENDLY!"
play bow

Once this sniff session is over, some dogs will want to play, as demonstrated by lowering their upper body and slightly spreading their front legs in front of a playmate. Typically, when both dogs want to play, they will romp and run around like this together, often chasing each other and running in fast circles around their owners.

Some dogs get extra excited and may even make some noise and growl as they wrestle and chase each other. The time to be concerned is when one of the dogs becomes too dominant, which is evident by the other dog's behavior. If you hear a yelp or a squeal, and the dog looks scared, with ears down, tail between his legs and appears to be trying to seek shelter under a table or your legs from the other dog, it's time to take a break.



ANXIOUS



HAPPY
(or hot)

When dogs are relaxed and happy, they seem to almost smile, and they run, walk, and sniff around, often wagging their tails contentedly. Whereas, a dog that is feeling scared or nervous may have narrowed eyes, lowered ears, his tail between his legs, and even cower down close to the ground, in fear.

An aggressive dog will often approach another dog quickly, head forward and neck raised with intense "staring" eyes. The hair on its back may be raised. A dog who lifts his lip and shows his teeth to the extent his muzzle is wrinkled is signaling they are about to



SUSPICIOUS

bite. Call your dog to you and steer clear from a dog exhibiting these behaviors.

The way a dog looks at you or another dog can also reveal clues about his mood and personality. A relaxed facial expression with eyes that blink when you look at them shows you a dog is comfortable. A lowered head with flattened ears and eyes that turn away or squint show a dog that knows he's being chastised. A tight face with a direct, hard stare signals a dog in an offensive, assertive position.

Your dog's tail can also reveal his feelings. A relaxed dog will hold its tail in its natural position, and may wag it back and forth. A fearful dog will usually tuck his tail under his body or holds it low to the ground. An aggressive dog will have its tail raised or extended up over the back. It may be still or flagging in short, sharp motions.

Think of your trip to the dog park as going to a doggy cocktail party. If your dog knows the other dogs, he will feel comfortable and relaxed as he mingles with his friends. However, if he doesn't know the other dogs, then you need to help him break the ice. The more you observe your dog and others, the more familiar you'll be at knowing what they're feeling. Keeping an eye on your dog and observing his interactions at all times is important to ensure the optimum safety and enjoyment of all dog park visitors.

A great resource for learning more about reading your dog's body language is "Canine Body Language: A Photographic Guide" by Brenda Aloff. We would also like to thank Lili Chen for her illustrations of Boogie the Boston Terrier. Check out her website at www.doggiedrawings.net.