

Module 1 - Section 1 A - Understanding Dogs

Dog Language

1. The 5F's of Behaviour
2. How dogs communicate
3. Calming Signals
4. Signs of stress.
5. Signs of possible reactive behaviour
6. Video talk on calming and stress signal

1. The 5F's of Behaviour

Fight

Flight

Fooling Around (Fidget)

Freeze

Faint

All animal behaviour, including that of humans, is governed by the 4 F's. In humans this is Fighting, Fleeing, Feeding and Fruitful (reproduction). When we are looking at dog behaviour we refer to them either as the 4F's or over the last few years the 5F's. These reactions shout to you that the dog is really not coping whether it is feeling fear, is anxious etc. The first two are commonly recognised as the flight or fight response. It is also important to realize that these can also work in conjunction with one another e.g. a dog that is a fear biter, where the dog will dash in to bite and then run away – this can also occur in various degrees.



FIGHT – when we say Fight, we immediately have an image (or at least I did) of a dog attacking another dog. This is not necessarily always the case. The fight reflex normally begins with the dog indicating by a snarl, lift of lip, backing off etc that it is not coping. It is when the perceived threat does not respond to the behaviour that the dog is exhibiting – that the behaviour starts to escalate, and the growl could become an air bite or perhaps a lunge and a snarl. In this way the behaviour gradually escalates until a bite does occur.



FLIGHT - In this case as well, it may not be the dog actually running away. It could try and make its body look smaller so that the perceived threat would not regard it as a threat. It could also go and hide behind a chair or a person. A dog hiding away behind a person or an object can be a very dangerous dog, especially if all means of escape are blocked. It is not uncommon in shelters where the dog is caged, or in a cage at a grooming saloon, that people will get bitten when trying to get the dog out.



FOOLING AROUND (also known as fidget) - Any excess (or lack of normal) of behaviour should be considered as a stress signal from the dog. Dogs that are very often know as hyper active, which jump around, lick constantly are not coping. My own dog Brady, for example, was overall a well behaved dog. However if we had a few new visitors all arriving at the same time he was beside himself and would attempt to jump up, something he never normally did. It was his way of coping with the stress, much like a person who will bite

their nails in stressful situations, or somebody that talks too fast when nervous or meeting new people. To help him in this situation, I will put him on lead to meet all the new visitors and ask him to sit and watch me, or perhaps give him a ball to hold in his mouth - I am giving him something else to do and this reduces his stress and he was then able to meet the visitors one by one and greet them without jumping up.



FREEZE - An extreme of this is that the dog stands dead still, the eyes become fixed, and the body is rigid. This however, is not always the case and you may find that the dog only freezes for a split second. It is so very important to recognize this very first sign of fear and one of the best things to do is to turn the dog away from the perceived threat. If the dog is acting reactively towards you, take a slow step away to give the dog the space it needs and turn your head away to show that you are not challenging.

In training situations and with owners, one often comes across the situation whereby the dog suddenly stops dead and refuses to move, often accompanied by the behaviour of the dog sitting at the same time. This is so often mistaken by both owners and trainers alike of the dog being stubborn – it is not – this dog (majority of the time) is simply not coping



FAINT - Although this is rare it can happen, just as a human can faint from fear so can a dog. In the circumstances that it does happen, the dog is more likely to be in a full freeze (as mentioned above) and then just topple over. It appears to be more likely to occur if there are underlying physical factors such as epilepsy.

In this picture the dog was actually so over whelmed at being reunited with its owner that it fainted.

2. How dogs communicate

Dogs also communicate vocally. If you observe dogs on a daily basis, the majority of them appear to be silent, only vocalizing when they want something, or have become aware of a threat or even just a ring of the doorbell.

These vocalizations are made up of whining, howls, yelps, barking (which many of us know only too well!), growling/snarling, whimpers and some even believe that sneezing is a form of communication used to diffuse tension.

Another manner in which dogs communicate is with the sense of smell (olfactory) which we have already discussed under the Dog's senses. When your dog smells the excrement of another dog it receives a large amount of social information, whether this is urine or faecal deposits. When observing dogs you will also notice that a lot of smelling goes on when they meet one another – sniffing anal and vaginal secretions, ears and snouts. Smelling can also be used to recognize offspring, objects, and areas.

3. Calming Signals

Dog language is a subject I find absolutely fascinating, and the more I learn about the signals exhibited by dogs, whether it be the calming signals, fear or stress responses or even how they communicate or signal to one another, the more I realize that we are only scratching the surface and there is so much more we don't know!

Dogs do not speak English, German or Zulu, but they do learn to understand different words, commands or cues. It has been hypothesized that this understanding is more 'sound/result' related than anything else. A major way they communicate which is not often realized by us humans, is by body language. This is not an isolated part of the body but includes the whole body, especially their face (eyes, eyebrows, muzzle, expression, mouth, tongue, lips etc). Their ears alone can indicate a multitude of different signals. We then get to the body itself including the legs, which will give us further information and then we look at the tail which can be one of the most ambivalent signals to decipher. The body signals can either be used to calm the dog itself or another dog/human (calming signals), or threatening signals to others.

What good does it do us to learn these signals? It makes a world of difference! As it is pretty certain that they will never learn to actually 'speak' our language, we can, by learning some of the basic signals, determine if our dogs are stressed, feel threatened, happy or are giving signals of reactivity. Think about how much miss-communication this could clear up!

A calming signal is described as a subtle signal used by dogs to indicate that they are stressed and to avoid or diffuse confrontation to both other dogs and humans. It is also known by the term appeasement signals. Not only do these calming signals allow us to observe if our dogs are stressed, we can make use of many of them by using them ourselves to pacify our dogs.

I was very fortunate that during the time I spent observing dogs while in Portugal I was, in

addition to Ethology based literature, reading Patricia McConnell's 'The Other End of the Leash' which is one of the best books I have ever read. She talks about how to really study your dog and even taking a video and then watching it and looking at the different signals our dogs give off all the time. She also suggests that you start with only one area of your dog, the head for example as if you try to watch everything at once, and you will get totally lost.

Let's start with the head, what are we going to be looking at? What is the dog's muzzle normally like, what are its eyes like, soft hard, wide open, slightly closed etc? How does his expression change if he sees another dog or the doorbell rings? What position are his ears in when he is relaxed, what position are they in if the dog is excited or nervous? What about his breathing, one of the most important things – can you recognize what is normal and what is stressed? When your skills improve (and they do), you will find this an invaluable tool when working with strange dogs.

Not only will this help you to recognize when your dog is not coping, but taking this knowledge of your dog a bit further and observing what your dog's normal body temperature is, what are the normal eating and elimination patterns are and so forth, will give you valuable insight to recognize when your dog is not 100% healthy. Early detection is always helpful in overcoming disease in the body and in some cases this can save lives.

I always try and leave a dog to walk around my practice or the client's home for some time while I am talking to the client. During this time I really observe what seems to be normal for the dog – this allows me to pick up the slightest change when the dog does stress. This is especially important in a dog that is fearful or reactive. If you see the dog's stress levels have risen by observing the body language, just by taking a step back (or preferably ask the owner to move the dog away), perhaps avert your eyes or turning away yourself, you are able to change the whole situation for the dog – you actually allow the stress levels to lower, and can even prevent a dog from attacking you. I cannot stress how important it is to be totally aware of dog's body language, especially in the case of fear or reactive behaviour. I always ask my students to really focus on this section – don't take my word for it, observe each and every dog you come across, and make notes.

It can take years to learn these signals especially as some of them are so very subtle – you are, in effect, learning a new language and the more you observe and learn, the more proficient you will become. Many of these signals have common meanings and they are more complex and subtle than originally thought. So generalizations such as thinking that a wagging tail is always friendly are not always correct. The dog as a whole has to be interpreted and if dealing with a potentially aggressive dog, this often has to be done in a hurry! One thing I can assure you of, your bond with your own dog will definitely deepen; training will become easier as the communication skills between the two of you improve as will your day to day interaction with your dog.

One of the first books I ever read about Calming Signals was an excellent one by Turid Rugaas - On Talking Terms with Dogs – Calming Signals (available from Pet Publications and Kalahari) which I highly recommend to all those who want to know more about their dogs.

Stress is something that is dynamic; it changes from moment to moment and within each new situation. Signals differ from dog to dog, with some dogs exhibiting more than others and can also be breed specific – an example of this is the Whippet breed, which have a naturally low tail carriage.

Although these signals can be seen individually at times, very often more than one is exhibited at a time and the dog's body as a whole needs to be looked at.

It may sound rather confusing, but do start to observe dogs in this manner and you will soon start to pick up the signals.



Lip Licking, Nose Licking & Lip Smack – Depending on the dog and its confidence level, it may be a quick dart of the tongue in and out or a slower motion. However, if the licking seems to be becoming quicker, the dog may then be using this as a stress signal, rather than a calming signal.

You can use this signal yourself towards a dog that is fearful or unsure. Be careful not to overdo it, as the dog can then interpret you as being overly submissive. In the case of dealing with a fearful or reactive dog, the fewer calming signals exhibited by you, the better.

Moving Slowly - Upon meeting new dogs, a dog that has friendly intent will start to move slower. It is thought that many dogs are fearful of, or react to bicycles, joggers, motor bikes etc because they approach too quickly. The moving slowly is often combined with the moving in an arc, as mentioned below. This is a behaviour which is often misinterpreted by owners thinking that their dogs are being disobedient meanwhile the dog is trying to calm the owner down.

Moving in an Arc - Strange dogs meeting one another for the first time will generally approach in an arc. Nose to nose, eyeball to eyeball meeting normally indicates aggression.

Some dogs, instead of approaching in an arc, may almost 'zigzag' towards the other dog and even perform behaviours such as sniffing the ground, in between, flicking eyes or turning head away from time to time, before it makes the decision as to whether or not to get closer to the other dog. On observing dogs, what you will often see happen is that as one dog approached the other, if the calming signals are not shown from the other dog, the approaching dog will turn away and not proceed with the intended meeting.

Approaching in an arc is excellent for approaching a dog you do not know or one that is nervous and is an exercise that all children should be taught – remember to do this at a slower pace than you would normally walk.

Whole Body - As with the head turn you may find that a dog will turn its body away from another dog approaching, or even just turn away its head and shoulders, this is another calming signal.

Turning the head - The turning of a dog's head to the left or right very often indicates curiosity or puzzlement, or as a reaction to a sound never heard before. If the dog turns its head to

one side or even to the back this is interpreted as a calming signal. Sometimes the head will turn the whole way, other times it may move very slightly. Sometimes it is done so quickly it is hard to see. This is one of the more obvious calming signals and is an excellent one to use with behaviour modification as when the dog turns its head away from a perceived threat, not only is it giving a calming signal, it is receiving one as well. The exercise that is widely used to help dogs in challenging situations is the 'watch' exercise.

Paw Lift - A dog that is lifting one front paw off the floor is nervous or unsure.



You will see in both these pictures above that there is also a Paw Lift happening at the same time



Blinking Eyes - Sometimes the dog does not turn its head, but looks out of the side of its eye instead. Other times it may just give a long slow blink or few blinks in a row. This too can be used by us humans on approaching a dog, but do use a slower blink.

Head Cocking – many people believe that this is a calming signal; however I believe that it is often a learned behaviour because the dog has received attention from owner as it looks so cute. I also think that the head cock is more a look of 'what's that??' than a calming signal.

Yawning - this is an easy one to do yourself and also invaluable when working with a nervous dog. Unfortunately like all yawning it tends to be contagious to humans! Yawning can mean leave me alone, stress or even a release of stress. It is one of the calming signals and is normally found in challenging social circumstances. A yawn can also indicate sleepiness. Dr. Dodman says that the yawn ventilates and activates the airways and the musco -skeletal system, respectively. The flushing of the airways carries oxygen into the lungs and removes carbon dioxide. Yawning is often found in the presence of stretching.

Play Bow - This can be an invitation to play or is used to calm another dog down. By going into a more submissive position the dog is indicating that it offers no threat.



Play Bow



Yawn with blink



Yawn

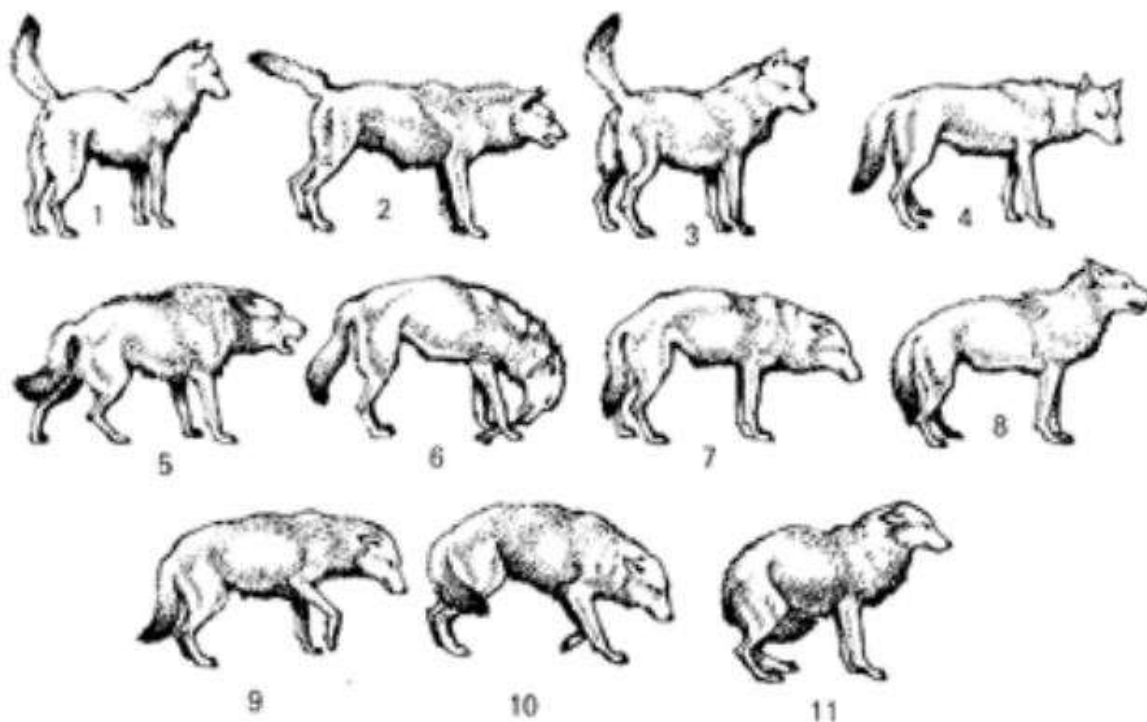
Tails - are the most ambivalent of all dog communication and can be the hardest to decipher – they really do need to be looked at in conjunction with the rest of the body. With tails the breed needs to be looked at as well to see if the breed carries its tail high or not. As mentioned previously with a breed such as a Whippet, it carries its tail in a very low position and this does not necessarily mean that this breed of dog is exhibiting this behaviour as a sign it is stressed. Again, if you learn what the standard position a tail is held in various breeds, and how the dog carries its tail when relaxed, will always stand you in good stead when observing behaviour. A dog sitting down thumping its tail on the ground is a happy dog but that does not mean that all tail wags are happy and signal a friendly dog. Some dogs even appear to wag their whole bodies; this is a sign of excitement and can also be interpreted as appeasement. The one breed that does this even more than others is the Lab – they often move the whole bum area and often the body itself seems to wag.

A dog that seems to have a constantly wagging tail is not necessarily a happy dog; this dog could be stressed and often has excitable or vocal behaviour. It is to be noted that any extremes in dog language, such as the constant tail wagging, constant licking etc, is normally a sign of stress.

In an interesting study it was noted that dogs tend to wag their tails more to the right when they are happy and to the left when they are unsure or nervous. Here is a link to this article as well as a link to the video. Unfortunately this video is not the best quality

<http://www.friendsofthedog.co.za/tails-tell-their-own-tale-by-by-sandra-blakeslee-ndash-the-new-york-times.html>

<http://youtu.be/Wda3id9vbCk>



1. A self-confident, dominant animal in the presence of another dog
2. Threat
3. Trying to impress (tail wags from side to side)
4. Unconcerned attitude
5. Uncertain threat
6. posture when eating
7. Subordinate attitude
8. uncertainty between threat and defence
9. 10. 11. subordinate attitudes in the presence of a dog of superior rank
(source PawsFirstChoice)

4. Signs of Stress

The most important thing to do when you have a dog that is showing ANY signs of stress is to remove it immediately from the current situation. It must be remembered that calming and stress signals can overlap and the whole body needs to be looked at, not just one part of the body.



Breathing – when a dog is stressed, fearful or tired, its rate of breathing will increase and a dog that is holding its breath (often accompanied by a freeze) is a precursor to reactive behaviour.

Panting - If the dog is panting with a happy look on its face (some describe this look as the dog smiling), the lips are relaxed and the rest of the body is relaxed, this can then be viewed as a positive signal. However, if the panting is fast and shallow this can be interpreted as a stress signal, especially if the lips and muzzle appear tight. Here the rest of the body needs to be looked at as well for further signs. Panting can also just indicate that the dog is too hot and panting will cool it down. Panting and shallow breathing may also be indicative of pain in the body.

Champing or Chomping – is a noisy motion similar to when the dog is chewing, but there is nothing in the mouth. This is one of the signals that can be interpreted as a calming signal, but can also indicate fear, submission or stress. It is also seen more in some breeds more than others such as the squashed face dogs. Again look at the rest of the dog's body.

Teeth Chattering – normally a very nervous and scared dog.



Excessive salivation - Here breed and the amount of salivation normally produced needs to be taken into account to determine whether or not it is stress or natural behaviour.

Puffing/Blowing/Spluttering - This is often seen in dogs that exhibit lip smacking.



Barking - and especially barking and backing up. Here we are not talking about ordinary barking; this is fear barking and will have a different tone/pitch to it – often high pitched and can even sound a bit frantic.

Mouthing - This is often seen in training whereby the dog just can't cope and will start to mouth the owner or even chew on the lead.

Carrying object in the mouth - Again dependent on context, location and situation.

Refusing food - This is a dog that has started shutting down or has already shut down. It could be that the dog will accept food from owner but not stranger, or that dog will not accept food from anybody.

Sneezing - I am not entirely convinced that sneezing is a stress/calming signal as I have seen many dogs that do this as a learned behaviour as they have received attention when they perform it. There are those who believe that sneezing is exhibited when dogs are excited or nervous. If a dog exhibits persistent sneezing there could be an underlying medical reason such as a foreign body that has become lodged or a polyp or tumour is present and causing the behaviour.

Mouth - a closed tight mouth can indicate a dog that is worried or has aggressive intentions. If the jowls appear to be puffed out (like a blow fish), then you can interpret this as tension or aggression. If the mouth is open with no sound this will indicate that the dog is stressed. Very often the dog will turn its head to the side in this position and be more likely to be lying down.

In TTouch we pay a lot of attention to the inside of the mouth. A mouth that is dry indicates tension.

Teeth - As a submissive grin (often called a smile). Here you will only see the front teeth and the lips do not appear to be drawn back as much or the muzzle as tense.

Eyes & Eyebrows - It is said that the eyes are the window to the soul and this is never truer than with dogs! Dogs don't have actual eyebrows such as humans but they do have a ridge above their eyes, and some breeds have markings there. The movement of the eyebrows is very similar to that of humans – a frown would suggest uncertainty or anger and raised brows interest. When a dog is stressed or challenging, the eyebrows become more pronounced. A dog that is relaxed and comfortable will have 'soft' eyes – the eye is relaxed and there is no tension around it. If the eye appears to be 'hard or staring' this is a sign of aggressive or even nervous behaviour.

Some dogs appear to narrow their eyes to slits when they are stressed or threatening aggression.

When two dogs meet for the first time you will often see them stare at one another – this is a sign of challenge and normally one of the dogs will back down by offering one or more calming signals. If no calming signals are observed, the end result will most likely be an altercation.

With our own family dogs, you will find that if you sit and stare at them, they will come up to you and possibly lick you as an appeasing sign.


Fearful eyes

uncertain frown

happy eyes

Forehead - If a forehead is wrinkled it normally signals aggression or tension. This is easier seen in some breeds of dogs than others. A smooth, wrinkled forehead normally indicates a relaxed dog but in the case of a submissive dog the rest of the body signals need to be looked at.

Ears - give us a large amount of information about our dogs especially if you have a dog with pointed ears. If your dog's ears are floppy /pendulous then the signals will be harder to read. A dog whose ears stick up straight shows that it is a confident dog. If the ears appear stiffer than usual and are facing forward, this will indicate that the dog is excited or alert or it could even be reactive – again you have to look at the whole body.

If the ears are facing backwards, but slightly lifted, this could indicate a dog that is friendly and about to greet you but be aware that in a situation where the ears are facing backwards the rest of the body needs to be looked at, as if the ears are completely flattened this is a signal that the dog is nervous or about to bite. Again, in this situation there will be other body signals to indicate the dogs intention. If the dog has erect ears and then puts them out to the side, this indicates a dog that is concerned unless it is breeds such as the Husky who will often put its ears sideways when happy and content.



Whiskers - A dog has hairs that grow around the muzzle, under jaw and above eyes as you learnt previously. Depending on the dog these normally appear to be relaxed and a little way away from the fur. These are commonly called whiskers and help the dog to explore his surroundings through touch. If you see your dog's whiskers appear more pronounced than usual or if they are quivering this can indicate that the dog is worried or excited. If they are held flat against the fur this is a sign that the dog is nervous.

Whole Body - If the body is crouched low or the dog appears to be slinking this is a sign that a dog is scared or submissive. A dog that rolls over on its back exposing its stomach in a submissive manner (not for a tickle) is a fearful dog, especially if the dog is not flat on its back, but slightly at an angle with the head raised a bit and often front legs are a bit off the floor. This is an extremely dangerous position as if the dog is approached closer; the likelihood that it will bite is high. When in this position you will see that the body appears to be very tight and stiff.

Pacing – this is more often seen in a shelter situation whereby a dog will pace up and down, or back and forward. Additionally, there could be an element of boredom/frustration involved here.

Lying Down – Again depends on the context. A dog will suddenly sit or lie down when it seems inappropriate to do so and very often will turn its back to the approaching dog or person. It may look fearful, but this is not always the case.

Inappropriate Body Chewing - Dogs start to bite or chew at its paws or any other body part. Remember that this is context dependent. It is when the behaviour is out of context that it can be considered a stress signal.





Displacement of behaviour – a dog will suddenly, out of context, start scratching or engaging in some other behaviour. This gives it something else to do as opposed to facing the situation it is uneasy with and is a displacement of behaviour. One of the signs of this is a dog sniffing the ground as if it has never seen it before. A dog may eat grass or stones suddenly. A dog may suddenly start walking in circles. I once knew a dog that when it was stressed in its home environment, immediately jumped in the pool!

Shaking (Shake off) - The dog suddenly shakes itself as it normally does when wet – we call this a shake off of tension and depending on the situation it could be regarded as either a Calming or a Stress Signal.



Leaving -Dog gets up and leaves – also inappropriate to the situation/location.

Ignoring - Dogs totally ignores the situation and acts as if it does not exist. A variation of this often happens in training as well whereby it seems as if the dog does not hear a word the owner says. Many such dogs are labelled as stupid, stubborn etc by those that do not understand the behaviour the dog is actually exhibiting.

Penis Crowning - or Penile Erection or stretching. This increases impulses to the brain and increases alertness. Many people refer to this as a stress sign but I believe it is more often seen as a pre-indication of reactive behaviour. The dog is definitely not coping, give it some time out before continuing what you were doing, or do something else instead.

Sweaty Paws -This is very difficult to see unless the dog is on a suitable substrate that will show the sweat.

Sniffing the Ground - Again a displacement of behaviour and depends on the context.

Moulting/Shedding - This is a very common stress indicator and is not necessarily the moulting that occurs during the spring/summer. When working with a client and the dog is shedding, owners will often comment that they have just brushed the dog!

Trembling - Although this can be a sign of extreme stress, I have found that this can become a learned behaviour in some dogs, if the owner has given the dog attention or comforted it when it is shaking.

Genital Checking - This is when the situation out of context – the dog that is engaged in doing something else and will suddenly, sit or lie down and seems to check if all the bits are there.

Any excessive or lack of behaviour - Any behaviour which is extreme either lack of focus, concentration or excessive, is an indication of stress.

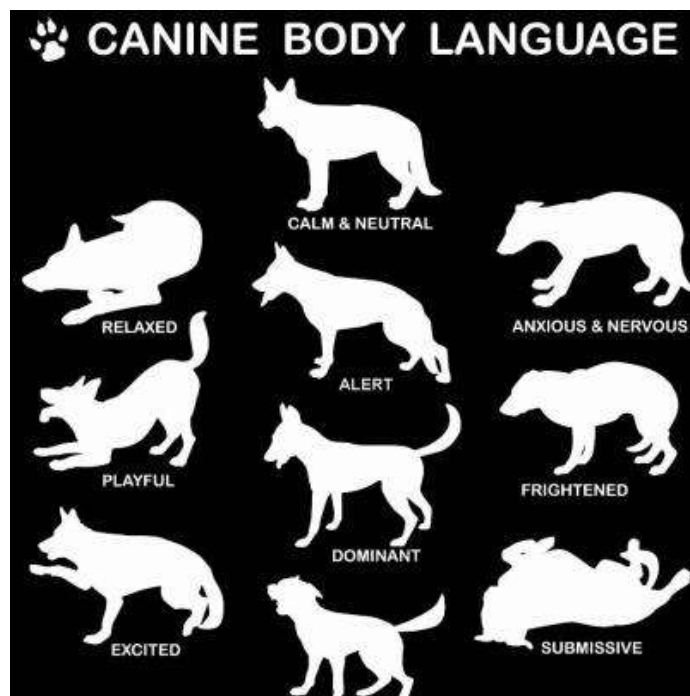
Inappropriate/submissive Urination - Very often seen when the dog meets a new dog or person and cannot cope.



Scratching - Again, you have to look at this in context as a dog will scratch naturally.

Stretching - This is often accompanied by a play bow.

Gait - A high ranking dog will usually walk with a confident stride with the head held high, while a more subservient dog will walk with the head held low or drooping.



Here are some links to You Tube clips so that you can actually see some of the behaviours mentioned above and do start to both study and take pictures of your own dogs body language and any other dogs you meet - you will find a fascinating new world opening up to you and your dog will really benefit from you learning more about how it is feeling.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj7BWxC6iVs>

Turid Rugaas Calming Signals DVD

Common Calming Signals

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_7dl4c-lrM

Dog Communication- Calming Signals

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1zq0bk35IM>

Dog showing stress signals

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K50nCx5XMn4>

Stress Behaviours in Dogs

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=071PrsBKfGg>

5. Signs of possible reactive behaviour

Tails – Always bear in mind the breed concerned and how the tail is naturally held. Another point is you come across a client's dog where the dog does not seem at all stressed, but the tail is carried in a low position, find out if this is normal and if there was ever an injury to the tails. How high the tail is carried is more of an indication of the message a dog is trying to get across. A dog that is holding its tail high and wagging it rapidly is possibly showing its intention of feeling superior and reactive.

A dog standing with its tail straight up like a pole is to be watched even though the tail may be wagging – you may see that there is a slight wag or even quiver, do not take this as a sign of a friendly dog it is the opposite. If the dog has the tail curled high over the back, whether wagging or still this signals aggression. If the dog is just standing with the tail held stiff behind it, this dog has not quite made up its mind what to do.

Breathing – holding the breath. Not always easy to pick up and often accompanied by a freeze – this dog is serious; it is preparing to become reactive.

Head - If the head is held high and the ears very erect, this can signal reactive behaviour. If the body is leaning forward and the tail is high as well as the ears and the head, this can signal reactive behaviour.

Body - One of the easiest signs to see is that of the body stiffening and the rear legs slightly behind the body. This may be for a split second and it may seem as if the dogs 'freezes' at the same time.

A dog's body that is held tense with the weight leaning forward is giving you signals that it is alert or reactive. Here again, you need to look at the body as a whole. If the dog is standing with its front legs spread/splayed and its head low it is likely to be aggressive.

A dog crouching with weight on back legs as if ready to pounce is also possible aggression.



Fur - If the fur is raised along the neck and/or back this is known as pilo erection and is an indication of a dog that may bite or that is scared (with some dogs this indicates that the dog is not coping, but has not yet made up its mind what to do). Some dogs will do this in extreme excitement. Other signs with fur that a dog is reactive are that the fur all over the body is standing up which makes the dog look bigger than it is or the tail appears to be bristling or bushier than normal.

Dominance - One dog putting its head above the other dog's shoulders. Here there may even be an attempt to lift a paw up as a sign of dominance.

Eyes - Direct stare with fixed eyes – very often happens very quickly before the attack. You may even see a tightening of the skin around the lips and eyes. A dog that shows you a 'half-moon eye' while looking at you sideways with a lot of white showing is asking to be left alone and this could lead to reactive behaviour.

A dog that exhibits 'whale eye', where the eye appears to be very white and the pupil is enlarged – it almost appears as if the eye is bulging, is a sure sign of impending aggression and if this is seen beware, this dog is serious.

Mounting – this can be a sign of sexual arousal as well but where your dogs are concerned, interrupt the behaviour immediately as it will probably signal dominance.

Growling or even a slightly raised lip.

Legs - Front legs splayed with the head low is a sign of aggression. A dog crouching with weight on back legs as if ready to pounce is also possible aggression.

Muzzle/Nose - A muzzle or nose is normally relaxed, however when a dog is showing reactive/aggressive behaviour, the muzzle can be seen to pull up and wrinkle.

Barking, growling, lunging at people or dogs approaching and passing



Whale eye