

## Body Language

Dogs communicate with their whole body from their nose to their tail. A dog won't bite if a warning will do but there are many ways in which they tell us they are uncomfortable before they raise their voice (growl).

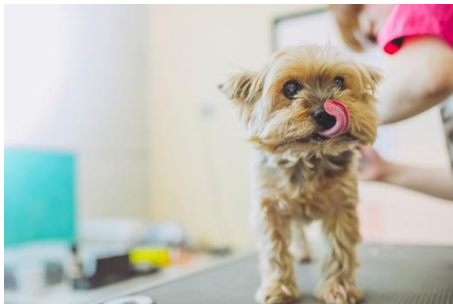
When looking at body language, context is important, it is the whole picture that tells the story. What is the rest of the body doing? What is going on in the environment? What is 'neutral' for that dog? Breeds which have a more muscle bound experience, such as boxers or French bull dogs can look confident because of the way they stand but actually be feeling anxious. Dogs with shortened tails and flat faces can find it harder to make themselves understood.

The dog's learning history is also important. If, over time, signals such as head turns or moving away ("No thank you") are ignored, the dog may dispense with these altogether and progress much quicker to biting.

Some breeds, such as terriers, have been bred for many years for jobs that need them to have quick reactions. If you are going down a hole after a predator with teeth of it's own, then you need to have quick reaction times to avoid injury or death. This means these dogs may also progress through the warning signals extremely rapidly, so it is important to take your time to observe and to listen.

### A few examples of stress signs and communication:

#### **Lip Lick/Tongue flick**



- A signal of potential discomfort/stress
- A communication to a human or another dog "please leave me alone/please don't do that"
- A symptom of feeling uncomfortable in a particular environment e.g. the vets
- May be accompanied by turning or lowering of the head, avoidance of eye contact or yawning

#### **Head Turn**



- A non-confrontational way of avoiding conflict, for example in greetings or to ask people or dogs not to invade their space
- You might see this when trying to put equipment on or near a dog such as harnesses, leads, clippers
- You may also see this from calm, older dogs who are being hassled by a young or boisterous dog

### Whale eye



- Frequently misinterpreted as the 'guilty' look
- Dog is seeking to avoid conflict (head turned), however simultaneously keeping eye on the 'threat'
- May be seen if the dog is being scolded. The dog understand someone is cross but doesn't know why/what to do about it.
- May be seen if the dog feels threatened, for example protecting a resource or avoiding handling/equipment

### Tail



- A wagging tail is another frequently misinterpreted signal especially in the context of dog bites. Wagging simply indicates arousal which could be excitement, frustration or a warning
- Happy, relaxed: tail relaxed, windmill pattern, curves in the body, eyes soft
- Fear, anxiety: Tail close to body or tucked under, mouth tight, body lowered
- Be careful: Tail high, moving slowly, body straight on, ears forward, eyes watching
- Stalking: Looks like warning, but tail and body lowered, ready to chase

### Body



- Context is important, the environment, the rest of the body and the individual dog
- Lowered body may indicate fear or predict chase
- A bow may be a play bow (play invitation) or a prey bow (pre-cursor to chase and grab)
- Weight on front paws for action, weight on back paws for escape- dogs may be conflicted if lacking in confidence
- Going very still is usually a warning, especially if accompanied by whale eye- often seen just before a bite and may only be a couple of seconds
- Polite dogs approach each other in a curve rather than head on

**\*\*If you worried that your dog is thinking about biting or is already biting, please talk to me. The earlier I can help you, the better the prospects of resolving it\*\***