

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DOG'S BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs use their body language, different parts of their body and noises and sounds to communicate with us. With their body language, they can show us it's okay to interact with them and to come closer through what is known as distance decreasing signals. Alternatively, they can ask us to give them more space or to stop what we're doing. These are known as distance increasing signals.

Dogs experience a variety of emotions, just like humans, and they show them in different ways, so it's important for us to learn what they are and understand them.



Scan the QR code to watch our video on how to understand your dog's body language. You can also find it on the pet advice section of the Battersea website, or on our YouTube channel.



RELAXED DOG BODY LANGUAGE

It's a good idea to get to know what your dog looks like when they're relaxed. All dogs are slightly different and breed variations mean that some dogs' tails and ears look different. A relaxed dog will have a soft wagging tail, soft eyes and may cock their head in an interested way if you talk to them. These are distance decreasing signals, which mean they are happy to interact with you.

PLAYFUL DOG BODY LANGUAGE

A playful dog will be more animated, and they may bow with their front end lowered down and their behind in the air, or jump around excitedly. These are also distance decreasing signals, showing that they actively want to play.

UNCOMFORTABLE DOG BODY LANGUAGE

The behaviour shown by dogs who are uncomfortable can look similar to when they're relaxed, so it's important to be aware of the context and learn

what is normal for your dog. For example, sometimes when dogs roll onto their backs, this is to show that they're uncomfortable, not that they would like their stomach rubbed. This is a distance increasing signal, so we need to move away and change the situation for the dog.

Other signals are less subtle and may occur in situations such as grooming or a vet visit. Look out for any signs of tension in your dog which may indicate that they're uncomfortable. Things like tension around the face, their tail down between their legs, and lifting one of their front paws while standing. These types of distance increasing signals are your dog's way of asking for the situation to stop. If it's a situation that has to happen, like a procedure at the vets, you may just need to give your dog a break and then try again.

Dogs can seem friendly at first but can become uncomfortable as we interact with them. To avoid this, when you interact with a dog, do so for a few seconds and then pause and move your hands away to give the dog a chance to show you how they feel. If the dog keeps trying to play, or tries to pull your hand towards them with their paw, they're probably happy for you to keep going for a bit longer.

FEARFUL DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs can show fear in many ways. Your dog may hide or cower away from the thing that frightens them. You should make sure not to approach them when this happens, as they may feel cornered, and like their only choice is to escalate to more aggressive behaviour.

If the scary situation for your dog continues, you may see some even more intense behaviour such as barking, or lunging forward. These are distance increasing signals, so the dog is asking to be given space. If we watch and listen to our dog's body language, we can try to prevent these situations from occurring and reduce potential stress for our dogs, and us.

If you experience any of these issues, we would recommend getting the help of a behaviour specialist. You can find out more about this in our advice piece on **finding a dog behaviourist** on the pet advice section of the Battersea website.