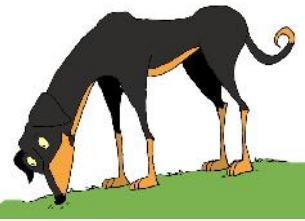


Learning to Speak "Dog"

Calming Signals

Sniffing: You may notice your dog sniffing when an obedience class drags on too long. Or to clearly make another dog aware of its peaceful intentions.



Shaking: Not all dogs use this signal. One interpretation is that shaking is a dog's way of saying, "OK, I got the message" after being reprimanded by its owner or put in its place by another dog.



Head turning or looking away: Shows that a dog is feeling uncomfortable, such as when a child comes up too close or when someone looks the dog in the eyes a bit too directly. Also sends a strong calming signal when approaching other dogs close by or at a distance. Can, however, express a certain level of stress.

You probably already know that dogs "speak" their own language. And that language includes things we generally associate with dogs like barking, tail wagging, and growling. But maybe you didn't know that dogs have many other ways of telling us what's on their minds!

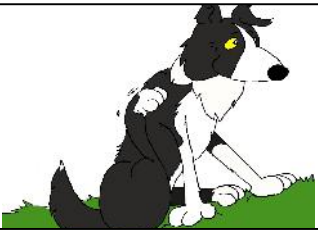
Take a few minutes to look at the illustrations on this page. Read the descriptions carefully. Then start observing your dog. Let your dog go about its usual dog business—try not to intervene. What does your dog say when meeting other dogs? When out on a walk? When hanging out at home? See if you can tell!

All of these seemingly-insignificant facial expressions, postures, and movements are part of a special dog vocabulary called *calming signals*. And calming signals—if you know how to read them—give you valuable information about your dog's state of mind. They can tell you if your dog is stressed out by a stranger, another dog, or even by you, its owner!

With a little effort, reading your dog's calming signals will soon become second nature. And, like learning any foreign language, understanding your dog's calming signals will bring many benefits. Not least of which is knowing how your dog is *really* feeling at any given moment. And understanding your dog is one of the keys to trust and communication, the foundations of any healthy relationship!



Sitting: A clear calming signal used in stressful situations or to defuse a conflict, such as when meeting other dogs or when the dog's owner is upset. The dog may even turn its entire body away before sitting.



Scratching: Often used when the owner puts pressure on the dog to carry out an order. As if the dog were saying "What do you want now? I don't feel like it!"



Tail wagging: This one is often misinterpreted because it can mean so many things, from happiness or eagerness to please (when the tail is low) to a show of force in the early stages of a conflict with another dog.



Lifting one paw: This is a strong calming signal, often expressed when the dog is standing completely still. Such as after hearing an unfamiliar noise, when faced with a new or confusing situation, or when stressed by another dog. Not to be confused with the pointing position used by bird and game dogs.



Yawning: Used repeatedly when a dog is uncomfortable (when reprimanded by its owner or another dog) or in a stressful situation (like being stared at or disturbed by a child while resting on its dog bed). Some dogs also shake when using this signal.



Nose licking: Sometimes the very first calming signal used in an uncomfortable or stressful situation. The dog licks its nose in rapid succession. This signal can be difficult to catch as it happens fast!



Lying down: Like sitting, a dog can lie down to take the pressure off in a stressful situation. Frequently used when meeting other dogs.



Play bow: One of the clearest ways a dog expresses its peaceful intentions.