

DOG TRAINING: HOW TO UNDERSTAND YOUR DOG'S MOOD

By Richard Cussons

Make your puppy training easier and more fun by understanding that your puppy is trying to communicate with you in other ways than barking or wagging his tail. Remember that your puppy also communicates with his ears, tail, paws, mouth and more, and your puppy training and everyday life with your dog will be much more fun.

Here is a short guide to some basic dog body language and what it means:

DOMINANT – You'll find that a dominant dog has its ears straight up or forward, its mouth slightly opened or closed, its eyes open wide or staring, its body standing stiff and tall with hair possibly raised, and its tail out from the body stiffened or fluffed. A low and assertive bark can often be expected.

FRIENDLY – A friendly dog has perked up ears, open and alert eyes, a relaxed mouth, a tail or whole rear end wagging, and is possibly whimpering, yapping or giving short barks.

PLAYFUL – A bow position with wagging tail means, "Let's play."

SUBMISSIVE – A dog with its ears tightly back, eyes closed and paw raised is showing extreme submission. The dog isn't happy, but shows it will not attack.

AGGRESSIVE – An aggressive dog has its ears flattened back against its head, its eyes narrowed or challenging, body tense, mouth open to show teeth, and tail held out from the body and fluffed up, if possible. Snarls or growls are typical.

Worried - Sharp barks combined with growling, ears flattened and neck hairs raised means "I'm worried" or "Something is wrong."

FEAR – A dog shows fear with a lowered stance, tail down or tucked underneath, an arched back, looking or turning head while showing the whites of its eyes and dilated pupils. Dogs often bark out of fear, especially if they are cornered, fenced in, or on a leash.

STRESSED – A stressed dog will often have ears back and down, a wide open mouth, lips drawn back and rapid respiration. Also shoulders lowered, hunched forward, tail tucked, tension in haunches and probable trembling.

Now that you understand more about what your puppy is trying to say to you about how he feels or the mood he is in, try to incorporate this understanding into your puppy training and everyday life. In a puppy training session, your dog should be showing that he is in a friendly or playful mood. If he shows he is dominant, then you know that he may not be taking you seriously or could be being stubborn, and you probably need to be more assertive. Some submissive behavior is not a bad thing as it means that he understands that you are in charge.

If your puppy becomes stressed, fearful, worried or even aggressive, you must stop your training and reassure your dog immediately. If you have been training for more than 15 minutes, stop and take a break. When you come back, take things more slowly or approach things in a different way. Use your knowledge in every-day life, too. Observe your puppy in different situations, and you will quickly discover what he likes and dislikes or how he is feeling. You can then take steps to give him more of what he enjoys and more support, confidence and training in situations he finds more difficult.

