

Dog Park Body Language

If you decide to visit a dog park, it is important to be able to read the body language of your dog and the other dogs present. The ideal body language is playful, but dogs will exhibit a variety of behaviors as they contact new dogs and spend more time at the park. Overall you are looking for balanced play between dogs – sometimes one is on top and next time he's on the bottom. Sometimes he's the chaser, and next he will be the chased.

It's always wise to leave the park if your pet shows signs of tiredness, stress or fear or if there are dogs present who seem threatening.

Playful actions to watch for:

- Back and forth play – dogs change position – role reversals
- Bouncy, exaggerated gestures
- Wiggly bodies
- Open relaxed mouth
- Play-bows
- Twisted leaps or jumps
- Pawing the air

Signs of Anxiety/Stress to Monitor:

- Fast wagging low tail
- Whining or whimpering
- Ears may be back
- Hiding behind objects or people

Signs of Fear:

- Dog will try to look small
- Tail tucked
- Hunched over, head down
- Tense
- May urinate submissively

Red Flags that Require Intervention:

- Excessive mounting

- Pinning (holding another dog down and standing stiffly over them)
- Shadowing another dog (following) incessantly
- Bullying: repeatedly bothering another dog that does not want to interact
- Fast non-stop running with a group – high arousal situation
- Full-speed body slams
- Putting head repeatedly onto another dog's neck or back
- Staring with a fixed gaze directly at another dog
- Snarling or raised lips
- Showing teeth
- Hackles up at the shoulders

Signs of Potential Illness – While not necessarily related to behavior, you will want to remove your dog from a park where dogs are showing the following symptoms:

- Coughing or gagging
- Vomiting
- Sneezing
- Diarrhea

In theory, dog parks are a wonderful way for dogs to socialize with other friendly dogs. It is important that owners who frequent dog parks know the limitations of their pets and act accordingly to keep playgroups interacting in a safe and responsible manner.

Resources

- [Video on Warning Signs of a Bite](#) from trainer Michael Burkey's web site
- ["Canine Body Language"](#) from the ASPCA Virtual Behaviorist web site
- ["Dog Body Language"](#) by Sherry Woodard from the Best Friends Animal Society web site
- ["Learn to Speak Dog and Teach Your Kids"](#) from the Doggone Safe web site
- ["Dog Body Language 101"](#) from the Dog Scouts web site
- [Stress Signs in Dogs](#) from Stacy Braslau-Schneck's Wagntain site
- [Talk Dog: Body Language](#) from Stacy Braslau-Schneck's Wagntain site