

An Insight into The Behavioural Aspects of Dogs: Understanding Their Language

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Do dogs talk? Well, the answer should be on the affirmative, as dogs have plenty of ways to express their feelings, emotions, desires & intentions. Just as humans interact through verbal & nonverbal means of communication, dogs do have their own vocal & behavioural means to interact among themselves as well as with their human masters. Understanding the language of your pets is utmost important for upbringing them properly and to see that they are not deprived of their rights, companionship & welfare. At the same time, some dogs may develop several behavioural disorders during their lifetime, which could often turn out to be a menace. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to explore the language of dogs with special emphasis on the understanding of their tail wags & ear positions. Dogs don't speak, yet can communicate effectively, here are some important aspects of their unspoken language.

The tails are not just tails; they are very expressive:

Tail wagging & positioning of the tail in dogs has a lot to do with their feelings, emotions & intentions. It's true that the dogs wag their tails when they are happy, joyful & exuberant. The intensity, speed & height of the wag are directly proportional to the level of happiness & excitement of the dog. However, dogs can use their tails as versatile means of communication and to convey a wide range of emotions to their fellows & human beings.

- Holding the tail high & erect signifies that the dog is confident, assertive & dominant. Approach such dogs with respect & caution.

- If the dogs keep their tails low & tucked, it's a sign of fear, anxiety & submissiveness. Such dogs are quite vulnerable & desire not to indulge in conflicts.
- If the dogs carry their tails in neutral positions, not too high-not too low, indicates that they are calm & relaxed
- Tail wagging during social interactions: A relaxed & loose wag indicates that the dog is friendly & playful while a stiff & rapid wag might indicate that the dog is tensed & could be aggressive. Treat the dogs accordingly.
- Slow, side to side tail wagging could be indicative of the dog's curiosity while a rapid, wide wag accompanied by relaxed body posture indicates excitement & anticipation.
- However, it's essential that the pet owner should be aware of the normal tail carriage & positioning in individual breeds of dogs to interpret the signals provided by the tail.

Thus, the tail wags & positioning are one of the effective means by which dogs communicate. By thorough understanding of the language of the tail, we can establish a better, harmonious & empathetic bond with our dogs.

Ears don't just listen; they tell quite a few tales:

- If the dog's ears are fully erect & face forwards, it signifies the alertness & attentiveness of the dog. Such dogs are engaged with their surroundings, ready to respond to stimuli & potential threats.

- When a dog is perked up & positions its ears forward, it means that it's confident, attentive & positive. It suggests that the dog is ready for interaction, either with other dogs, or humans.
 - Keeping one ear up & the other down indicates that the dog is curious & perceptive, they are trying to gather as much information from the environment – they are inquisitive & ready to explore their surroundings.
 - If the dog's ears are pulled back tightly against their heads, it's a clear indication of fear, anxiety & submissiveness. Such dogs desire to minimize their presence & avoid conflicts, try to create a safe & reassuring environment for such dogs.
 - In extreme cases, the dogs may even pin-up their ears very tightly against their skull – associated with intense fear or aggression, a clear warning sign – approach such dogs with caution, try to provide them space & reassurance.
 - Ears positioned forwards is a sign of their confidence, attentiveness & positive attitude while the ears pulled back indicate defensiveness or defensive aggression. Such dogs are wary & uncomfortable – create a supportive environment so that they feel secure.
- Eye contact is an important tool for effective communication in humans. Similarly, by maintaining proper eye contact with the dogs, we can build trust & establish emotional connection with them. We just need to meet their gaze & maintain the eye contact.
 - A soft & relaxed gaze by the dog is indicative of affection & contentment while a direct, unwavering gaze signals aggression & a challenge. Observe carefully & act accordingly
 - If the dog's eyes appear, soft & relaxed, it's a sign of comfort, trust & contentment. The dog feels safe, its well-being is assured and we can maintain a positive, nurturing environment for them.
 - Some dogs squint & blink to express their calming signals. Such gestures indicate a non-threatening intent of dogs and that they are trying to resolve a stressful situation. Be considerate and try to create a sense of security & reassurance to the pet in such situations.
 - Dogs exhibit “soft eyes” or “eye kisses” – by deliberately blinking to signal their trust, relaxation & a lack of threat. Reciprocate the gesture to develop strong bond with your pet and create a harmonious, comfortable atmosphere.
 - If the pupils of your dog's eyes are dilated, it can be a sign of fear, stress & excitement. Try to interpret the situation with the help of other body language signals and provide the appropriate support to such dogs.
 - Dogs exhibit the whale-eye or the half-moon eye, when they have anxiety, fear & discomfort. You can clearly see the white of the eye in such condition. You can assume that the dog is stressed & take necessary measures to alleviate the stress & make him comfortable.

Thus, a thorough understanding of the ear position & movement of dogs helps us to understand the dog's state of mind by which we can deepen our bonds besides understanding their needs & desires accurately.

Peep into the eyes of dog and try to read the facial expressions; you can explore his emotions

Eyes are the reflection of the mind and it holds good for dogs too. Dogs can communicate their feelings & emotions through their eyes & facial expression. Here are some of the hidden messages in the eyes of dogs & their facial expressions.

- If a dog locks his gaze directly into somebody or something, he's signalling his assertiveness & dominance and that he's ready to challenge the ensued threats. It could also indicate his intention to play. Interpret with other body language signs & act accordingly.

Thus, the simple understanding of canine eye contact & facial expressions can uncover the intentions & emotions of the dogs. A thorough interpretation of the same can promote the emotional well-being of your pets.

Postures & Body positions also contribute to canine communication:

Dogs have an uncanny ability to communicate through their body posture, positions & gestures.

- The dog displays its trust & submission by willingly rolling on to its back & exposing the belly. Recognize & respect this submissive gesture to create a safe & secure environment for them.
- Dogs often exhibit the "Play Bow" posture – They bend forward with both their forelimbs stretched out and the hind limbs raised. It's a sign of their friendly interaction & willingness to play. You can engage in joyful & playful sessions with your canine companions in such situations.
- A Dog with stiff, upright posture by holding its head high, body tall & tail erect is assertive & confident, with a sense of self-assuredness.
- Raised hackles in a dog, i.e., raised hairs along the dog's back, is an indication of fear, excitement & aggression. Interpret the posture with other signals.
- Freeze posture of dogs – the dog becomes completely still, holding its body tight, rigid & tense – is a clear sign of fear in the dog. It's a defensive posture that can precede either fight or flight responses.

- Dogs with loose, relaxed body with wiggly movements indicate that they are relaxed, happy & content. They wag their tails, wiggle the body & display relaxed facial expressions.
- A dog that sleeps & snores in your presence signifies high level of trust in you. It indicates the dog's confidence with the surroundings & trust in its care takers. Just respect its need for rest & provide a safe, secure sleeping environment.

The intricacies of canine body postures, position & gestures provide valuable insights into the dog's feelings & emotions. Interpret & respond to such cue from your pet and create a more accommodative, comfortable environment.

Significance of paws in canine communication:

Most kids get fascinated when their pet dogs shake hands with them. The movements of the dog's paws convey quite a few messages, express their emotions & communicate their needs.

- The dog generally lifts its paw to express its attentiveness & curiosity. The gesture is usually accompanied by a tilted head & forward posture. Pawing is a common behaviour that dogs use to seek attention & initiate interaction. Recognizing the pawing behaviour is important to understand his potential needs.
- If your dog places its paw on you or gently nudges you with its paw, it's expressing its desire for physical affection – the dog trusts you & expects reassurance from your side
- Sometimes the dog paws at doors, objects or at your body when he is anxious and it's an indication that he is seeking your help. Provide the necessary support & console him.
- Dogs use their paws to interact with their food/water bowls – either paw at them or push them around. It may be indicative of their

need of fresh water or the preferences for foods. Adjust their feeding by understanding such paw movements.

- Dogs can be trained easily to give a high five or shake hands and it adds a lot of fun to your interaction with them. They actively engage with you & respond to your cues when you encourage them after such acts.

Barking is as good as Speaking; Follow the language of barking!

Dogs bark in various ways to express their feelings, convey their messages and to alert other dogs or the owners in certain situations. Let us embark on the different types of barks & vocalizations that dogs use to communicate.

- If your dog's barks are in the form of sharp & short bursts, he's trying to draw your attention to potential threats & unfamiliar situations. It's a sign of its vigilance & a warning signal for you to take appropriate action.
- Your dog's barks could be playful & full of energy when he is excited. Such barks are often accompanied by a wagging tail & it's an

indication that he's inviting others to join the play & fun.

- Deep & assertive barks are usually defensive in nature and dogs use them to protect their territories as well as their loved ones. Invasive barks are distinct from the defensive barks and are triggered by the presence of intruders or strangers. Recognize such barks and take stock of the situation.
- Howling is a special type of vocalization in dogs which could be used to express their loneliness, anxiety or it could be a response to specific stimuli.
- Soft, high-pitched sounds - whining & whimpering by dogs is an attempt to seek attention and express discomfort. Such vocalizations are often associated with pawing & nudging. Console them & comfort them adequately.

Thus, from simple tail wagging to variety of vocalizations dogs have been very effective communicators. It's upto their masters to learn the language of dogs & interact with them effectively.
