



# What Dog Body Language Is Saying

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By Becky Striepe

Just as some words can mean different things in different context, dog body language can mean different things from your dog. Some signals are very clear while others might require you to get a feel for how your dog communicates. I learned most of the signals below through our years in training class and some just from bonding and communicating with Jenna, my dog.



- **Wide eyes** – Your dog is afraid or uncomfortable, and you should get her out of that situation as soon as possible.
- **Ears pulled back** – This is a sign of nervousness.
- **Bristled fur** – Most folks are familiar with this sign of aggression.
- **Yawning** – This dog body language can mean that your dog is tired, but it can also signal that she is overwhelmed or anxious. Consider the situation when deciding what your dog's yawn means.
- **Rolling onto her back** – She may be asking for belly rubs because she's feeling playful, or she could be nervous and looking for comfort. In general, if she's more stiff, she's more likely to be nervous than happy. NOTE: A friend who is also a professional dog trainer mentioned that she has seen aggressive dogs get on their backs and play submissive, then bite when you approach. Such a great reminder that dog body language depends on temperament! If you don't know the dog well, it's always best to be cautious and take your cues from the owner.
- **Wagging tail** – A tail that wags freely means your dog is happy, but if her tail looks stiff when she's wagging it, she's feeling nervous.



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- **Raising one front paw** – Your pup is telling you that she’s feeling uncertain. Jenna does this when she needs more time in the backyard to go potty, too.
- **Eye contact** – In many cases eye contact is aggressive dog body language. If your dog is in a new or strange situation, though, she will often look to her owner—the alpha “dog”—for how to react.
- **Bared teeth** – Paired with other signs of nervousness, a dog showing her teeth is acting aggressively. Jenna also shows her teeth when she is hot or happy though. You can tell the difference because the rest of her signals are relaxed.
- **Lack of eye contact** – If a dog refuses to look at something, chances are it’s frightening her. It’s pretty easy to tell when a dog is just scoping out the scene versus pointedly trying not to look at something. As you get to know dog body language, you’ll be able to tell the difference.
- **Sitting** – If you didn’t ask your dog to sit, and she sits down in a hurry, she may be nervous, especially if she freezes and shows other nervous signs, like staring straight ahead or lifting a paw.
- **Shaking** – Is your dog cold? If not, she’s probably scared. Whenever there is a thunderstorm or there are fireworks, Jenna quivers visibly.

*Adapted from: <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/dog-body-language-what-is-your-dog-trying-to-tell-you.html#ixzz2qy4qBXyY>*