



Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Ltd.

Animal Behavior Services

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Body Language

In order to improve our relationship with our pets it is important to learn, understand, and respect their body language. Animals are "talking" all the time. Most animals instinctively try to avoid confrontation, it is after all counterproductive to survival. If you observe a group of animals, everything they do, every movement they make is intended to give the other animals in the group information. Most humans do not pay attention to their pet's body language or they misinterpret what their pet is trying to tell them. When dogs wag their tail it doesn't always indicate an invitation to approach and pet them; they could be saying, "I'm happy to bite you." Likewise, exposing their belly might mean "pet me" or "go away!" How do you know whether to approach, retreat, or stay put?

Early recognition of low levels of anxiety enables you to adjust your interactions or remove your dog to a more comfortable environment without the pet escalating to aggression. Please refer to the Stress Escalation Ladder. Some pets will climb the ladder from "displacement behaviors" to "preparing to defend" in less than a second. In general, the longer the pet has been ignored (by humans or other animals) the faster the ascent up the ladder. If the pet has been punished for growling, they might skip that step and proceed to biting. This is when people report that "the bite came out of nowhere." Many pets tolerate a lot of our interactions, but they do not truly enjoy them. Once you have become fluent in body language you can become your pet's advocate and intervene during these tolerated interactions.

There are many websites that have done a wonderful job explaining and describing body language. To learn more about canine body language follow the links to the various websites, videos, and books are listed below.

- **The Family Dog** is a great site for families. Their **body language video** is found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bstvG_SUzMo&list=TLiO-XnTs9VqQMdjct6G60KBvNaydjiEQd. In addition The Family Dog has video to teach children about body language and when to stay or walk away through their **video called "I speak doggie"** http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=M9ISHMa77FA.
- The Family Dog video **"How to kiss a dog"** teaches children the proper way to kiss a dog: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abutaEVEt4&list=TL3q3ym5Nwa_wrpmNbSq_KbIvZON8F8Prr
- **The Zoom Room** guide to body language: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00_9JPltXHI
- **The Liam J. Perk Foundation** has a phenomenal website that includes body language, bite prevention, how to greet a dog, safety guidelines, and various activities for children. <http://www.liamjperkfoundation.org/talk.html>.
- **The Sophisticated Dog** has a wonderful video of calming signals. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_7dl4c-IrM
- If you prefer to read, here is a great book written by veterinary behaviorists: **Decoding Your Dog: The Ultimate Experts Explain Common Dog Behaviors and Reveal How to Prevent or Change Unwanted One** <http://www.amazon.com/Decoding-Your-Dog-Ultimate-Behaviors/dp/0547738919>

These videos are a great place to start learning how to "read" your dog. If you have any questions regarding your pet's body language please contact us.