The Veterinary Behavior Center

DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Stretch Greeting

- Common when greeting friends
- They may jump up!

Play Bow

Slightly Open Mouth

Ears and face relaxed

Bottoms up!

The Relaxed Dog

relaxed brow and face

soft eyes

no facial tension

mouth slightly open

loose body

Loose Wiggly Body

Feet not planted

Loose wide tail wag

Tail at or above level of spine

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

Stress, Fear, Discomfort, Appeasement, or Conflict Avoidance

- Furrowed Brow
- Facial Tension
- Tense Body
- Lowered Body or Head
- Ears Back
- Slow Walk
- Tucked Tail
- Visual Scanning

Lip lick/tongue flick
Showing whites of eye
Airplane ears
Lean away

Refusing treats and food

Side eye
Ears back
furrowed brow

Stress yawn

Facing Away

Paw lift
Tucked Tail
Closed Mouth
Avoid gaze
Tight Lips

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

Submissive "Tap Out"

Legs held close to body

Exposed belly

Tail tucked

Tense face

Lip Licks

Displacement Behaviors:

Engaging in behavior out of context

Sniffing out of context

Scratching when they aren't itchy

Shake off when they aren't wet

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

AGGRESSION

Offensive Aggression

- Ears forward
- Lips puckered, bared teeth
- Hard stare
- High body carriage
- Weight forward, tall body

Note: body language can be a mix of offensive & defensive (and still be fear based!)

Alert/Aroused Dog

not necessarily aggressive

- Piloerection (raised hackles)
- Tail stiff and flagging
- Feet planted
- Ears oriented toward source
- Weight forward, even, or back
- Tight lips/closed mouth

Defensive Aggression

Classic for Fear-Induced Aggression

- Tail tucked or down
- Lowered body
- Bared teeth
- Weight over hind legs
- Crouched posture
- Ears back
- Dilated pupils
- Lips pulled back

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

ESCALATION FROM RELAXED TO DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

Relaxed

- Soft eyes
- No facial tension
- Mouth slightly open
- Ears relaxed

Alert/ Stressed

- Visual scanning
- Closed mouth
- Tight brow
- Ears back
- Whale eye

Defensive Aggression

- Dilated pupils
- Whale eye
- Corners of mouth back
- Bared teeth
- Ears pinned back
- Tense brow
- Hard stare

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

Common Progression of a Fearful Dog

1

- Alert
- Raised hackles
- High, flagging tail
- Closed mouth
- Hard stare

2

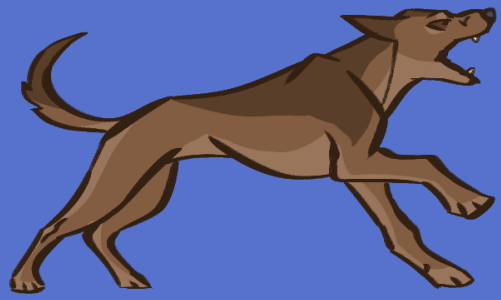
- Lean away
- Ears back
- Tail below spine, stiff or tucked
- Crouched down
- Weight back

3

- Bared teeth
- Ears back
- Tail Stiff
- Weight back
- Crouched
- Growl

4

- Lunge
- Bark/growl
- Tail stiff
- Air snap



The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 ©

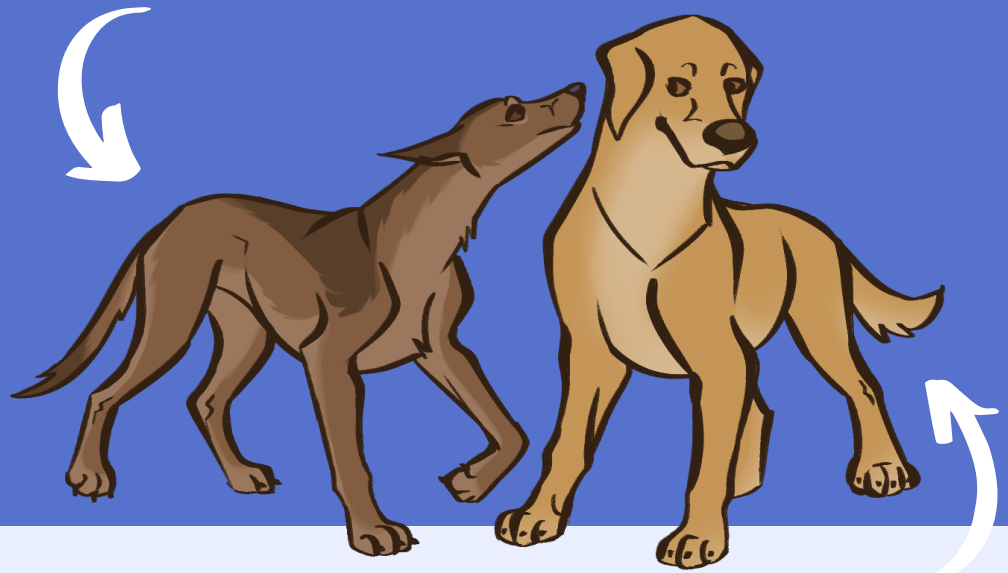
www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen

Socially Typical Dog Greetings

Deferential Greeting

- Eyes soft, possibly half closed
- Indirect approach
- Tail low, +/- wagging
- Paw lift
- Ears neutral to back



More Assertive Greeting

- Tail up
- Ears forward
- Direct approach
- Weight even or forward
- May sniff or put chin over other dog's back

Conflict Avoidant Response

- Lean away and/or look away
- Tail low, +/- wag
- Stiff if uncomfortable
- May curve into sniffing

Signs of Healthy Greeting

- Curved or side approach
- Soft body and face
- Mouth slightly open
- Mutual hind end sniff
- Ears relaxed

The Veterinary Behavior Center, 2022 © www.vetbehaviorcenter.com

Art by Oak Thorsen