

Speaking in Dog:

A Guide to Reading and
Reacting to Canine
Body Language



Happy Dogs: Relaxed and Content

Physical and facial cues



Loose and relaxed body: A happy dog has a loose, wiggly, and tension-free body, without a stiff stance or tense muscles. They may even lie on their side with limbs relaxed.



Wagging tail: A wagging tail is a classic sign, often described as a "gentle wave".



Relaxed face: Their mouth may be slightly open with a relaxed jaw, sometimes appearing as a soft "smile." Their eyes will be soft and bright, with a gentle blink, not a fixed stare or wide, showing whites of the eyes.



Ears: Ears are relaxed and floppy, not pulled back against the head or held stiffly.



RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF ANXIOUS DOGS

Subtle signs a dog may bite include lip licking, yawning, and avoiding eye contact. Other key signs are a stiff body posture, raised hackles, and seeing the "whale eye" (the whites of their eyes). If you see these signs, turn away slowly and give the dog space.

Subtle signs

Mouth and facial expressions

- Licking lips without food
- Yawning when not tired
- A closed mouth, sometimes with a slight lip curl



Eye contact

- Avoiding your gaze or looking away
- An intense, unwavering stare
- Showing the whites of the eyes (whale eye)



Body language

- A stiff, rigid body
- Raised hackles (hair on the back)
- Ears pinned back or flattened against the head
- Tail tucked between the legs or held stiffly
- A slow, nervous-looking tail wag



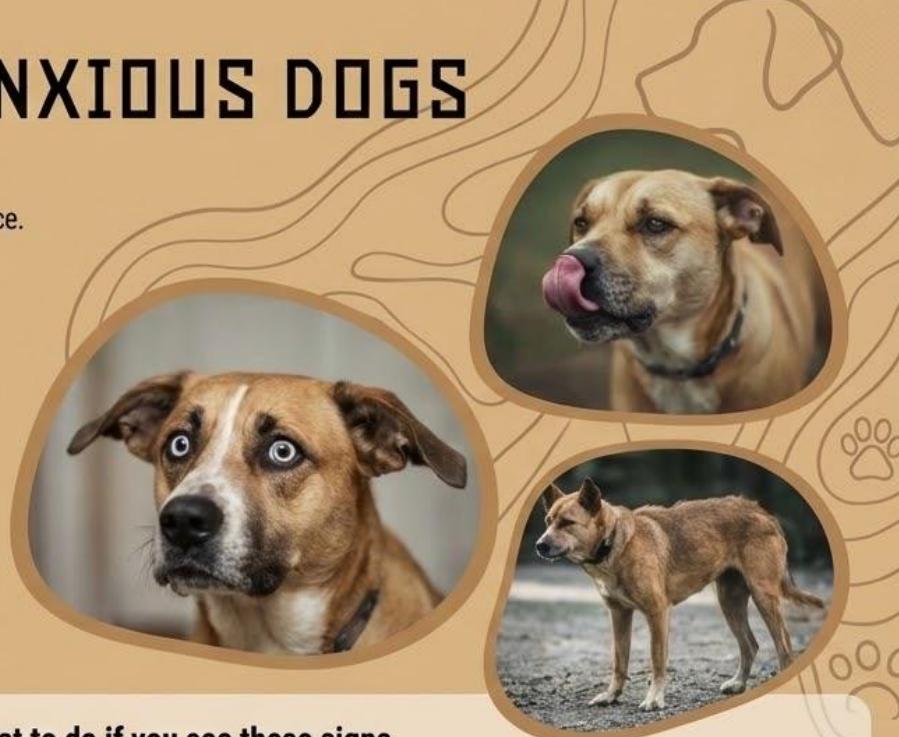
Other behaviors

- Licking chops
- Sudden sniffing of the ground
- Freezing in place



What to do if you see these signs

- Keep yourself safe by keeping the dog in your periphery, but try to remove any direct eye contact. Turn your body away so that you're not facing the dog head-on (but never turn your back)
- **Avoid conflict:** Don't force interaction or try to comfort a dog that seems stressed.
- **Do not make direct eye contact:** This can be perceived as a threat.
- **Consider the context:** These signs often occur when a dog feels threatened, cornered, or is protecting something.



HOW TO ADJUST HANDLING TECHNIQUES IN REAL-TIME BASED ON CANINE FEEDBACK.

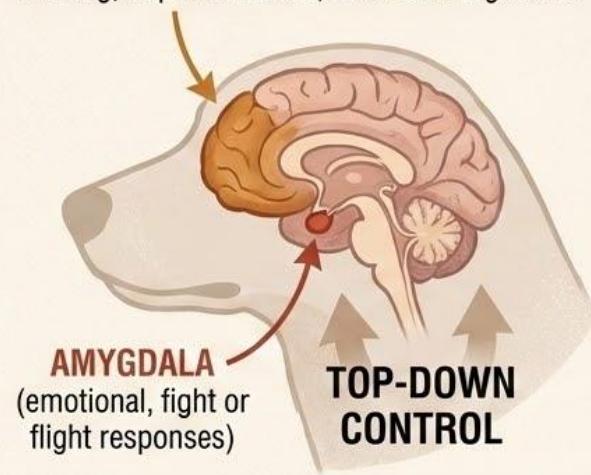
ENGAGING THE SEEKING SYSTEM

Turn off fight or flight by engaging the seeking system.



THE NEUROSCIENCE OF CONTROL

PREFRONTAL CORTEX (PFC) responsible for executive functions, decision-making, problem-solving, impulse control, emotional regulation



SHIFTING FOCUS & ACTIVATION

Creating curiosity in a smell like food (or even a stinky shoe!) helps to activate the PFC and shifts their attention away from the trigger, helping them switch from reactive mode to thinking mode.

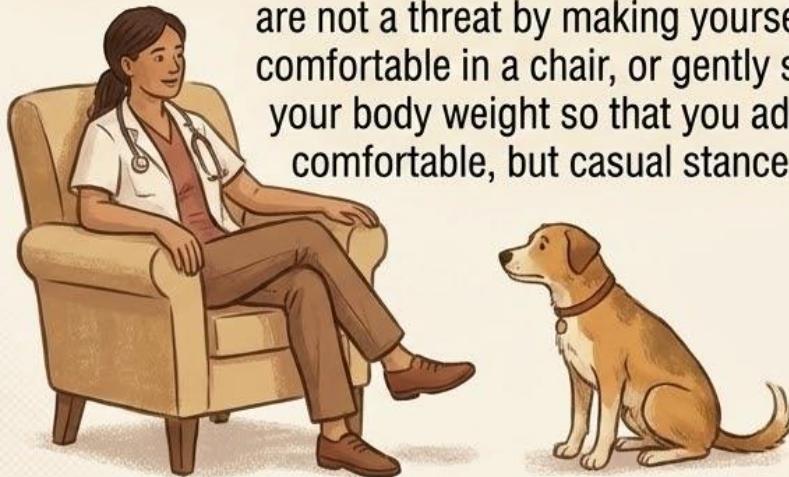


DEALING WITH FEARFUL OR ANXIOUS DOGS DURING AN EXAM

PRESENT CALMING SIGNALS

If the dog is presenting with nervous or anxious body language, make sure to present your own calming signals that help communicate to the dog that you

are not a threat by making yourself comfortable in a chair, or gently shifting your body weight so that you adopt a comfortable, but casual stance.



INSTRUCT ON LEASH HANDLING

Instruct the owner to try to maintain a loose leash on the dog if it decides to move around the room, but to use it to prevent the dog from being able to make contact with you.



THE LEAKY TODDLER METHOD



- Activate the seeking system using food.
- Toss food away from you. Avoid direct eye contact and do not move towards the dog, or offer the food by hand directly.
- Don't use the food to draw them closer to you.
- The goal is to use both the smell and the movement of the food to engage other parts of the dog's brain.
- The moment the dog shows interest, toss another piece of food away.
- Any sign of curiosity should prompt you to toss another piece of food.
- When the dog moves around and actively engages with the environment it will help to calm the dog and make it feel more comfortable.

BUILDING COMFORT & LONGER INTERACTIONS

INITIAL POSITIVE EXPOSURES



- 骨干 If the dog looks at you or approaches, give a warm smile and a calm “hello！”, then immediately toss food away.
- 骨干 Keep interactions extremely short for small positive exposures.
- 骨干 Interrupt interactions early by tossing food; build up to longer interactions as body language becomes more comfortable.

INCREASING ENGAGEMENT

- 骨干 As the dog becomes more comfortable, continue to drop and toss food while engaging more actively.
- 骨干 Ask to hold the leash and see if the dog responds well to being guided.



GUIDING OWNERS: ACCLIMATING DOGS TO EXAMINATIONS

PRACTICE HANDLING AT HOME

- Encourage owners to practice handling at home to teach their dogs how to cope with gentle restraint and build up the ability to have their dog tolerate physical examination of the head, ears, eyes, legs, feet, tail, etc.



CONDITIONED RELAXATION

- Suggest Conditioned Relaxation training where owners practice teaching dogs to yield and consent to gentle body manipulations, and capture getting calm on cue.



'VISIT FOR FUN' APPOINTMENTS

- Encourage clients to book Visit for Fun appointments where owners can practice skills and gain positive exposures with their dogs.



MUZZLE CONDITIONING

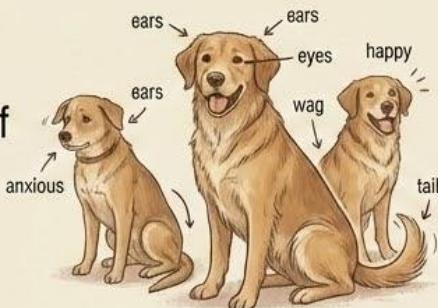
- For dogs who have the potential to bite or are very resistant to examination, recommend muzzle conditioning.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PRESENTATION

INTERPRET CANINE BODY LANGUAGE

- Interpret postures, expressions, and tail movements to gauge if a dog is calm, happy, nervous, or anxious.



ADJUST PRESSURE & ENGAGE THE MIND

- Adjust spacial and social pressure for anxious dogs; use food and smell to engage their prefrontal cortex.



ACCLIMATE TO EXAMS & REDUCE RISK

- Reduce bite risk by encouraging owners to acclimate dogs to exams. Recommend Conditioned Relaxation and muzzle conditioning for at-risk dogs.



BUILD POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

- Build positive interactions via "Visits for Fun," where dogs gain positive exposures and practice skills.

