

Animal Body Language



Kennel or Shelter Stress

For most animals, being relinquished to a shelter is a drastic change:

- Separated from family
- Unfamiliar confined space
- Exposed to more noise than they are used to
- Many animals in close proximity

Living in an environment where the dog or cat has no control – cannot hide if fearful, cannot access outside for toileting, strange smells/sounds, limited social interaction & physical activity – increases anxiety. Stress decreases the immune system and increases susceptibility to disease in shelter pets.



Kennel / Shelter Stress

Crossroads Pets has a very small kennel that can be less stressful for many animals, but we have to keep in mind that many of these animals have recently experienced loss, abuse, trauma and may be feeling very vulnerable and untrusting of humans.

For these reasons, it is important to remember

SAFETY FIRST

- ***These are NOT our personal pets*** and should not be treated so.
- *We should not be:*
 - Laying on beds with them
 - Sitting on the floor in the kennels
 - Wrestling/rough housing, etc
 - Hugging/Kissing, etc
 - Taking items away without “trading” for a higher value object
 - Assuming they are “OK” unsupervised.
- These dogs and cats do not know our intentions, they are often afraid, shut down and untrusting.
- It is crucial to respect their boundaries and not form attachments that may cause further trauma when they are adopted to a new family.



Animal Handling

As a foster, you may be starting with animals who are stressed and frightened.

It's important that we handle each animal with care and compassion.

Every animal you handle should be done so following the PAWS protocol



ALWAYS REMEMBER SAFETY FIRST!

PAWS protocol

Proper body language is important working with any animals, but especially shelter animals.

- Go slow and make yourself look small
- Speak quietly and in a “happy” tone
- Approach with your side
- Always underhand

Use your **PAWS**

 **P**ersonal Space

 **A**pproach Slowly

 **W**atch Body Language

 **S**afety First

Remember, we DO NOT know their past or what might make them nervous or afraid and they do not know our intent!

Animal Body Language

Dogs and cats are incapable of deceit. They don't plot revenge nor are they stubborn. Those are incorrect and potentially dangerous attributions that humans ascribe to felines and canines.

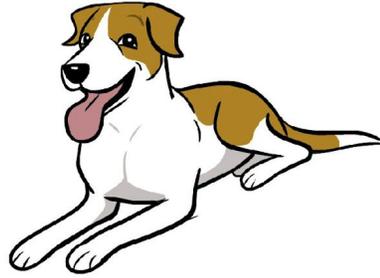
Dogs and cats DO communicate truthfully. Taking the time to observe their body language will allow you to understand their emotional state, giving you the exact information you need to interact with them humanely.

Basic Dog Body Language



Identifying Relaxed Body Language in Dogs

These body language signals indicate that a dog may be relaxed



Lying down, relaxed



Open mouth smile



Standing relaxed



Frog legs, lying down



Body loose and friendly



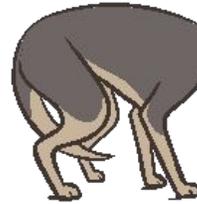
Lying down, resting

Identifying Fearful Body Language in Dogs

These body language signals indicate that a dog may be fearful.



Ears back



Tucked tail



Trembling



Avoids eye contact



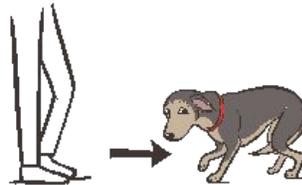
Crouching



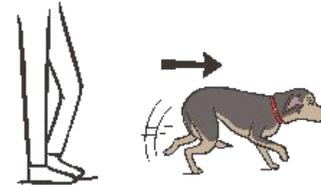
Cowering



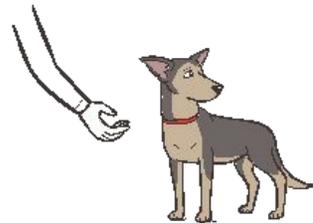
Lip licks



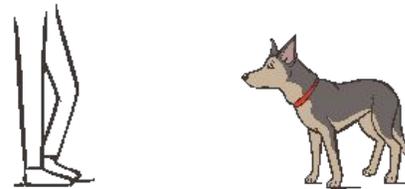
Backing away



Running away



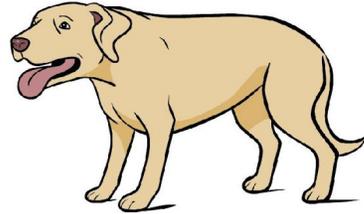
Not interested in food



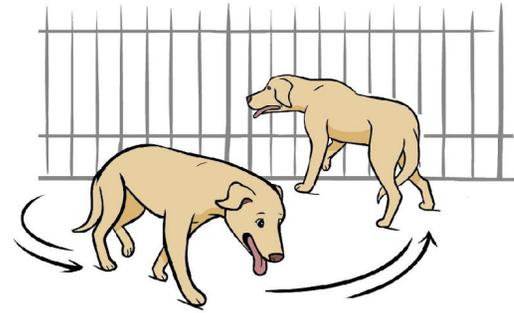
Does not approach

Identifying Anxious Body Language in Dogs

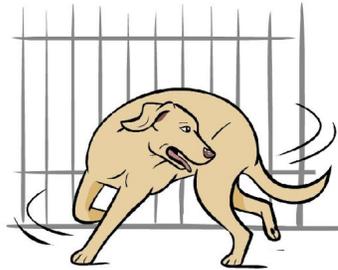
These body language signals indicate that a dog may be anxious



Panting



Pacing



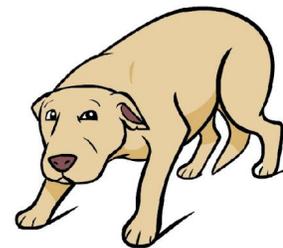
Spinning



Jumping repetitively against walls and/or cage door



Yawning



Cowering

Identifying Aroused or Excited Body Language in Dogs

These body language signals indicate that a dog may be aroused or excited



Body forward, ears forward, high tail: alert/aroused



Hackles up, body and ears forward: pilo-erect alert



Lunging and/or barking



Jumping on people



Playful: excited playbow



Mouthy



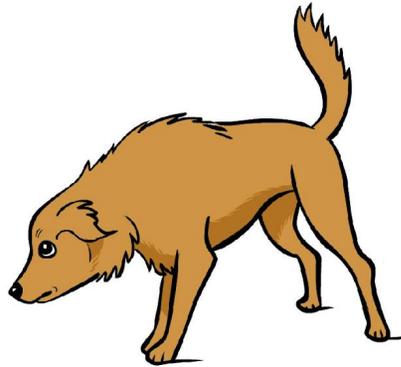
Biting leash



Biting or tugging clothes

Identifying Aggressive Body Language in Dogs

These body language signals indicate that a dog may act aggressively



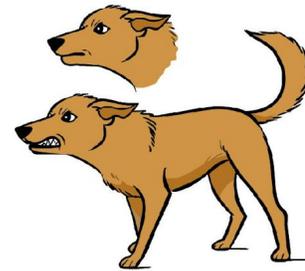
Freeze, ears back, eyes wide



Wide eyed/whale eye



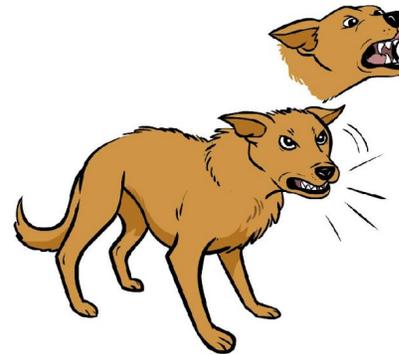
Showing teeth



Curled lips, tense mouth, growl



Barking and/or growling,



Air snap



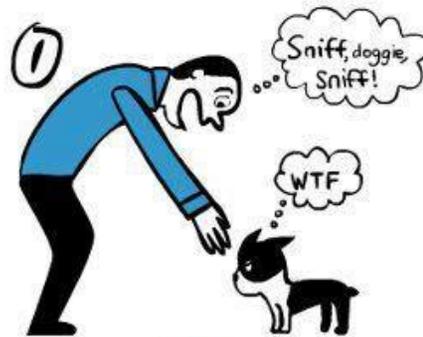
CENTER FOR

Shelter Dogs

A PROGRAM OF THE ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE OF BOSTON

HOW NOT TO GREET A DOG

Most people do this stuff and it stresses dogs out so they BITE!
I don't care how cute you (or your kid) think Boogie is. Please show him some respect.



DON'T
Lean over the dog & stick your hand in his face



DON'T
Lean over the dog & stick your hand on top of his head



DON'T
Grab or Hug him



DON'T
Stare him in the eye
(This is an adversarial gesture)



DON'T
Squeal or shout in his face



DON'T
Grab his head and kiss it
(This is an invasion of space)

Doing this to a dog who doesn't know you is like a perfect stranger giving you a great big hug and kiss in an elevator. Wouldn't that creep you out? And wouldn't you have the right to defend yourself?

THE CORRECT WAY:



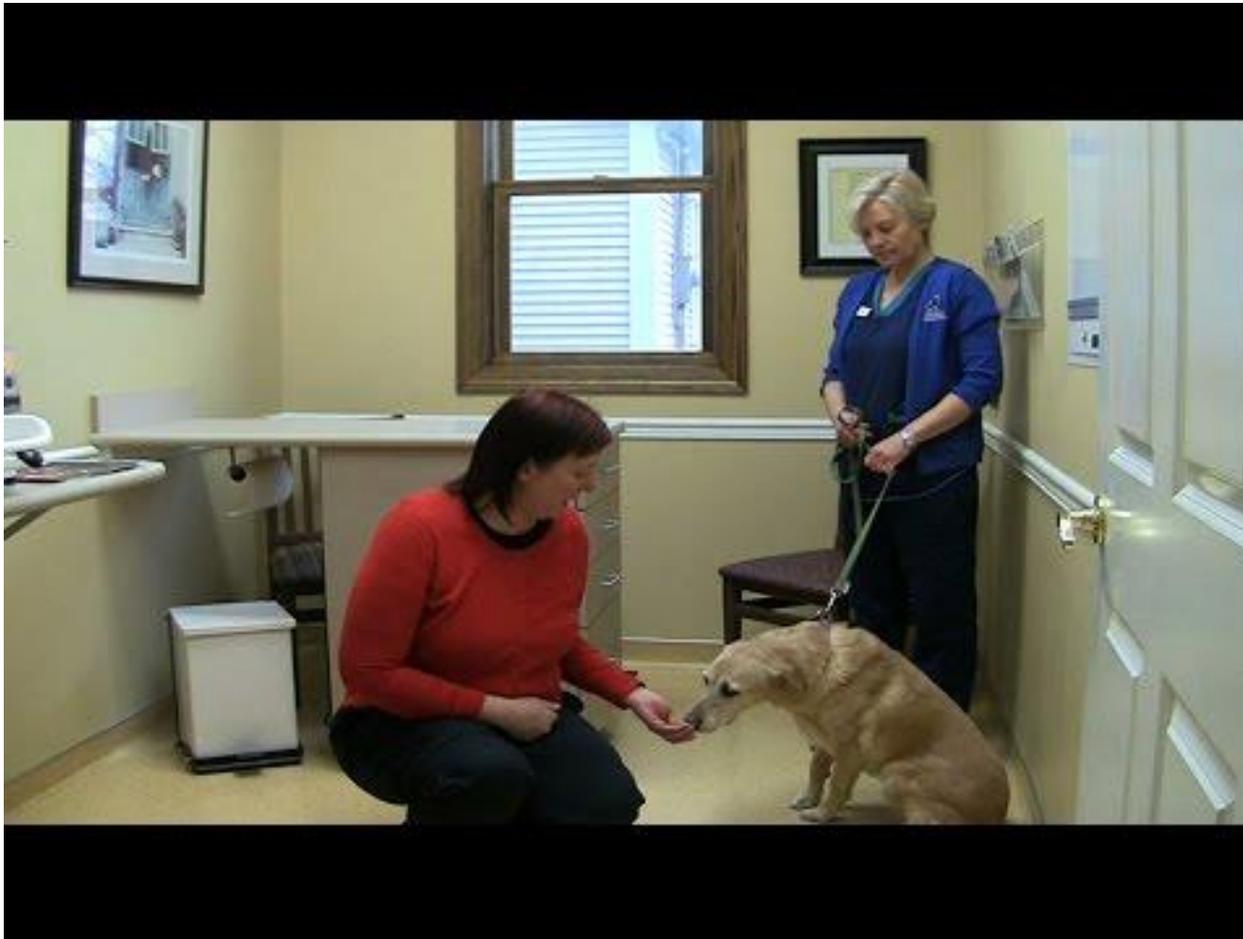
- * No Eye contact
- * Let the dog approach you in his own time
- * Keep either your SIDE or BACK towards the dog (non-threatening posture)



- * Pet or stroke him on the SIDE of his face or body. Or on his back.

Safe Approach

- Using calm body language (approach slow & calmly)
- Remember, tone of voice means more than words to animals. Keep it calm & quiet
- Bend at your knees (not your waist) with a sideways profile.



Take the “TEMP”

Learning how to understand dog/cat body language isn't really that hard. Once we know what signals they use, we can generally pick up on their cues to keep them and us safe.

An easy way to remember: “Tail, Eyes, Ears, Muzzle, put them together to solve the puzzle.”

Tail

Eyes/**E**ars

Muzzle/Mouth

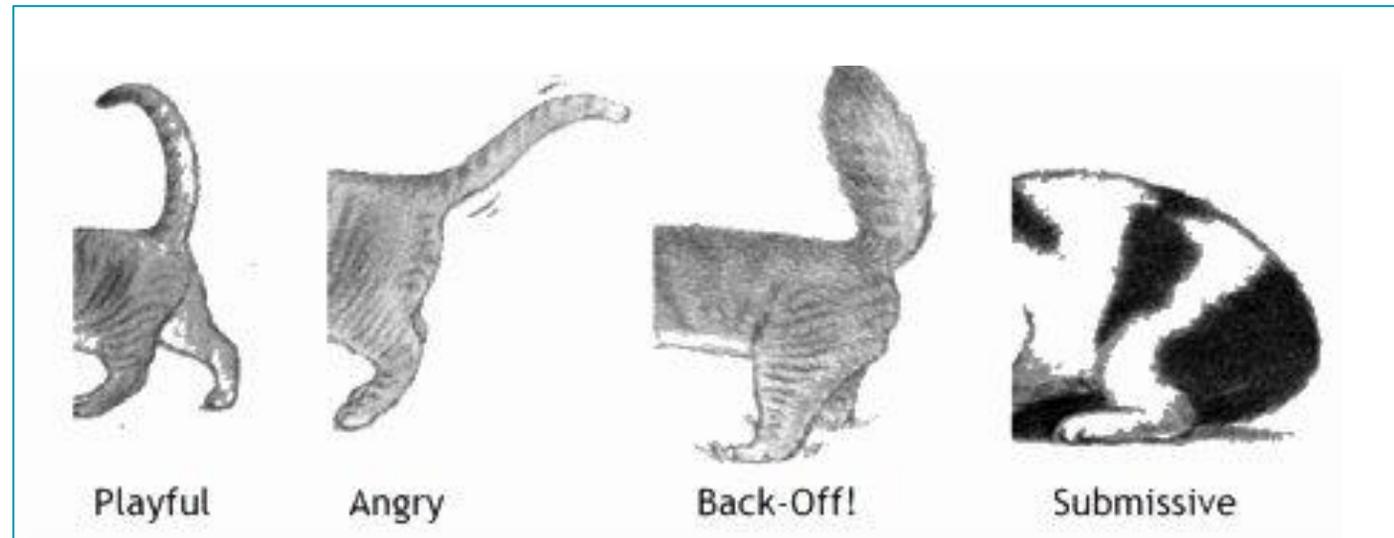
Posture (solving the **P**uzzle)



Tail

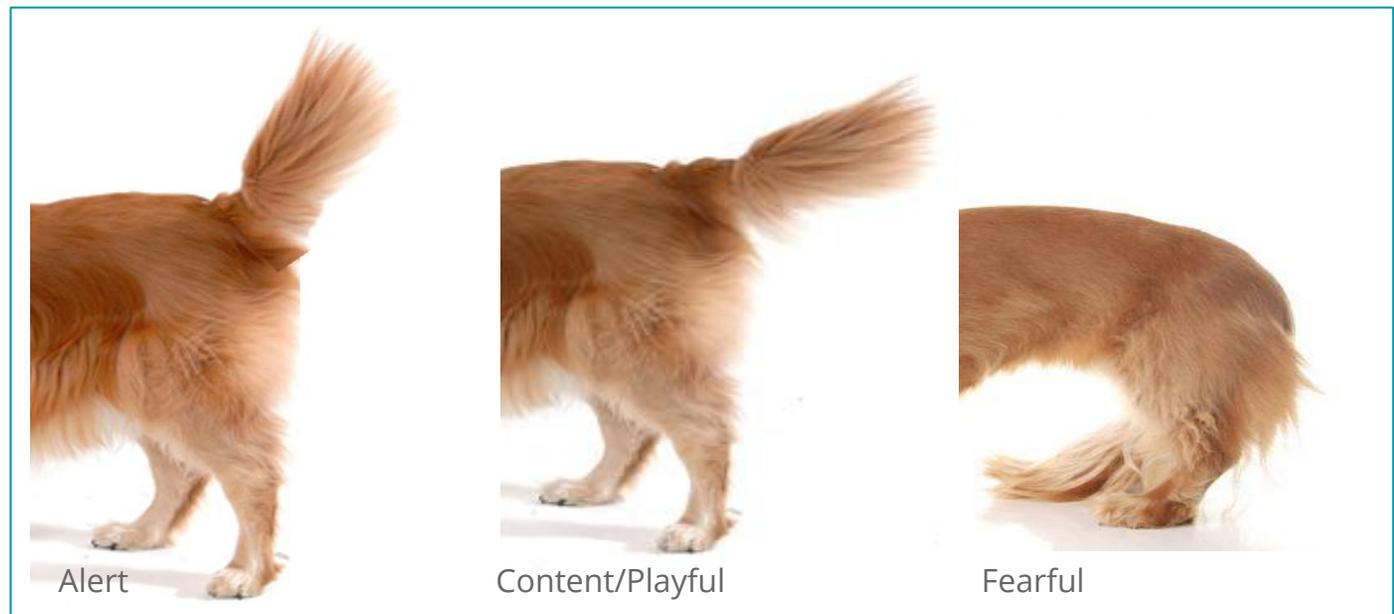
Position

- High
- Natural
- Low/Tucked



Movement

- Wide wag - content
- Stiff/Tight - alert
- Still - potential aggression



Remember that it's important to look at the position AND the movement of the tail and consider the rest of the animal's body posture... "wagging" does NOT always mean happy.

Eyes

Whale Eye



Soft Eye



Hard Stare



Whale eye - eyes wide, whites showing, often brow is wrinkled, mouth closed, fixed/dilated pupils

Soft eye - may look like “squinting”, generally open mouth, brow may be raised, relaxed ears

Hard Stare - direct eye contact - non blinking, straight ahead, mouth closed/tight or may wrinkle muzzle & show teeth

Also be watchful for rapid or slow blinking or squinting - this can be a sign of stress.

Ears



*ears are up
and forward
alert
focused*

ATTENTIVE



*ears are
held back
or sideways*

APPEASING



*ears are
flat against head*

FEARFUL | ANXIOUS



*ears are
carried
naturally*

RELAXED



Happy



Angry



Frightened



Playful



Content

Consider human expressions: scared, happy, anxious, angry.
What muscles do we use and how do we feel when making those "faces"?

Mouth/Muzzle



Dogs also signal discomfort, fear or anxiety with lip licking, tongue flicks and yawning

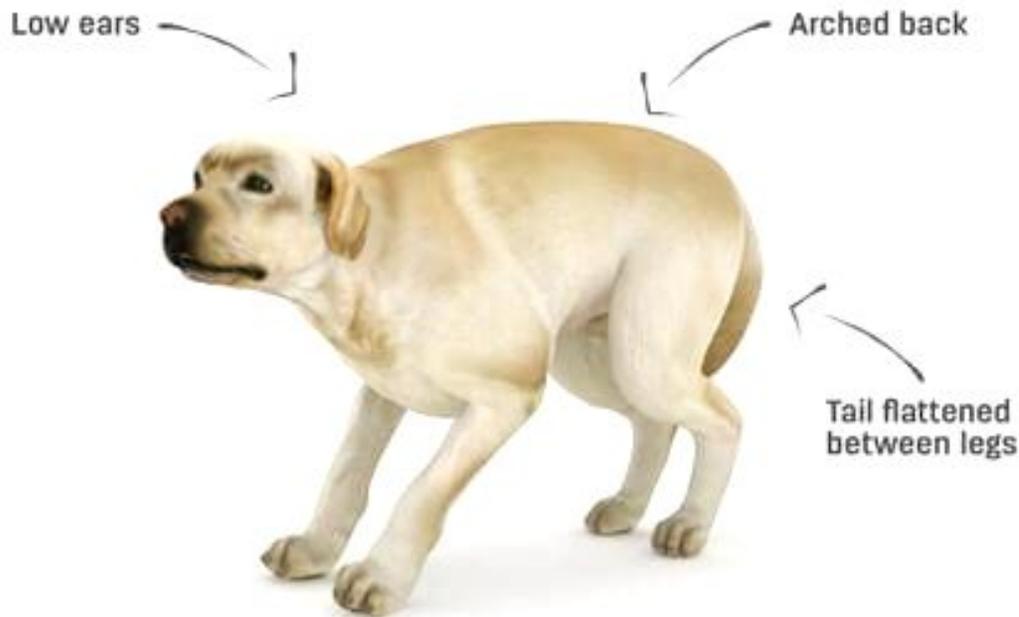
Photo 1: Pre-aggression - ears back, whale eye/direct stare, lips pulled over teeth, mouth closed

Photo 2: More serious threat - muzzle extends forward, head lowers

Photo 3: Wrinkled muzzle, showing teeth

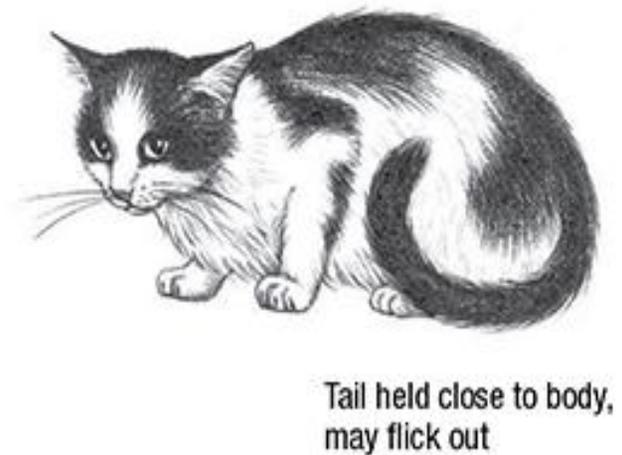
Posture

Fearful



Ears swiveled sideways

Enlarged pupils



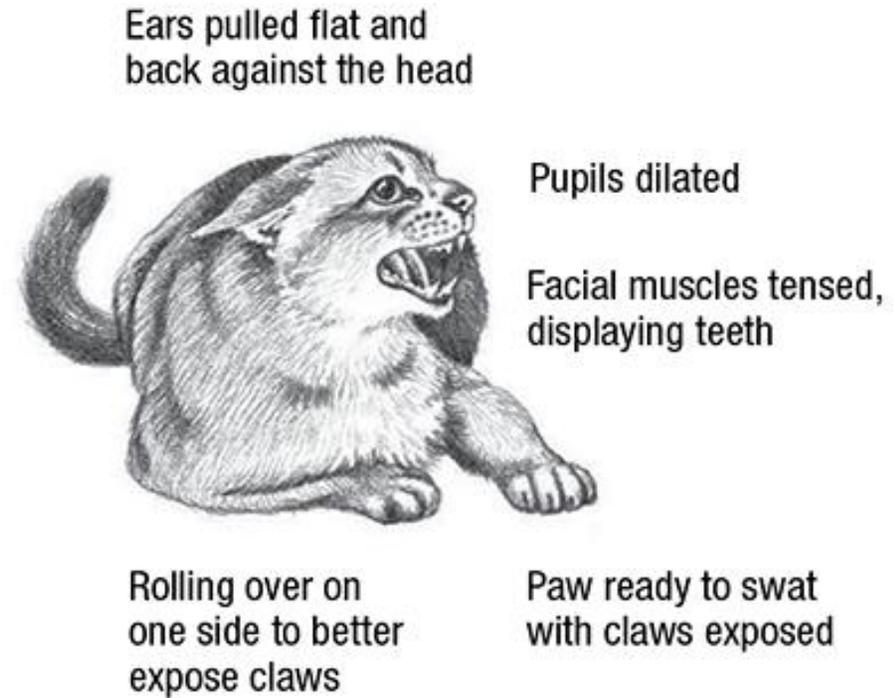
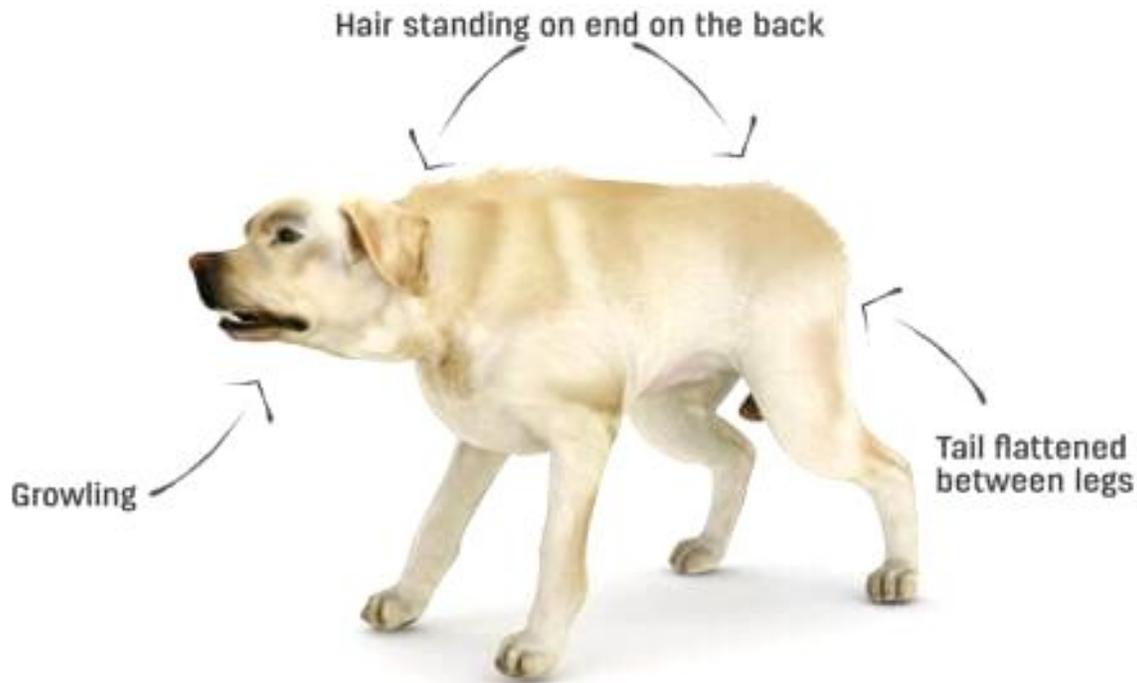
Notice the crouched posture, trying to look small and non-threatening.

Many dogs will also go “belly up”...this is NOT looking for a belly rub, but a way to say “please don’t hurt me”.

Many dogs also give a “paw lift” as a sign of uncertainty

Posture

Fear Aggressive

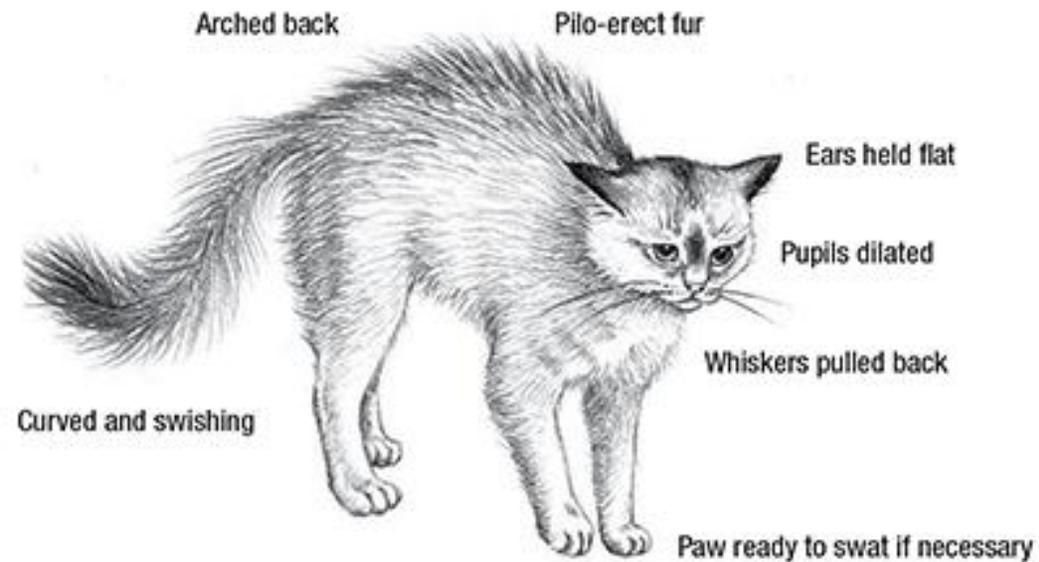


Note “backward” movement - lean away - crouching

Body made to look smaller, but showing teeth & stare as if to say, “Don’t make me do this”

Posture

Assertive / Aggressive



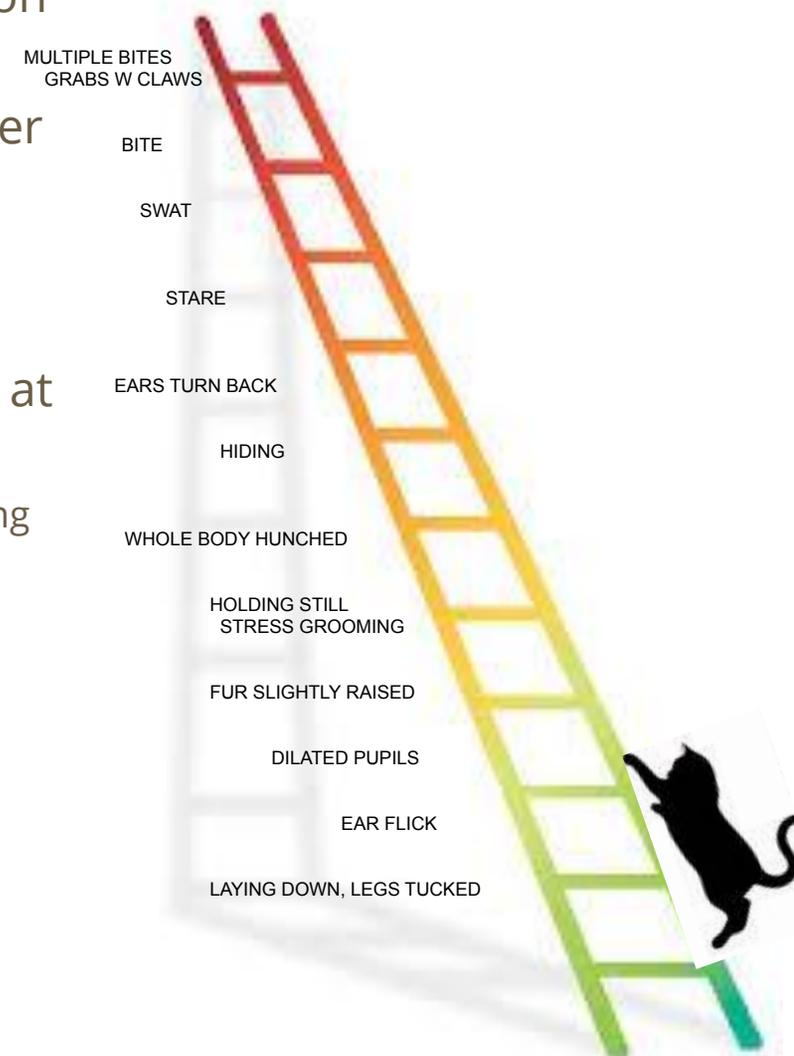
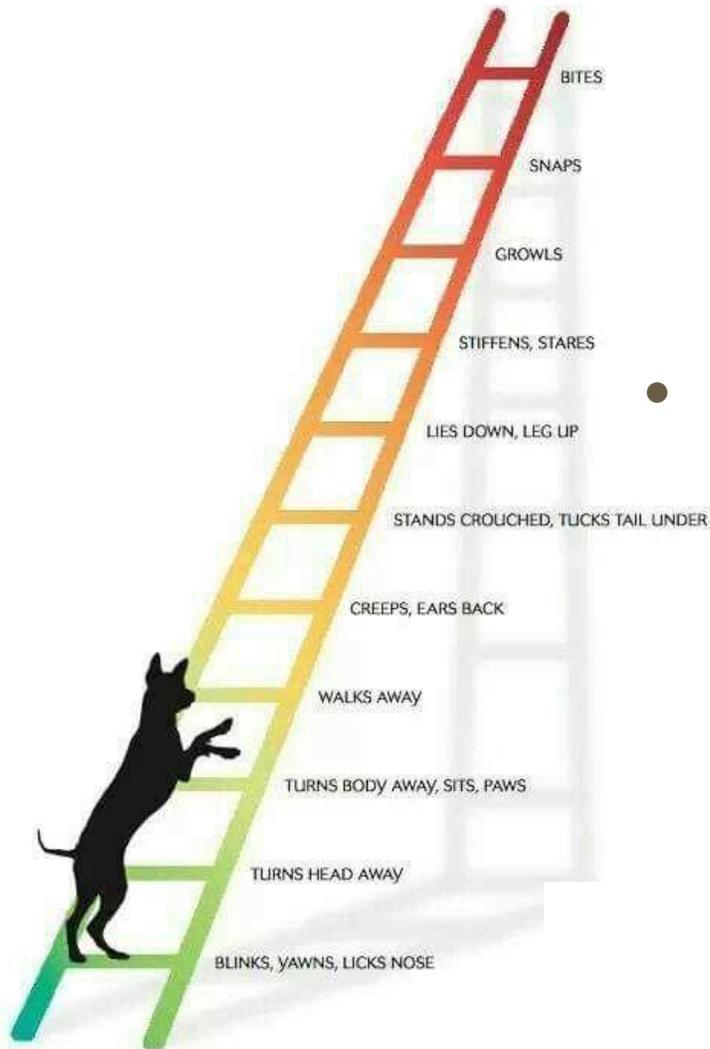
Note the “forward” movement in dog - ears forward, tail high, lunging, staring at “target”
Body is made “larger” by raising the tail & hackles to appear more threatening

“Ladder of Aggression”

- **Aggression:** is overt, often harmful, social interaction with the intention of inflicting damage or other unpleasantness upon another

- Need to recognize signs at the bottom

- Next step doing something to decrease stress
- Prevent animal from “climbing the ladder”



What can be done?

If an animal is noticeably stressed, 3 common steps to decrease stress depending on the dog, the stress, and the environment/situation:

- 1. Move the animal away from the stressful stimuli**
- 2. Move the stressful stimuli away from the animal**
- 3. Redirect/distract from stressful stimuli (only if still under threshold)**

Clearly, it is easiest to avoid stressful situations/stimuli altogether.

Video on fearful dog body language:





sides of
the body

sides of forehead
cheeks



Cat Behaviour

Congratulations!

You have completed
The foster family body language orientation.

Please contact [Kym](#) with any questions or concerns.

