

## Interacting With Your Dog

Our ultimate objective is to develop an effective alert dog for your child. However, this requires that the dog learn necessary skills, is obedient and suitable for public access. These, in turn, require that there be effective communication between the child and the dog. This is a two way street. Your child must be able to communicate their desires and expectations to the dog and to be able to understand the dog's feelings and needs. Likewise, the dog must understand the child's commands and wishes, and feel a part of the team. Although the most important interaction is between the child and the dog, it is necessary for the remainder of the family to properly interact with the dog, or they will become confused. So the following procedures are required for everyone in the pack (family)

We must recognize that we are different species, and have evolved along different paths. We expect the dog to learn to accommodate our communication style, which leans heavily upon spoken language. It is not unreasonable for us to learn the dog's communication style, which is more visually oriented. One of the first things that we must realize is that, like humans, every dog is unique, with different personalities, different priorities and somewhat different communications skills. Therefore, not all of the following will apply directly to your dog. You must carefully observe you dog to determine what is applicable, and what is not. However, the following should get you on your way to better communications with your dog.

### 1. The Eyes.

This is probably the easiest one, as dog's eye responses are very similar to a human's.

Open Wide. Alert and ready to go.

Staring. This is done by a dog that is trying to establish dominance. If you stare at the dog, they will interpret it correctly that you are dominant. In this case they will politely turn away. We have an exception to this, as we teach the "watch me" command. Since this is often followed by something positive (treat or dinner), our dogs learn to be comfortable with it.

Dilated Pupils. Dog is under stress.

### 2. The Body

Relaxed and confident. The dog will stand tall, with a slow tail wag. The ears will be slightly up and forward, and the eyes will have smaller pupils.

Bowing. The front paws are forward and nearly down, with the head held low. This is an invitation to play to another dog, and may be used to urge a human to play

Pacing. The dog is nervous about something and/or he is bored.

Rolling over. This shows respect for authority, and is a sign that the dog is comfortable with the present company, as he is exposing his belly and is very vulnerable to an attack.

Raised Paw. This is a carry-over from when the pup pawed at the mothers teat to stimulate milk flow, and in adulthood, it remains an attempt to attract your attention.

Hip Swing (against your leg). This is again a request to play. Dogs do it to each other as an invitation to “roughhouse”.

Raised Hackles. The dog clearly feels threatened, and is trying to make itself look bigger. Do not approach a dog with raised hackles, as they may react negatively.

Sudden Freeze. The dog suddenly becomes motionless in the middle of activity. This often means that your dog isn't feeling sure of itself and would rather be left alone, or is preparing for an attack. Again, avoid any interaction with the dog.

### **3. The Tail**

This is a much misinterpreted communication trait, in that a wagging tail is generally interpreted as a sign of friendliness, contentment and/or happiness. In fact, it can also indicate fear or warning. A dog's eyesight is keyed to be very sensitive to motion, as opposed to ours which is keyed to detail and color. Therefore, the tail becomes a very effective communication device for dogs. In fact, breeds, like our Golden Retrievers, have developed very bushy tails to make them even more visible. An interesting observation, which confirms their importance as a communication tool, is that dogs only wag their tails in the presence of humans, other dogs, some other animals, or moving objects that could be interpreted as being alive. Following are some things to observe.

Height of the tail. This is a good indicator of the dog's current emotional state. The positions described are relative, and may differ for each dog. You should observe your dog when you are confident that he is relaxed, and not stimulated by anything unusual. This should be considered the “middle” position and other positions referenced to this relaxed position.

- a. Up. As the tail is raised higher than the “middle”, the dog may be coming more threatening. If it becomes almost vertical, it means that the dog is highly threatened and may attack to defend himself. Beware!
- b. Down. As the tail goes lower than the “middle”, it indicates submissiveness, or that the dog is ill. I.e., if there are no other indications that would stimulate the submissive response, you should probably see a vet.
- c. Between the legs. This indicates fear! The dog is essentially pleading not to be injured, or attacked.

Rate of Wagging. This basically indicates how excited the dog is.

- a. Slight Wag. Tentative. Wait and see
- b. Wide wag. Friendly! I do not find you challenging or threatening. This may be so wide that it drags the hips with it!
- c. High frequency wags (almost vibrations). This, with the tail held high is a sign that the dog is poised to do something drastic – like run or fight. Beware!

- d. Wag Direction. This is a new finding (Stanley Coren). Recent tests show that the dominant direction of the wag (right or left) indicates a lot about the dog's response to the current stimuli. A wag predominately to the dog's right side indicates a positive reaction, and a wag biased to the left a negative reaction. This is because, for humans and most mammals, the left brain is involved with with pleasant sensations, like safety and security, which result in a reduced heart rate. The right brain controls physical activities which could result from negative stimuli, like fear or aggression, causing an increased heart rate. Note that the right brain controls the left side of the body and vice-versa, so it all ties together. Note that the above descriptors (right & left) are from the dog's perspective. I.e., if you are facing the dog, the bias will go to your left for positive reactions and to your right for the negatives.

#### 4. The Ears

Our dog's ears are not as expressive as some, because they are so floppy, but if you look closely, you will see some of the following.

Ears forward or up. Paying attention! Interested in something, or curious.

Ears flattened against head. Indicates fear or resulting aggression. Probably to prevent ear injury, in case of a fight.

Ears Back. Unhappiness or anxiety.

#### 5. Vocal Responses.

Your dog's barks, whines, etc., carry a lot of information. Learn to differentiate between them.

##### Barks.

- a. Rapid, Loud, High pitched. Territorial and aggressive to intruders.
- b. Guttural, Short, Frequent. Usually a warning of danger. May be accompanied by growls.
- c. Crisp and short. A greeting
- d. High pitched yelp. The dog is in pain, trapped, or other physical distress.

##### Growls.

- a. Low, quiet. Sigh of aggressiveness. Beware!
- b. Low growl, ending with short bark. Responding to a threat. Again beware!
- c. Low mummering grumble. This is general "play" grumbling.

There are a lot of things covered here, but if only a few stick, than we are that much more able to communicate successfully with your dog. I know that just doing this research and writing this up, has made me much more aware of what Bandit has probably been trying to tell me for weeks 😊.