

Dog Body Language



Focus: The students will learn to recognize dog body language behaviors as a way for dogs to communicate with us.

Age Level: Pre-K-8

Prerequisite: None

Time: 60 minutes

Prep: None

Follow Up: Dog Behavior Checklist

Materials:

- Body Language Pictures/Chart

Instructional Objectives: Students will learn that dogs communicate using their bodies. They will explore how dogs show different emotions such as happiness, stress, fear, frustration, nervousness, and relaxation.

Intro:

Ask the students:

- How can we tell how each other are feeling?
 - (we can tell each other with words!)
- What about without words?
 - (our body language)
- Give a few examples for them to guess how you are acting
 - Crossed arms, furrowed brow (angry)
 - Smiley face, waving arms (happy/excited)
 - Frown (sad)

Body:

Ask the students:

- How do dogs tell us how they are feeling?
 - (with their bodies)

- With the students, draw a chart on the board for the emotions listed below. come up with possible body language cues that a dog will give to relay when they are feeling each one of these emotions. Have younger students physically practice these behaviors.
 - **Happy** (wiggly body, low wagging tail , loose floppy ears, play bow)
 - **Stressed** (pacing, hyper vigilant, panting, yawning, shake off, lip-licking, nose lick)
 - **Nervous/Anxious** (whale eye, low body, ears to the side, worried brow, moving away, head turn, tail between legs)
 - **Frustrated/Angry** (hackles up, furrowed brow, barking, jumping, growling, ears forward)
 - **Relaxed** (sleepy face, laying down, loose body, eyes closed)
- Ask students "Are these are the only emotions dogs feel?" (No)
- List other feelings they might have out loud (sad, excited, hopeful, annoyed...etc.)
- Explain that we will be focusing on these 5 emotions because they have the most telltale signs, AND are the most prominent in dogs at an animal shelter.
- Add an "other" column to the board for dogs that are feeling something other than those 5 emotions.

Hold up one of the body language cards and ask the students:

- What do you think this dog is trying to tell you?
- What parts of his/her body tells you that?
- What do you think this dog is feeling?
 - Tape the picture of the dog in the correct spot in the chart on the board.

Closure:

Go through each emotion and ask the kid what they should do if a dog is showing these signs:

Emotion Exhibiting	Your Own Dog	Not Your Dog
Happy	Enjoy! Play and pet respectfully.	Ask permission to pet gently.
Stressed	Change the situation (leave the area if possible, do something different). Your dog is not enjoying his/herself.	Leave them alone.
Nervous/Anxious	Leave them alone and have an adult help you. Give them space and change the situation. Your dog is not happy, and will react inappropriately if kept in that situation.	Leave them alone! This is the most common emotion leading to a bite.
Frustrated/Angry	Leave them alone and have an adult help you. Give them space and change the situation. Your dog is not happy, and will react inappropriately if kept in that situation.	Back away immediately. Avoid eye contact and leave as soon as possible.
Relaxed	Call them over to you if you want to pet/play. If they come over, they are interested! If not, they may need some down time, so give them space.	Leave them alone. They are taking a break, and don't want to be bothered right now.

***Remember, only ever approach a dog that is wiggly, loose, and excited to see you.**

Lesson adapted from the San Francisco SPCA.