

## Calming Signals

Calming Signals are the body language that dogs use among themselves to "keep the peace," to avoid conflicts. The list below is a result of many years of study by Turid Rugass, watching the interaction of wild and tame dog packs. If you have more than one dog, you can no doubt observe your dogs giving these signals to each other all the time.

**Looking Away or Turning the Head** - He's not turning his head to "ignore" you... he's turning his head to say "calm down, I don't know what you're yelling about but I don't mean any harm, ok?"

**Turning the Whole Body Away** - and you thought, perhaps, that when you scolded her and she turned her back on you and sat down, she was letting you know she was mad at you, too?

**Licking the nose** - mostly they do this when approaching another dog.

**Freezing** - the old freeze and sniff that dogs must do in proper greeting.

**Walking slowly, using slow movements** - in highly exaggerated movements.

**Play bow** - not just "I don't mean any harm" but "I would like to PLAY with you!"

**Sitting down** - this is something that you can not only use to calm your dogs (works best if you sit on the floor with your back to them), but also something you can cue your dog to do when meeting a questionable dog... turn your dog away from the stranger dog and cue him to sit.

**Lying Down** - lying down, belly to the ground is a VERY powerful signal, especially when used by high-ranking dogs. I've seen wild and wooly puppy play come to a screeching halt in seconds when the alpha bitch strides to the middle of the room and lays down. You can use it when a dog is stressed and nagging you (as in thunderstorm fears) or you can use it when you have inadvertently CAUSED your dog to be stressed...

**Approaching in a curve** - This one didn't come from the Rugaas book, but from several other books on canine behavior. Dogs with peaceful intentions don't approach head on... it's considered rude and confrontational. They make a slow wide arc. So when you stand at the back door saying "doggie, come" in increasingly irritable tones... he's not "stalling" as he makes a wide curve around the yard to you, he's saying if you're looking for a fight you're looking in the wrong place.

**Yawning** - This is another strategy that dogs will use when they don't understand what's being asked of them. They'll also use it at the vet's office, or if the people in the house are quarrelling, or any time they're uncertain about how to handle a given situation... they use it in a million ways. It's also one of the most powerful signals that people can use. You can use it to calm your own dogs when they're upset about noise outside. You can use it when you meet shy/fearful stranger dogs.

**Sniffing** - This may take a dog by surprise, but they'll notice you're only trying to get to know them!

**Splitting up** - going physically between dogs or people is a signal. Dogs will do it when they sense problems brewing between two individuals. Those of you with children have probably seen this a lot... your dogs getting in between quarrelling children, or getting between you and your child when you are scolding your child. I've used this one, with great success, to avoid many dog-dog conflicts. If two dogs are staring at each other, it's important to get them to break the stare!

**Wagging tail** - not JUST a sign of "happy dog." This is another one a dog will use when you're losing your temper with him. He's not being a knuckle-head, saying "where's the party?" while you're standing there scolding him... he's *trying* to calm you down. Note the partial highlighting. Whether you can use this one or not depends on how well you can wiggle your butt!

**Shake** - this is another one that's not in the book, but if you pay close attention to your dogs, you'll note that every time they get spun up about something... noise in the street or whatever... an end to the excitement is called with a "shake" by the alpha dog, and the others follow suit. And they'll do it as they "shift gears" from playing/tussling into more quiet play. They'll also shake as they come into a room that has one or more other dogs in it.

When you see a dog use calming signals, it does not necessarily mean that the dog is 'upset' or worried or confused. Yes, a dog will use calming signals under those circumstances, but dogs also use them as a basic part of all-day-every-day language. It's just the 'polite' way to behave and to establish and maintain peaceful co-existence on an ongoing basis. And dogs will ALSO use calming signals when they are very happy and excited.

It's not always possible to get a clear read on exactly why a dog might be using calming signals in a given situation, and I don't really think it's necessary or useful to presume that the dog is upset about something. I do think it is quite helpful to give calming signals when you're seeing calming signals... whatever reasons the dog has for throwing them, it's cool that he wants to get along peacefully, and it's 'polite' that you assure him that you do too. And it's useful to give calming signals when the dog *\*is\** obviously upset.

Dogs do communicate' the have an intricate language. As a general rule, the higher the tail and the more forward the ears, the more aggressive the dog is becoming. The lower the tail, the further back the ears, the more frightened the dog is. Either situation can be dangerous with an unknown dog. We highly recommend the book, "Dog Speak" by Stanley Coren if you are interested in learning more about Canine Language!