

CANINE COMPANIONS

LESSON 2: Grades K-3

HOW TO SPEAK “DOG”

Show-Me Standards:

Academic Goals: 1.5, 1.10, 2.3, 4.6, 4.7

Knowledge Goals: Communication Arts: 1, 4, 6; Science: 3; Health/Physical Education: 5

Objective: To interpret canine verbal and non-verbal communication, both positive and negative.

Materials:

- “The Dog’s Bill of Rights” handout
- “Reading Canine Body Postures” handout
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers
- Paper or poster board
- Pencils

Method: It is very important to be able to understand what dogs are “saying” to us. Dogs communicate through body language, tail wagging and facial expressions. We must learn to interpret these behaviors so we can develop a deeper relationship through mutual understanding.

Speaking: Do dogs speak the same way humans do? No! But, they do communicate through sound. A dog can make many sounds to convey feelings of excitement, fear, pain and anger. For example, a dog may yelp if he is excited to see you or growl if he feels threatened or scared. Have the students think of the many different sounds a dog may use to communicate. Brainstorm with the students as to why a dog would communicate via this method.

Body Language: Like people, dogs use their body to express their feelings. For example, I may cover my eyes if I am scared, whereas a dog may crouch down if something frightens him. Choose a few volunteers to act out different emotions using **only** their bodies. Explain the importance of acknowledging a dog’s behavior and responding accordingly. Clarify the different body postures a dog may demonstrate for common emotions. Have the children demonstrate how we look when we are happy, mad, sad and surprised. Ask the rest of the class to guess what emotion the “actor” is expressing.

Canines use their ears, tails, eyes, body hair and body posture (the way they stand, sit, crouch, lay or position their bodies) to “talk.” Most of the time they use their bodies and sounds together to communicate to people.

Distribute the “Reading Canine Body Postures” handout to each student. As a class, look at each dog. Examine and discuss what is happening in each picture. Think about the following:

1. The dog’s body language—look at each part of the body and what it is doing.
2. What sound may this dog be making?
3. What is this dog feeling?
4. Is it safe to approach, touch, or pet this dog? Why or why not?

Write a simple sentence describing the behavior of each dog. The more you understand what your dog may be trying to say to you, the more you will appreciate the relationship between you and your dog.

A few more tips for safety around dogs:

Make your dog part of the family. A dog that receives little attention from people is more likely to bite or act aggressively. Spend some quality time playing and petting your dog. You'll both feel better.

The noises and movements you make when playing are very exciting to dogs. When dogs play with other dogs, they often play roughly with their teeth and claws. Sometimes dogs forget that they can't play the same way with you. A dog can hurt you by accident, just by being too excited. Always play gently and calmly and if a dog gets too excited, freeze and slowly walk away. Never run from a dog.

When a dog is in pain, he doesn't understand where the pain is coming from. If you touch him, he may think you are causing the pain and may bite you. If a dog is acting like he is sick or hurt, leave him alone—even if he belongs to your family. Tell an adult, and together you can get medical help for the dog.

A dog will protect anything that is important to him: His toys, bed, food and water bowls, yard, even his people. If you come near something that a dog feels is off-limits to you, he may bite to make you leave his "property" alone. Don't go into a yard where there is a dog you don't know. Don't reach through a car window or a fence to pet a dog. Don't pet a dog that is tied up. Always leave your dog alone while he is eating. He may feel threatened and to protect his food, he could bite.

Quick movements and sudden or loud noises are scary for dogs, and they may bite to protect themselves. If a dog thinks you're a stranger who might hurt him, he may not know how to get away, so he'll protect himself by biting. When you are around a dog you don't know, be quiet and move slowly. Always ask the dog's owner for permission before you pet him. If the owner isn't there for you to ask, leave the dog alone.

MOST IMPORTANTLY---treat your dog and all animals with kindness and respect. Never pull a pet's hair, tail or ears. Don't kick, hit or throw things at any animal. Let's practice treating pets gently. Using stuffed animals, demonstrate to students how to pet and touch animals. Remind them that our pets at home aren't like stuffed animals at all. They have feelings and will hurt just like we would if we were kicked, hit or tugged on. Allow students time to practice stroking and touching the stuffed animals. This is a good time to talk to them about using quiet, inside voices when around pets. Explain that pets may become upset or frightened if children yell and scream around them.

Distribute the "Be Kind To All Pets" color sheet to reinforce this lesson.

Call To Action: Make two posters for your school. On one poster, with colorful crayons or markers, copy all of the **DO's** from The Dog's Bill of Rights. On the other poster, copy all of the **DON'T's** from the Dog's Bill of Rights. Decorate the posters and hang in your school cafeteria or another spot where it will be seen by many. What is a bill of rights? Can you think of any additions that can be made to the Dog's Bill of Rights?

Web sites: For recommended animal-related web sites visit www.apamo.org and choose "Animal Issues" from the left-side menu, then choose "Links" from the top of the page. Or [click here](#) to launch your browser and link directly to the list.

The Dog's Bill of Rights



DO:

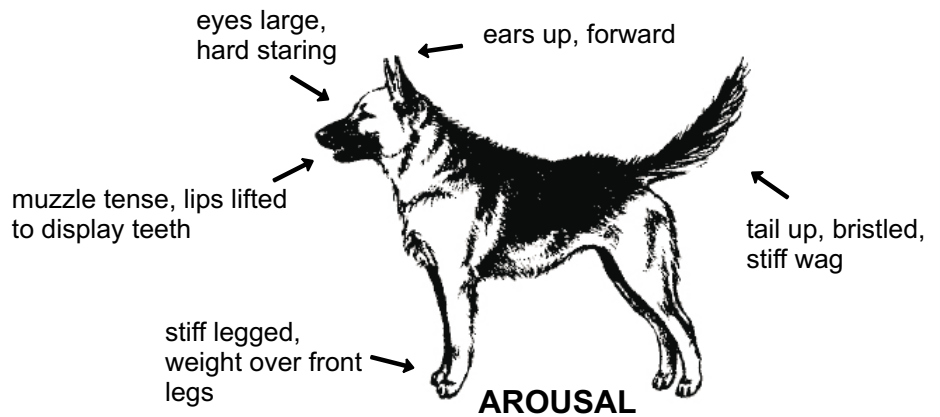
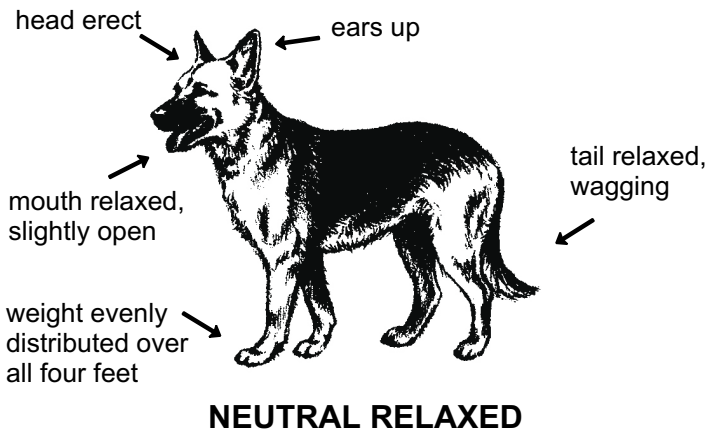
Love your dog
Provide him with adequate food, water and shelter
Keep him at home or with you
Reward him with praise when he is good
Be patient his attention span is short
Be consistent so he can learn right from wrong
Give commands clearly
Let him know he is wrong by your voice tone and a slight jerk of the collar
Take time to play with him
Give him confidence and security

DON'T:

Don't make your dog vicious
Don't train him to attack people
Don't chain him outside where he is helpless
Don't hit him ever especially in anger
Don't overtrain him training sessions should be fun
Don't grab his coat or pinch his skin
Don't point your finger in his face
Don't nag him
Don't punish him unfairly his mistake may be your fault
Don't lock him in a car in hot weather he may die of heatstroke
Don't breed him hundreds of thousands of unwanted puppies must be destroyed each year

Reading Canine Body Postures

While dogs cannot speak, they do display their state of mind via their body language. By taking careful note of ear position, pupil dilation, facial tension (particularly around the muzzle and forehead), tail carriage and body weight distribution, an observer can detect whether a dog is relaxed or fearful, or acting in a submissive or dominant manner toward the observer.

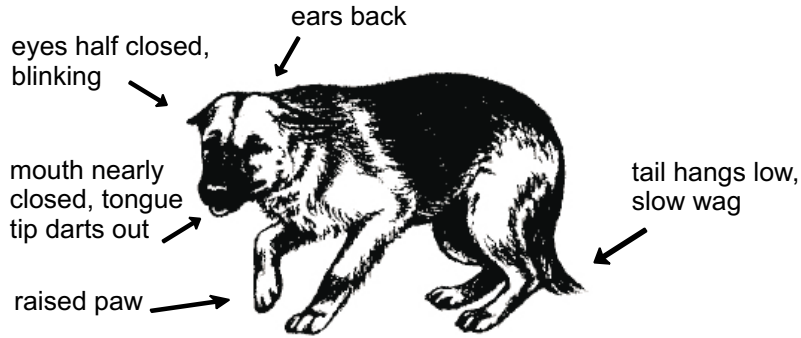


The dog has been stimulated by something in his environment. When the dog is excited by something pleasurable, the hackles will be down and the tail will be carried a little lower and will loosely wag. The muzzle will be relaxed and the tongue may be seen. This posture may be displayed to subordinates in order to express higher ranking pack position.



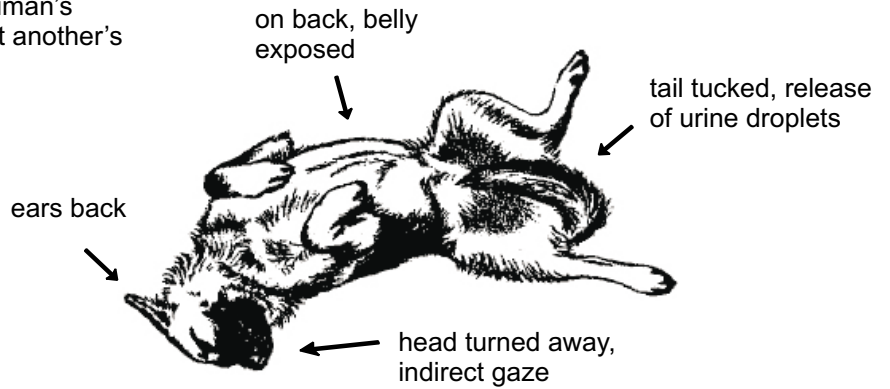
This threatening posture is used to chase another away or, if need be, to attack in order to protect possessions, pack or self.

Reading Canine Body Postures



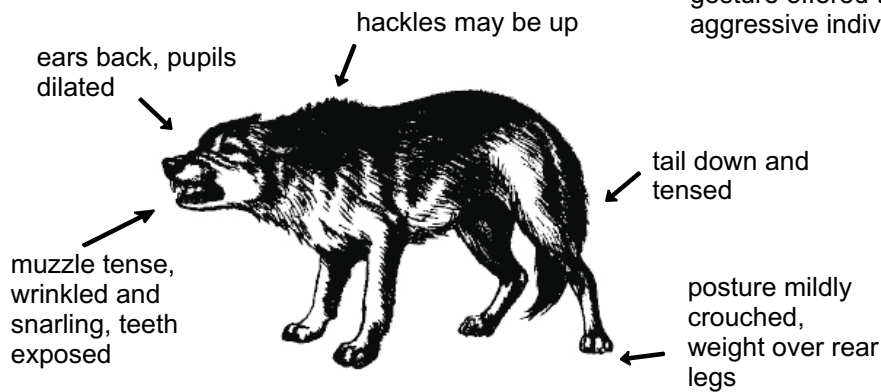
ACTIVE SUBMISSION

This pacifying posture is used when a dog acknowledges another dog or human's higher social ranking, or to inhibit another's aggression.



PASSIVE SUBMISSION

Bellying up indicates surrender, a pacifying gesture offered to a more dominant or aggressive individual.



DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

When fearful, a dog will give warning signals to indicate he does not wish to be approached. If, unheeded, he will bite to protect himself.

Companion Animal Care

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 National Headquarters - 424 E. 92nd St. - New York, NY 10128-6804 - (212) 876-7700 - www.asPCA.org
 Midwestern Regional Office - 1717 South Philo Road, Suite 36 - Urbana, IL 61802 - (217) 337-5030 - www.napcc.asPCA.org