

THE PET CONNECTION

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PET BODY LANGUAGE – LEARN TO READ THE SIGNS!

Even though our pets can't talk they are saying something to us all the time. If we take the time to watch and listen to the body language animals are constantly sending our way, we will enjoy our pets more as well as learn how to avoid unwanted or even dangerous behavior.

Everyone knows that a wagging tail means that a dog is friendly right? Not always! What else is the dog doing, is he staring at you, is the rest of his body stiff while his tail is wagging, is he backing away or holding his ground? These could be signs that a dog is uncomfortable with you, or has the potential to act aggressively. You should approach such a dog cautiously or not at all.

A dog that hits the ground and rolls over on it's belly to be pet is another story. This dog is acting submissively, he is telling you that he thinks he would like to be pet, but he's a bit unsure or even timid. Go slow with this dog, talk softly and get down on his level to pet him.

Then there's the hyper dog, straining at the end of it's leash to get to you. This dog is not aggressive, but he is out of control. Your best course of action with this dog is to ignore him when he reaches you, don't talk or pet him right away. He needs a chance to calm down before you engage with him. Petting a dog that is jumping all over you is actually rewarding him for bad behavior. Don't do anything to make this dog more excited, avoid using a high voice, clapping your hands, or aggressively petting this guy.

Of course cats have their own brand of body language. Just because a cat is purring doesn't mean it wants to be pet or that it won't turn and bite you while you are petting him. The area just at the base of a cat's tail is very sensitive, and is best avoided when petting them. Never restrain a cat that you are petting, if they are in your lap let them get down as soon as they appear to want to leave, otherwise you will either annoy or frighten them, which could lead to you getting bitten. If a cat pins it's ears back or swishes his tail a lot he is unhappy, or worse he's becoming aggressive, back off, and let this guy come to you.

Unfortunately owners are not always in tune with their pet's body language, and often encourage others to engage with their pet without understanding what their animal's body language is really saying. Just because you like someone doesn't mean your pet will. Animals are comfortable with some people right away, and others they are not. You need to try and discern what affect you are having on an animal, and if need be adjust your behavior to make that animal more comfortable.

The best rule of thumb for becoming friends with most animals is to give them the time to access and approach you first. Don't rush in to pet them, try not to make eye contact, or make a fuss over them right away. Believe it or not, ignoring most animals when you first meet them is the best thing you can do to help them relax and feel safe with you. If the owner is there address them first and not their pet, believe it or not the animal is watching to see how their owner reacts to you. If the owner is not there just be still and give the animal a chance to sniff and figure out who you are. You'll be amazed at how fast you'll make a new animal friend if you learn to “hear” what they are trying to say to you!

PAWS FOR REFLECTION

Remember to be a good pet neighbor, clean up after your dog or cat if you exercise them somewhere other than your own yard. Pet urine can burn lawns, so if possible try to walk your pet in an empty lot or common area. Think green, your neighbors will love you for it!

If you have pet related questions or would like to see a future topic discussed in The Pet Connection please send an email to Debbie@PamperedPawsSalon.com