

### Welcome

This topic of this month's newsletter is "How to read your pet's body language". If you have any questions or have a topic you would like to hear about please contact our staff at 630-365-9599 or you can contact us via email at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net

Can cats and dogs be friends? We know from experience, some can and some fight like cats and dogs!

Why this inconsistency? The problem is the two don't always speak the same language.

Cats and dogs communicate, with us, and with each other, through body language. When using our pet's body language to interpret what our pets are saying, it is important to consider both the context and the pet's individual personality. While certain physical cues do commonly appear in both cats and dogs, those cues don't always mean the same thing. It is important to know the differences in order to better understand your cat or dog.

### **Your dog is saying one thing; your cat is saying something else!**

Following are a few examples of behaviors that may communicate totally different things for each species.

**Tail held high:** When a cat holds her tail high, it can signal that she is friendly and relaxed. The higher the cat's tail, the more confident she may be. However, if her tail is raised high

with the fur erect and puffed out, it usually indicates alarm or potential aggression. As she becomes more unsure or fearful, her tail is more likely to slink lower.



When a dog holds his tail high, it often signals high arousal and the possibility of aggressive behavior. A cat that is agitated and about to become aggressive may also flick his tail back and forth vigorously. A dog is more likely to carry his tail in a neutral position, extended out behind him, when he is relaxed.

**Wagging tail:** Friendly dogs wag their tail loosely back and forth at medium height. When a cat's tail begins to wag back and forth, an unfriendly encounter or attack is likely to occur.



**Closed mouth:** Relaxed cats have closed mouths; relaxed dogs may have a closed or partially open mouth. The more tense a dog is, the more tightly closed his mouth becomes, although a very heavily stressed dog may pant heavily or yawn.

**Ears up for greeting:** A cat who is confident greeting people will normally hold her ears forward and alert. If her ears move backward or twitch, it may indicate uncertainty or that the encounter is not going well. By contrast, one sign of a friendly dog is that his ears move back just slightly. A submissive dog will move his ears back even further as an appeasement gesture. Dogs with erect pricked ears may be ready to stand their ground against another animal if necessary – but this behavior is specific to the individual dog.

**Turning to the side:** Both dogs and cats turn their bodies to the side when attempting to shut off a potential threat. A dog may do this to show he means no harm, while a cat may be

trying to appear larger and more threatening to her opponent.

**Lying belly up:** A dog is likely to lie on his back as a submissive greeting behavior or as a way to get belly rubs by someone he is close to. A cat, on the other hand, will lie on her back in self defense: this position allows her to have all four paws, with claws drawn, ready to react to any threat. A cat will sometimes lie on her back for people she is close to, but very few cats actually enjoy having their belly rubbed and may respond aggressively.

### **Sometimes your cat and dog are speaking the same language**

Your cat and dog may not always be on the same page, but they do share same behaviors. Here are a few that they have in common

**Ears upright:** Cats and dogs both communicate through their ears. When they are relaxed, their ears usually point forward. When they are really excited or interested in something, their ears are likely to move all the way forward and upright. When the ears move backward and are flattened against the head, there is often underlying fear or submission.

**Raised hackles:** When cats and dogs are feeling scared or over stimulated, the hair on their back and tails fluffs out and stands on end. In both dogs and cats, hair standing on end indicates an animal ready to react.



**Pupils dilated and blinking:** A cat's pupils dilate when she is afraid or getting ready to attack. Similarly, a dog's pupils will dilate when he is fearful or aggressive. Dilated pupils can also indicate high arousal in both species. Eye blinks on dogs and cats indicate the desire for a peaceful greeting, while direct eye contact, without blinking or looking away, can signal a challenge in both dogs and cats.

**Compacted body:** When a dog or cat is afraid of something, he will make his body appear as small as possible, usually with the head held low. Similarly, both dogs and cats curl their tails underneath their bodies to indicate extreme fear.



**Whiskers stiffened:** Dogs and cats both have a normal height and structure to their whiskers. When they are stimulated by something and are about to react, their whiskers are more likely to stiffen and extend outward.

**Panting:** Panting can indicate various things in dogs, but in both species it can mean that the animal is highly stressed or frightened. Panting in a cat that is not interacting with another animal or in a fearful situation may indicate a serious health condition, and a veterinarian should be contacted immediately.



**Yawning:** While yawning in dogs can indicate stress, both dogs and cats may yawn as a calming behavior in conflict situations.



If you have any questions or comments, please email us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net) or call 630-365-9599! If you have a subject you would like covered in our newsletter please let us know!

