

# Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

## Golden Rule Training



## Understanding Dog Language

### How to Read Your Dog's Body Language

Knowing how to read your dog's body language is the key to understanding your dog, assessing her attitude, and predicting her next move. Because dogs are non-verbal their body language does the talking for them. Vocalization actually takes second place to a dog's body language. Once you learn the basic types of dog body language, spend some time observing dogs interacting with people and other animals in various situations. Understanding a dog's body language can also help protect you and your dog from dangerous situations as well as aid in training or identification of common behavior problems.

#### **Confident**

The confident dog stands straight and tall with her head held high, ears perked up, and eyes bright. Her mouth may be slightly open but is relaxed. Her tail may sway gently, curl loosely or hang in a relaxed position. She is friendly, non-threatening and at ease with her surroundings.

#### **Happy**

A happy dog will show the same signs as a confident dog. In addition, she will usually wag her tail and sometimes hold her mouth open more or even pant mildly. She appears even more friendly and content than the confident dog, with no signs of anxiety.

#### **Playful**

A playful dog is happy and excited. Her ears are up, eyes are bright, and tail wags rapidly from side to side. She may jump and run around with glee. Often, a playful dog will exhibit the play bow: front legs stretched forward, head straight ahead, rear end up in the air and possibly wiggling. She may also put her paw on another dog's back, and these are most certainly an invitation to play!

#### **Submissive**

A submissive dog holds her head down, ears down flat and averts her eyes. Her tail is low and may sway slightly, but is not tucked. She may roll on her back and expose her belly. A submissive dog may also nuzzle or lick the other dog or person to further display passive intent. Sometimes, she will sniff the ground or otherwise divert her attention to show that she does not want to cause any trouble. A submissive dog is meek, gentle and non-threatening.

#### **Anxious**

The anxious dog may act somewhat submissive, but often holds her ears partially back and her neck stretched out. She stands in a very tense posture and sometimes shudders. Often, an anxious dog whimpers, moans, yawns and/or licks her lips. Her tail is low and may be tucked. She may show the whites of her eyes, something called whale eye. An anxious dog may overreact to any stimulus and can become fearful or even aggressive. If you are familiar with the dog, you may try to divert her attention to something more pleasant; however, be cautious and do not provoke her or try to soothe her.

### **Fearful**

The fearful dog combines submissive and anxious attitudes with more extreme signals. She stands tense, but is very low to the ground. Her ears are flat back and her eyes are narrowed and averted. Her tail is between her legs and she typically trembles. A fearful dog often whines or growls and might even bare her teeth in defense. She may also urinate or defecate when approached. A fearful dog can turn aggressive quickly if she senses a threat. Do not try to reassure the anxious dog, but remove yourself from the situation calmly. If you are the owner, be confident and strong, but do not comfort or punish your dog.

Try to move her to a less threatening, more familiar location. If you have to coax her, make sure you always talk in a soft, upbeat and happy voice. A fearful dog needs to know all is okay and you are not a threat. If you try to console, she may think you are scared too, which can make the situation worse.

### **Dominant**

A dominant dog will try to assert herself over other dogs and sometimes people. She stands tall and confident and may lean a bit forward. Her eyes are wide and she makes direct eye contact with the other dog or person. Her ears are up and alert and the hair on her back may stand on edge. She may growl lowly. Her demeanor appears less friendly and possibly threatening. If the behavior is directed at dog that submits, there is little concern. If the other dog also tries to be dominant, a fight may break out. A dog that directs dominant behavior towards people can pose a serious threat. Do not make eye contact and slowly try to leave. If your dog exhibits this behavior towards people, behavior modification is necessary.

### **Aggressive**

An aggressive dog goes far beyond dominant. Her feet are firmly planted on the ground in a territorial manner, and she may lunge forward. Her ears are pinned back, head is straight ahead, and eyes are narrowed but piercing. Her tail is straight, held up high, and may even be wagging! Do not be fooled! A dog that wags its tail can also bite! She may also bare her teeth, snap her jaw and growl or bark threateningly. The hairs along her back stand on edge.

If you are near a dog showing these signs it is very important to get away carefully. Stay calm, do not run and do not make eye contact with the dog. Slowly back away to safety. If your own dog becomes aggressive, seek the assistance of a professional dog trainer to learn the proper way to correct the behavior. Almost any dog will bite under the right circumstances.

Accidents happen in the blink of an eye, and even the gentlest family dog will bite if he is in pain, or if he has just "had enough."

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