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A list of 47 of the calming or stress signals that humans can observe in any dog. I've probably split them imperfectly into these two columns, because many times dogs will be presenting more than one signal at a time, but, it's a place to start:

Calming

head turning away
eyes turning away
yawning
sniffing
drooling
lip licking
raising a paw (as if to "shake")
grass eating
marking
water drinking
pooping
avoidance
slow reluctant behaviors
hackles raised
arcing (or curving)
laying down
frantically wagging tail
play bow
splitting
sitting
blinking

Stress

panting
growling
spinning/circling
stopped or frozen (in an awkward position)
howling
short attention span
biting the leash
poop eating
whining
barking
aggression
hyper behavior
complete body turns away from you (can also be calming)
hackles raised
body shaking (as if they are cold)
scratching
shaking (as if they were shaking off water)
blinking of the eyes
sneezing
sweaty paws
raised temperature (ears can get hot)
chewing
diarrhea
"stress" shedding and dandruff
digging
loss of appetite (won't take treats)

For instance, when dogs approach each other and wish to avoid fights, they will arc around each other rather than approach head on. This can calm the other dog and avoid a potential conflict. In addition, there are also what I call "personal stress signals." These are different for every dog:

The set of their ears and tail, any creases on their face, the look and shape of their eyes and pupils, foaming at the mouth (different than drooling), tightness of their mouth when taking food, suppleness or tightness of their bodies, puffing out of cheeks with short but explosive breaths, and the shape of their nose and muzzle often changes when they are feeling stressed.

I look at it this way: most dogs will communicate in whispers to start - small signals - a tiny lip lick, small head duck or head turn, a blink. If those are ignored or punished, they will have no choice but to “talk” louder by using more obvious signals - full sniffing, full body turns, huge yawns. If those are ignored or punished, they will start “yelling” and use even more blatantly (to them) obvious signals - frantic tail wagging, hackles up, low growl, showing teeth, stiffening of their body, staring. If those are ignored or punished, you may be leaving them no choice but to go further into conflict resolution with biting - into “poker face” mode and they will just simply bite with “no warning.” The moral? Listen to and respect the whispers!

Take a good look at these photos and see how many signals from the above list you can see!



