

Calming Signals

Dogs use calming or “cut off” signals (also called displacement behaviors) to calm down or cease aggression/reduce stress in their environment. The signals are used at an early state to prevent things from happening, avoiding threats from people and dogs, calming down nervousness, fear, noise and unpleasant stimulus. The signals are used for calming themselves when they feel stressed or uneasy. The signals are used to make the others involved feel safer and understand that intentions are of goodwill. They are used to make friends with other dogs and people. Dogs have strong instincts for conflict solving, communication and cooperation.

Dogs also have threatening signals, and when we are dealing with dogs we have a choice of how to behave: We can be calming, friendly, reassuring, or we can be threatening. Whatever we choose will have consequences in our relationship with our dog. When you are using threats to your dog, intentionally or unintentionally, the dog will try to calm you down. For the conflict solving dog, threats must be calmed down. So, it is to the benefit in our relationship with our dog to understand these signals, and to use them ourselves to increase the communication level we have with our dog.

Identifying Some of the Signals

Head:

1. Turning head to the side (either quickly or holding it there)
 - You can use it yourself when a dog starts to get worried or frightened upon approach
2. Not turning the head but averting the eyes to avoid direct eye contact



Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

More information about Calming Signals:

Book: *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming signals* by Turid Rugaas

DVD: *Calming Signals: What your dog tells you* by Turid Rugaas

See More:

[Dog Body Language](#)

- You can use when dog approaches you and you have difficulties turning your head for some reason.

3. Lowering lids, and not staring in a threatening way

Turning Away:

1. Turning the side or back to someone is very calming. When dogs are playing wildly, some of them will start turning their side or back in between playing, to make things calm down a bit.
 - You can use it when a dog shows signs of nervousness or aggressiveness toward you. If he jumps at you, turn away, and he will usually stop.
 - If your dog is being overwhelming with its jumping and nagging, turn your back on the dog.

Licking Nose:

1. A very quick movement of the tongue, so quick that sometimes it is hard to see as a calming signal.

Freezing:

1. Your dog will freeze, stop, stand sit or lie still, without moving a muscle when a much bigger dog comes up too close and starts sniffing him/her all over.

Walking Slowly, Using Slow Movements:

1. Movements that get slower, sometimes so slow there is hardly any movement have a very calming effect.
 - You can use it when a dog seems frightened of you, or when you do not want to scare a dog. When you go up to a dog that you want to put a leash on, moving slowly will help it to stand still.

The Choice is Yours

When you are with a dog or meeting a dog you have a choice, you can be threatening or calming. Dogs are conflict solvers, and they try to solve conflicts in their environment all the time. If we are continually causing conflict for our dogs or we are ignoring their calming signals it can be really scary to dogs.

