

Dog Training Articles
By Beth Bradley

Body Language – 5 Steps to Communicating with your dog

Though I make no claims of being a formally schooled behaviorist, much of my day consists of watching dogs interact with each other and replacing wrong behavior with appropriate behavior. I have attended numerous seminars and educational forums but most of my knowledge was learned from watching my dogs give birth, the raising of their pups and watching how dogs in our day care and training school interact with each other.

The Steps:

I have narrowed a dog's body language down to 5 steps, which my human eyes can differentiate. But these are not steps as we understand steps, most of the time all of the five below happen at the same time, or so quickly that the human eye missed the separate steps and assumed the Alpha went from step 1 to step 5.

1. Posture:

The Alpha dog stands tall and stiff. He holds his head and tail high. He 'hackles' or raises his fur from his neck to his back in order to seem even larger. The Alpha also uses his body to block a dog from doing something or going somewhere. We have seen dogs stop toddlers from wandering into the street in the same manner; i.e. stand in front and don't allow the subordinate to pass. The Alpha will use his body to take a bone from a subordinate, walk straight up to the subordinate and 'own' the bone until the subordinate steps away.

2. Eyes:

The Alpha uses his eyes in two ways. The first is when he raises his eyes to the sky when he is demonstrating that he is ignoring a young pack member. He will do this when a young dog is jumping on him and actually turn his face, body and eyes away from the young dog if the pup is jumping toward his face or licking his face. The second way is direct eye contact, used to threaten. He will stare at another pack member until that dog turns his gaze away or walks away.

3. Ears:

The Alpha dog holds his ears erect and alert. Ears held back towards the head shows submission or fear. The ears are held erect and pointed forward to the subordinate.

4. Vocalization:

The Alpha dog uses a low and guttural growl to control the pack. The Alpha does this in connection with his posture, eyes and ears. This is the last warning before a correction happens. The growl is short and not vocally drawn out. The growl is exhibited one time before a correction is used.

5. The Correction:

The Correction happens very quickly. If the pup or subordinate has not heeded the warnings above, the Alpha will snap and use his teeth on him. The correction is quick and the amount of pressure used depends on the situation or the amount of dominance the subordinate is trying to demonstrate to the Alpha. The Alpha realizes that the correction must be given so to let the subordinate know that he should never challenge the Alpha in this manner again. The most important part of the correction is that it immediately stops the subordinate quickly.

How can you use these steps in training your dog?

1. Stand up straight, do not bend over. Keep your back straight and stiff. Step toward your dog in order to take ownership of something (i.e. a bone or the front door) or someone (i.e. step in front of your dog if he is jumping on someone. Block his jump).
2. If your dog is jumping on you, turn your back to your dog, look toward the ceiling; ignore him. Make eye contact when commanding, taking 'ownership' of something, commanding or reprimanding.
3. Hold your head up high, this will keep your 'ear's erect. Do not look down toward your dog. Not only should your back be stiff but your neck should stay straight also.
4. Don't speak. If your dog is excited, yelling commands to sit are going to be ignored. Give one command, sit; and give the command one time only. Keep your command short and the sound of it should be low and guttural. Do not praise, tell your dog it is 'ok' or continue to talk; talk resembles barking and barking makes dogs excited. If you are yelling or giving multiple commands you are only going to excite your dog, not calm him down or stop the inappropriate behavior. Also, once your dog is calm, speaking or praising is going to stimulate your dog again. Walk away from your dog and teach him that calmness receives attention, and that his inappropriate behavior deserves nothing.
5. Correct your dog for inappropriate behavior. The correction given should be strong enough to stop the behavior. The correction should only have to be given one time to stop the behavior. The type of correction needed depends upon the dog because each dog is different and his sensitivity to the correction is different

also. I prefer the use of a collar and leash, a short snap, jerk and release correction given on the leash which is attached to the correction collar.

Conclusion:

This is how I train when dogs are with me. The dog learns quickly and the inappropriate behavior usually stops immediately. However, your dog has learned from you that he can ‘wear you down’ and get a response. Dogs and humans are creatures of habit and in order to make a change in our dog’s behavior you must be consistent and stubborn. You can not give in to your dog or go back to your old ways of handling; this inconsistency will not benefit you, your dog or your training.

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Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-ROMs and DVD’s on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Beth can be contacted via the web at www.dog-trainer.biz or her business (201) 247-8472.