

# Body Language: Do You Know What Your Dog is Saying?

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Recognizing some common canine stress signals makes supervising the interactions between kids and dogs much easier.

If your dog shows one of these signals, it is time for you to intervene and suggest an alternate activity. Just because your dog is showing signs of stress, doesn't mean that she's on the verge of aggression. But all behavior deteriorates under stress--our own and dogs'--so it is important for us to be able to recognize when our dogs need a little help. Remember that you need to analyze not only your child's intention, but also the dog's perception of every interaction. For example, hugs are intended kindly, but few dogs enjoy them.



## Lip Licking

When a dog is anxious, she will often quickly stick out her tongue and lick her lips. It's usually just a fast, little flick. Watch your dog; this is one of the most common signals.



## Yawning

This is often mistaken for contentment. The dog is surrounded by kids, and she lets out a big yawn. Isn't that sweet? Nope, it's a sign that she's in over her head and would appreciate your help.



## Turning Away

Often owners think a dog turning away is "blowing them off" and they intensify their demands on her, which is exactly what the dog was trying to avoid.



### **Shaking Off**

I compare this to a reset button. The dog is doing a full-body shake-off, as if she were wet. It often happens just after a stressful interaction. Pay attention. It happens more often than you might think. Reboot!

### **Half-Moon Eye**

When a dog is calm and relaxed, you don't usually see much white around her eyes. The "half-moon" refers to the white arc that is often seen when a dog is stressed and trying to hold it in.

### **Freezing**

Watch out! Dogs typically freeze right before they snap or bite. That may sound obvious, but one of the scariest things I ever saw was when an owner told me, "Lucy loves to have kids hug her. Look how still she is." It was a heart-stopping moment for me. Lucy, thank goodness, did not bite, but she was definitely not enjoying the experience.

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