



## Canine Stress Signals and Body Language

Dogs use many signals to indicate how they are feeling but there are different degrees of these signals and how many a dog uses will depend on the individual dog. Signals often come in clusters too.

### Calm behaviours



Calm dogs will have relaxed body language, from their ears and eyes through to their tail. They may sit, lie down or even stand but their body shows relaxation.



Relaxed mouth and ears





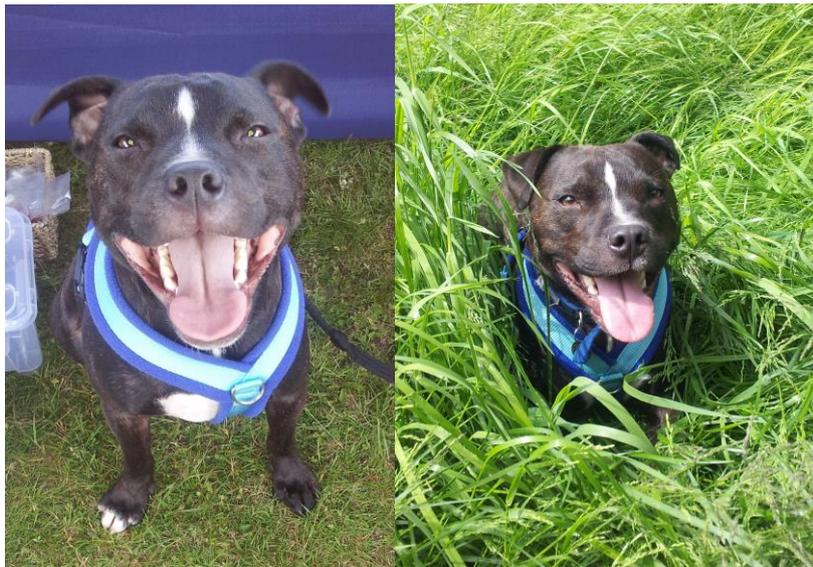
**Low levels of stress may include:**

- ❖ Furrowed brow
- ❖ Ears pulled back or tension in ears held close to their head
- ❖ Avoiding eye contact
- ❖ Yawning
- ❖ Excessive lip licking
- ❖ Vibrissae (whiskers) pulled forward and tense
- ❖ Rapid blinking
- ❖ Dilated pupils
- ❖ Tension around the mouth
- ❖ Red membranes around the eyes (although can also be tiredness)
- ❖ Still tail held close to the body
- ❖ Tail between legs with some movement
- ❖ Stretching after contact or an interaction
- ❖ Shaking off after contact or an interaction
- ❖ Shaking off after engaging with something
- ❖ Approaching and then turning back on the trigger
- ❖ Sitting down away from the trigger
- ❖ Placing body on the other side of a safe person (hiding)
- ❖ Penis crowning – the more that is exposed, the more stressed the dog is
- ❖ Drooling
- ❖ Sucking on bedding or toys





- ❖ Panting but not hot
- ❖ Tense tongue held high in the mouth
- ❖ Spatulate tongue – tongue has tension and is curved in a spoon shape
- ❖ Over excitement
- ❖ Unable to concentrate.



The left image shows a spatulate tongue. Note the tension lines on the forehead and how the ears are pulled back. The right image shows a relaxed tongue and ears and no tension on the forehead

### Medium levels of stress and arousal

- ❖ Furrowed brow
- ❖ Ears pulled back with tension in ears, held close to the head
- ❖ Avoiding eye contact
- ❖ Yawning excessively or exaggerated yawning
- ❖ Vibrissae pulled forward and tense





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- ❖ Rapid blinking
- ❖ Fast panting with tongue high in the mouth
- ❖ Rounded eyes
- ❖ Labial commissure (tension in corners of mouth)
- ❖ Dilated pupils
- ❖ Red membranes in eyes
- ❖ Fast frantic wagging tail, held high and stiff
- ❖ Stiffness in hind quarters
- ❖ Walking stiffly
- ❖ May be on tip toes
- ❖ Fast movement of head and ears, held high
- ❖ Lack of movement
- ❖ Approaching and then avoiding the trigger
- ❖ Fixing gaze on safe person and ignoring the trigger
- ❖ Sitting or lying down with back turned to trigger
- ❖ Approaching quickly, sniffing hand or face
- ❖ Approaching quickly and jumping up
- ❖ Jumping up forcefully
- ❖ Jumping up and mouthing
- ❖ Jumping up and clamping with forelegs
- ❖ Mounting
- ❖ Rubbing anal glands along the floor





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- ❖ Grabbing the lead
- ❖ Penis crowning
- ❖ Pacing
- ❖ Licking any part of the body after contact with the trigger
- ❖ Scratching any part of the body after contact with the trigger
- ❖ Body curved away from the trigger
- ❖ Lunging
- ❖ Chewing hard on toys after interaction
- ❖ Suck bedding or toys after interaction
- ❖ Licking himself or the handler
- ❖ Drooling
- ❖ Inability to concentrate
- ❖ Clingy behaviour
- ❖ Attention seeking



Dilated pupils, tension on forehead





## High level stress/over arousal

- ❖ Deeply furrowed brow
- ❖ Ears pinned back against head
- ❖ Avoiding eye contact
- ❖ Overly intense staring at trigger
- ❖ Excessive lip or nose licking
- ❖ Vibrissae pulled forward and tense
- ❖ Dilated pupils
- ❖ Sclera showing (whites of eyes)
- ❖ Labial commissure forward and very tense
- ❖ Front teeth exposed
- ❖ Muzzle wrinkling or snarling
- ❖ Fast frantic tail wagging but high and stiff
- ❖ Tail between legs and stiff
- ❖ Tail high and stiff but only movement in the tip
- ❖ Approaching and then avoiding
- ❖ Hiding
- ❖ Approaching very fast and intense sniffing
- ❖ Approaching very fast, jumping up and leaning away
- ❖ Frequent mounting during play with another dog
- ❖ Mounting toys
- ❖ Frequent anal gland rubbing





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- ❖ Freezing
- ❖ Penis crowning
- ❖ Pacing
- ❖ Grabbing lead
- ❖ Obsessively licking any part of the body
- ❖ Excessive urination/defecation
- ❖ Chewing hard on toys for a long period of time
- ❖ Escape attempts
- ❖ Chewing furniture
- ❖ Excessive barking
- ❖ Spinning or tail chasing
- ❖ Growling and snapping
- ❖ Lunging
- ❖ Hyperactivity for prolonged periods
- ❖ Hyper vigilance
- ❖ Inability to concentrate
- ❖ Clingy behaviour
- ❖ Persistent or prolonged attention seeking
- ❖ Walking stiffly
- ❖ Body curved and tense
- ❖ Rigid back
- ❖ Lack of movement



Nothing to fear here.

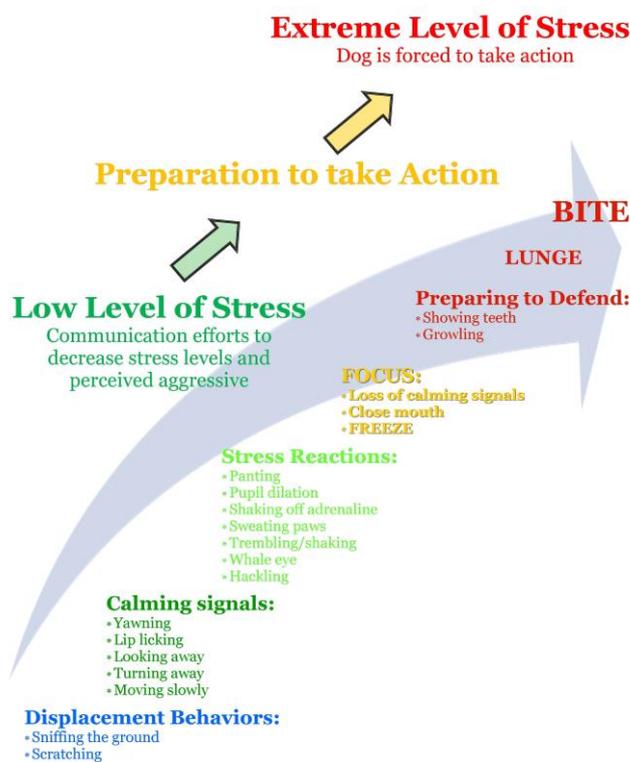


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Dilated pupils, stiffness in back and tail, ears pulled forward and mouth about to show teeth

## The Stress Escalation Ladder

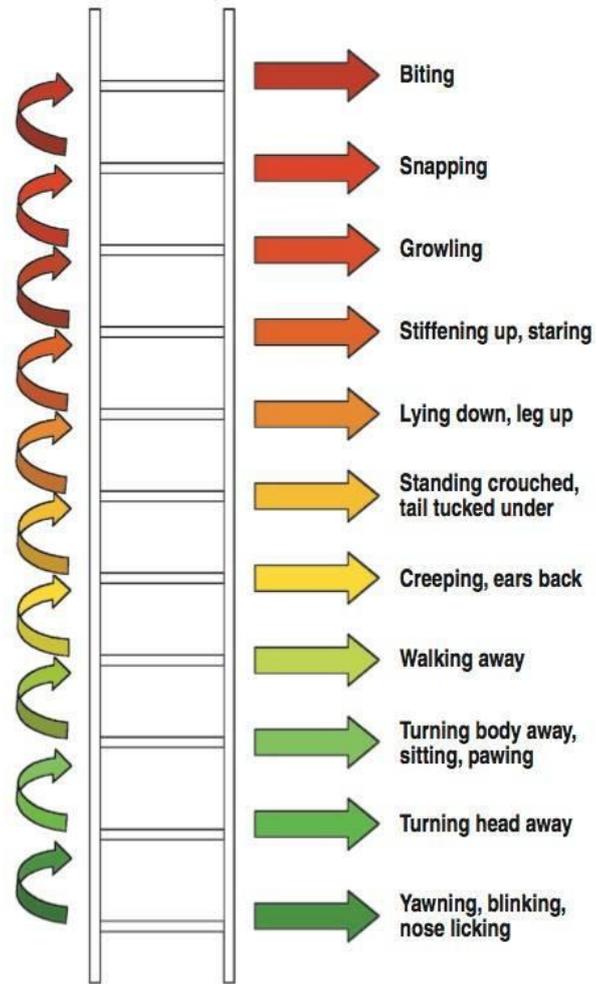


- Turid Rugaas

A useful ladder of stress by Turid Rugaas



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BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural Medicine, 2nd edition

### The ladder of aggression

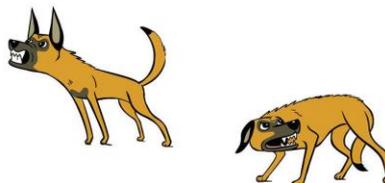


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## THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

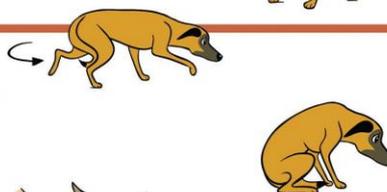
### RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression: lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive aggression: hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.



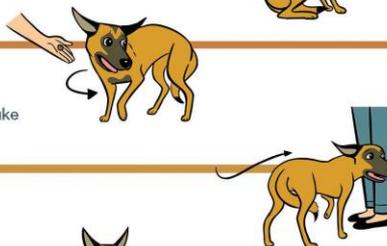
### RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight: ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.



### YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)

- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.



### YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)

- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.



### GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Lip licking, avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, lifts paw, partially dilated pupils, slight panting but commissures of lips are relaxed.



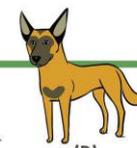
### GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.



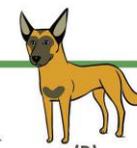
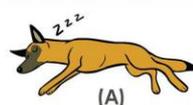
### GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but loose lips, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.



### GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)

- A: Sleeping.
- B: Neutral - ears in neutral position, not perked forward, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed but lips relaxed, body loose, tail carriage neutral, pupils normal dilation.
- C: Friendly greeting - slow back and forth tail and butt wag, ears just slightly back, relaxed brow and eyes, may have mouth slightly open with relaxed lips and loose tongue.



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