



The Body Language and Emotion of Dogs: A Practical Guide to the Physical and Behavioral Displays Owners and Dogs Exchange and How to Use Them to Create a Lasting Bond

By Myrna M. Milani

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Why do dogs and their owners, both social animals, often have problems? As a practicing veterinarian, Dr. Milani found that many owners fail to understand the meaning of dogs' behavioral displays. By mistaking territoriality for spite, dominant behavior for love, and making other false interpretations, owners often respond inappropriately. Many owners also fail to grasp how their own emotions and body language affect their relationships with their pets. Here, based on fascinating case histories from her own practice, Dr. Milani offers a guide that goes beyond solving dog behavioral problems.

The Body Language and Emotion of Dogs also explores the powerful emotions aroused in those of us who seek satisfactory bonds with our pets. Understanding both the social nature of dogs and also that our own emotional responses enhance the physical, mental, and emotional health of both owner and pet. Dr. Milani uses fact, practical experience, and above all, sensitivity and tolerance to help owners build better relationships with their dogs.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In explaining the complexities of canine psychology and human interaction, Milani provides excellent information on special problems, such as depression, fear, aggression, boredom, and isolation. Charming, realistic views of people through a dog's eyes reveal the effects of behavioral and emotional states on relationships. Unlike training books, this focuses on interpreting canine body language, assigning motives, and developing an effective response. Since little has been published on this topic, this will be of interest to students of animal health and behavior. Written with repetitious examples in a continuous style that tends to require reading of the entire book, this is unsuitable as a reference resource, and may not appeal to the average dog owner. Recommended for larger collections. Carolyn Alexander, USACDEC Technical Information Ctr., Fort Ord, Cal.

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About the Author

Myrna M. Milani graduated from the Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine and has taught and spoken widely on various aspects of the human-animal bond. She has also written *The Body Language and Emotion of Cats* (also available from Quill/William Morrow).

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Chapter One

Seeing Is Not Believing

Bob Kalish had just whistled for his sheepdog, Shaggy, to terminate their romp in the park when a group of picnickers asked for directions. As Bob stood talking with the group, a gray and white blur shot out of the dense undergrowth and barreled down on them like a cannonball.

"Excuse me," said Bob, stepping apart from the group. As the others watched in horror and then amazement, the four-legged projectile hit Bob full force and knocked him to the ground. Owner and dog rolled over and over with much laughter and licking.

"That's some dog you have there," observed one of the picnickers.

"Oh, he's a lover," agreed Bob, rubbing Shaggy's ears fondly.

"You mean a killer," muttered a fearful woman at the back of the group who tightly clutched the hands of two children straining to get closer to the dog. "He'd better keep that dog on a leash or I'll report him to the park ranger!"

The Espositos took great pride in their devoted Doberman, Madd Max, because he defended their property so heroically. After watching Max romp with the rottweiler next door, little Joey invented a new game to play

with his dog: He would hide behind the couch, wait for Max to walk by, then growl ferociously, lunge at the dog, and try to pin him to the floor. The first time Joey tried his new game, Max whipped around and lashed out at the child, who toppled backward. Screaming, Joey clutched the side of his face.

"Max is vicious; I want him destroyed," Rose Esposito insisted when she brought Joey home from the emergency room.

"No, Mommy! It was my fault. I scared him," sobbed Joey. "Please don't kill my dog!"

Al Esposito looked at the fourteen stitches in his son's swollen and bruised face. Then he looked at Max lying at Joey's feet and staring at the boy with that familiar look of undying devotion.

Every time the Bennetts' doorbell rings, their springer spaniel, Photon, performs a dancing, barking ritual that led one guest to describe her aptly as "a mindless yapping cyclone."

"She's so devoted to us," the Bennetts invariably apologize to startled visitors. "We can't seem to convince her we don't need all this protection."

When the local dog officer served the Bennetts with a warning citing Photon as a public nuisance and threatening court action if the behavior persisted, the family felt crushed. At least one of their neighbors, sharing their guest's view of the yapping dog, had filed a complaint. The Bennetts ricocheted between embarrassment, guilt, remorse; and anger aimed at themselves, Photon, and their neighbors. These varied and conflicting emotions proved to be such a drain that the Bennetts sold their suburban dream home and moved to the country.

In this book we're going to explore how body language and its attendant emotions affect our relationships with our dogs. A few years ago the idea of body language as an important form of nonverbal communication preoccupied many psychologists and writers, who told us how to interpret the signals lovers, spouses, and bosses were giving us with their bodies. Armed with our lists of body signals and their associated meanings, we proceeded to "read" other people, thus reducing their need for verbal expression of conscious (and unconscious) emotions. Unsuspecting women who crossed their ankles would find themselves branded brazen hussies by other women while simultaneously deflecting the unwanted attention of men responding to their silent come-hither calls. Harried businessmen who loosened their ties and ran a hand through their hair unwittingly revealed to all those privy to the vocabulary of body language that they were insensitive and too attached to their mothers. Eventually the fad died out as it became clear that interpretations of body language are so subjective that any signal sender and any receiver could attach totally different meanings to any gesture. When Shiela assumed that the way her boss sat during meetings indicated deep-seated insecurities and latent sexual problems, you can imagine her embarrassment when she learned that he sits that way because he's recovering from a total hip replacement.

I asked a psychologist friend to help me understand the relationship between body language and emotion in people. From my own experience I knew that a physical signal such as a wink could mean one thing to one person and something entirely different to another. But weren't there some general rules of interpretation?

"Yes--sort of," my friend said. "However, the meaning of physical cues goes far beyond simple cause and

effect. If I winked at you during a boring lecture, you'd interpret my gesture as our sharing an inside joke; but if you winked at a strange man in a cocktail lounge, he'd interpret your cue as a sexual invitation. Still, even though the meaning of the signal depends on the situation and on the relationship of the people involved, we can loosely categorize signals. For example, a person standing at the side of the road with his thumb in the air wants a ride."

We explored this example further, discussing how the hitchhiker's stance could trigger a wide range of emotional responses in passing motorists. Shoulders back, eyes glaring, feet planted firmly might suggest that this person wouldn't be a safe passenger, whereas a bright but weary smile might evoke compassion.

"It's a two-way street," my friend continued. "Body language may express a variety of emotions, and the interpreter of the signals adds his or her own emotions to the process. A driver who's been mugged and robbed by a hitchhiker obviously views all hitchhikers differently than one who's only had positive experiences picking up riders."

"I think I've got it," I said. "If the IRS audits ten percent of all taxpayers, that's body language; if they audit me, that's emotion. If the fourth-grade band performs with distinction in the statewide competition, that's body language; if my son's playing the tuba, that's emotion."

Users Review

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