Pet Behavior & Communication Guide

Pet Radius • Understanding Canine & Feline Body Language & Common Behaviors

Understanding your pet's body language and behavioral cues is essential for building trust, preventing anxiety, and addressing common challenges effectively. Use this reference guide to interpret signals and apply positive reinforcement techniques.

1. CANINE BODY LANGUAGE QUICK REFERENCE

EMOTIONAL STATE	BODY POSTURE & TAIL SIGNAL	FACIAL CUES & EYES
Relaxed & Happy	Loose body, soft posture, gently wagging tail at neutral height.	Soft, relaxed eyes; open mouth with relaxed tongue.
Alert & Curious	Weight forward, ears perked up, tail held horizontally or slightly high.	Direct gaze, closed mouth or slight focus, intent expression.
Anxious & Stress Cues	Tense posture, tail tucked low or wagging stiffly, lip licking, yawning.	"Whites" of eyes showing (whale eye), avoiding direct contact.
Fearful / Defensive	Crouched low, weight shifted back, tail tightly tucked, raised hackles.	Ears pinned back flat against head, lip curling, growling.

2. FELINE BODY LANGUAGE QUICK REFERENCE

EMOTIONAL STATE	TAIL & EAR SIGNALS	BODY POSITION & VOCAL CUES
Relaxed & Content	Tail held high with a slight curve at tip; ears in neutral position.	Stretched out or loosely curled; gentle purring or knead movements.
Overstimulated / Annoyed	Tail twitching, flicking, or thumping; ears turned outward or back.	Rippling skin on back, sudden freeze, low growl or vocal protest.
Frightened / Threat Response	Puffed-out tail (bottle-brush appearance); ears flattened completely.	Arched back with fur raised (piloerection), hissing or spitting.

3. ADDRESSING COMMON BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

Canine Excessive Barking

Identify the trigger (boredom, alertness, or separation anxiety). Increase physical exercise and mental stimulation (puzzle toys). Reward quiet behavior immediately using high-value treats rather than yelling.

Feline Destructive Scratching

Scratching is a natural marking and stretching behavior. Provide vertical and horizontal sisal scratchers near favored resting areas. Use synthetic pheromone sprays (e.g., Feliway) to reduce stress-induced scratching.

Resource Guarding (Food / Toys)

Never forcibly take guarded items away. Practice trade-up games: offer a higher-value treat from a safe distance whenever approaching guarded items to build positive associations.

Core Principles of Positive Reinforcement

- **Reward Desired Behaviors Promptly:** Mark correct behavior within 1–2 seconds with praise or a treat.
- **Ignore or Redirect Unwanted Behaviors:** Avoid physical punishment or harsh reprimands, which increase anxiety and escalation.
- **Keep Sessions Short:** 5 to 10 minutes of consistent daily training yields better retention than lengthy sessions.
- **Consult Professionals:** For severe aggression, fearfulness, or sudden behavior shifts, consult a certified veterinary behaviorist or professional trainer.