

MEDIA RELEASE

7 July 2009

Promoting
Responsible
Dog
Ownership



Body language speaks to dogs louder than words

Many owners believe their dogs understand every word they say to their dog. In reality, dogs are more likely to look at body language and listen to the tone of the voice rather than words when trying to translate human-talk into dog-talk. As certain actions can be interpreted by dogs as aggressive and confronting, **Dogs NSW** recommends owners learn about their dog's body language traits to foster a more harmonious relationship.

"During spoken interaction between humans, we look at body language for extra information about what a person is trying to say. The same is true with dogs. As pack animals, they communicate both consciously and subliminally through body language to one another. When they try to interpret what their owners are trying to say to them, they look less for vocal cues and more for visual cues.", says veterinarian and **Dogs NSW** spokesperson **Dr Peter Higgins**.

Many owners believe that vocal commands that they give their dogs (sit, stay, lie down etc.) are the most effective way for getting them to obey tasks. In reality, it is the movements that accompany this command and tone of voice that is more comprehensible to the dogs.

"When I'm trying to get my dogs to obey a task, I use a spoken command, but accompany it with gesture or hand movement to reinforce the command. When you say 'lie down' you can point at the ground to reinforce the message.", suggests **Dr Higgins**.

There are a number of signals that humans can accidentally give dogs that can intimidate, anger, or inadvertently excite them when that is not the owner's intention. Making eye contact with a dog is interpreted as a confronting challenge, and may cause aggressive or overly submissive reactions, depending on the dog. Touching a dog around the head and muzzle and moving quickly directly towards an unfamiliar dog can also solicit aggressive behaviour.

"To make eye contact with a dog is to make a challenge. Dominant dogs will stare back and growl, whereas the more submissive animal will whimper and sometimes urinate in defence."

"*Everyone* needs to be aware of how dogs react towards certain visual cues, not just owners. Unfortunately, it is often children, who are less experienced with interacting with animals that can accidentally rile a dog up and cause it to act dangerously. Knowing these basic rules of interaction will help minimise accidents in the future.", states **Dr Higgins**.

Dogs NSW recommends owners include the following steps when training their dogs to better understand them:

- Get to know the dog's personality and temperament. Are they dominant and aggressive, or shy and submissive?
- Don't allow people with little experience around dogs to be alone with your's.
- Learn and practise good canine manners in regards to eye contact and where to grab them when you need to.
- Learn about their personal body language traits
- Teach dogs signals rather than vocal cues. These are more quickly and effectively learnt.

"Just adding these few simple steps during training makes your life easier and creates a better relationship between you and your dog.", says **Dr Higgins**.

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