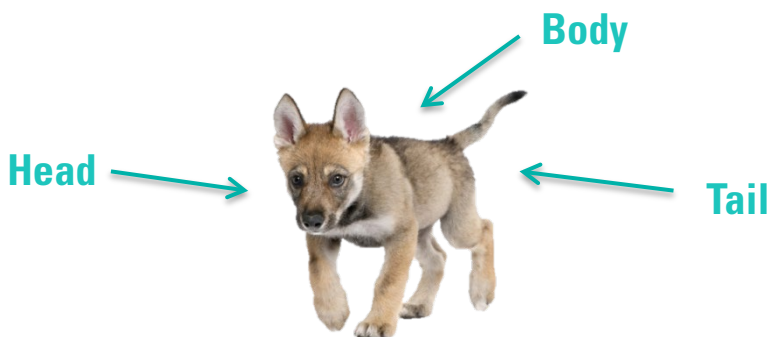# How Dog Communicate

Like people, dogs communicate in a variety of ways using chemical, acoustic, tactile, and visual signals. One of the most obvious ways they attempt to communicate with us is through their visual body language. As dog caretakers, it is essential that we learn to "speak dog" by building an understanding of dog body language.

Step 1: Look at the whole dog
Observing dog body language requires looking at the dog's entire body (head, body, and tail) to understand the whole picture.

Step 2: Look at the context
Now that you can observe dog body language, it is important to put it into context. Taking the environment into account is an important part of reading your dog's body language. Consider the following example: The dog below is licking his lips and raising his paw. These are usually recognized as signs of stress; however, when in the presence of a food bowl, lip licking and walking toward the food bowl are more likely to be anticipatory/excited behaviors Depending on whether the dog is presented with a potentially exciting stimulus (food bowl) or a potentially stressful or fearful stimulus (rolled up newspaper), the dog's body language cannot be accurately interpreted.

Step 3: Determine next steps
Once you've looked at the whole picture: the dog's whole body as well as the context, it's time to determine your next steps.

When reading dog body language, it's important to be proactive in predicting their next move as well as planning yours. The ability to understand how dogs communicate can help keep you, your dog, and your family safe. The following pictures are examples of dog behavior communicating their internal state, and what you should do about it.

Happy/Relaxed -> continue to reinforce these behaviors through relaxation, play, and bonding.

Excited/Stressed -> decide whether dog is able to respond to cues or if the dog needs a break

Early Warning Signals -> either remove the dog from the situation or remove the triggering stimulus

Warning Signals -> immediately separate the dog and the stimulus, reconsider future situations