



CALMING SIGNALS: UNDERSTANDING YOUR DOG'S NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE



A short summary and illustration of the work by Turid Rugaas of Norway

Reference: Turid Rugaas. *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals*. 1997. *Calming Signals: What Your Dog Tells You*. (video) 2000. Both are available from **Legacy by Mail** and are excellent references well worth having! (360) 683-9646 P.O. Box 697 Carlsborg, WA 98324 www.legacy-by-mail.com

What Are Calming Signals?

Calming signals are certain behaviors used to communicate from dog to dog that no conflict is desired and no harm is intended. Dogs use these signals with each other to calm each other down and to help keep the peace in a pack. Calming signals are all about preventing and avoiding an argument or conflict. Sometimes dogs even use these signals to calm themselves down when they feel stressed. Many times dogs give these signals to humans, but they go unrecognized and un-returned – many times this lack of understanding leads to misunderstandings between humans and dogs.

- TURNING OF THE HEAD / AVERTING THE EYES
- TURNING THE BODY AWAY
- TONGUE FLICKING
- FREEZING POSITION / STOPPING / SITTING / LAYING FLAT
- WALKING SLOWLY WITH TAIL MOVING SLOWLY
- YAWNING / STRETCHING
- SNIFFING
- SCRATCHING
- LIFTING THE PAW / BOWING
- URINATING
- SHAKING OFF
- PRETENDING TO BE INTERESTED IN SOMETHING ELSE
- SPLITTING UP (A THIRD DOG COMES IN BETWEEN TWO DOGS THAT ARE IN CONFLICT – NOT FRONTALLY, BUT FROM THE SIDE OR BEHIND)
- ARCHING PATHS (AWAY FROM EACH OTHER TO COMMUNICATE THAT NO HARM IS INTENDED)





How Can Calming Signals Be Used By Humans?

Humans should learn to recognize calming signals so that they understand when a dog is stressed. If a dog is giving these signals, he's waiting for the signals to be returned to show that no conflict is desired. If the signals are not returned and the stressful event continues, the dog may continue with more signals to try to communicate again, or may try to leave the situation. If the dog is unable to leave the situation and is forced to deal with the stress, the dog may have no other choice but to react defensively. (This is often the scenario of many dog biting incidents with children, although the calming signals before the conflict often go un-noticed.)



- Humans can learn to recognize these calming signals in training and realize that a dog is feeling stressed and trying to communicate that feeling....not being disobedient.
- Humans can learn to mimic these same signals (especially the yawning, head turning, and stretching with arms pointed down) to calm a dog down that is worried.
- Humans can use the technique of "splitting" to maintain better relationships between dogs and to communicate desire for pack harmony.

Please note: splitting does **not** mean putting oneself in the middle of a dog fight...it means applying it when two dogs are interacting energetically, but neither is giving calming signals. It's a means of saying "o.k., guys, knock it off", but should **not** be used in a dog fight. Dog fights are best disrupted by making a loud noise away from the dogs...like clapping your hands, shaking up a can of soda and letting it spurt out, throwing water on the dogs, or dropping something on the floor. **Never, ever put your hands or body anywhere near dogs' heads to break up a dog fight.**

- Humans can use arching paths on walks to help dogs learn to properly communicate to other dogs and to help them avoid conflicts.
- Humans can learn to avoid dog aggression by recognizing these calming signals and returning the calming signals to let the dog know that no harm is intended.

