



27 Dog Calming



Signals + What To

Do When You



See Them



MIKE JAMES

Founder of

www.dreamdogformula.com



PREFACE

When something's not right...

Your pooch can't say directly what they feel.

But, they could show many cues using their body.

And since the signs can be subtle...

It's easy to ignore them if you don't know what to look for.

So to help you understand doggy language...

Continue reading to learn:

- 27 dog calming signals you must know.
- 7 things you should do when you see them.
- 6 reasons why knowing dog calming signals is important.
- And many more...

CONTENTS

PREFACE	2
What are dog calming signals?	4
Why do dogs use calming signals?	5
The importance of recognizing calming signals in dogs	5
27 dog calming signals	6
#1: Lip licking	6
#2: Lip smacking	7
#3: Tongue flicking	8
#4: Head turning	9
#5: Full-body turn	10
#6: Avoiding gaze	11
#7: 'Whale eye'	12
#8: Freezing	13
#9: Shaking off	14
#10: Yawning	15
#11: Sniffing	16
#12: Sudden scratching	17
#13: Panting at rest	18
#14: 'Play bow'	19
#15: Tail-wagging	20
#16: Paw raise	21
#17: Splitting up	22
#18: Licking	23
#19: Walking slowly	23
#20: Curving	24
#21: Sitting on the ground	25

#22: Lying down	26
#23: Crouching	27
#24: Tucked tail	28
#25: Having a 'soft face'	28
#26: Blinking	29
#27: Winking	30
 What to do when you see dog calming signals?	 32
#1: Never ignore them	32
#2: Give your dog space	33
#3: Identify the cause	33
#4: Avoid or leave	34
#5: Don't use punishments	35
#6: Train to reduce anxiety	35
#7: Keep building trust	36
 Are dog calming signals bad?	 37
REFERENCES	38

What are dog calming signals?

Dog calming signals are '*polite gestures*' that help avoid conflicts and relay desires. First, they maintain peace by appearing friendly to others during play and interactions. Also, it may stop fights and reduce tension among individuals. But dogs show these cues when stressed or threatened as well.

Why do dogs use calming signals?

Dogs use calming signals to:

- Avoid possible conflicts.
- Show they're not a threat.
- Tell others they're anxious.
- Soothe themselves or other animals/humans.

Thus, these cues could mean many things.

And it'll depend on the context.

So please pay close attention to it.

For example, a dog licking their lips after eating's normal.

But if they do it all of a sudden... And when someone approaches them, you can count it as a soothing gesture.

The importance of recognizing calming signals in dogs

Recognizing calming signals in dogs is important to maintain healthy interactions. As well as your Fido's well-being.

Because if you know what the cues mean, you can:

- Calm anxiety.
- Prevent aggression.
- Get your dog out of stressful situations.
- Realize their true emotions and desires.
- Make your Fido feel understood and secure.
- Ensure your safety and everyone around your dog.

27 dog calming signals

#1: Lip licking



You may see your dog do this after they eat. Or while waiting excitedly for their meal.

But if there's no food, your fur baby might be:

- Scared.
- Uncomfortable.

Experts say this is more likely if lip licking comes with other stress signals, like:^[1]

- Pinned ears.
- Tense body and face.

Based on a study, this is a common calming signal.^[2]

And dogs often lick their lips when threatened.

So your furry friend may do this around a stranger. As well as if they're hugged or picked up when not in the mood.

 **Trivia:** Turid Rugaas, a dog trainer, coined the term '*calming signals*.' She's the author of a [book](#) on the said topic. Which is named '*On Talking Terms With Dogs: Calming Signals*.'

#2: Lip smacking



This is similar to lip licking.

But this time, you'll hear sounds as your dog smacks their lips together. And while swiping their tongue in their mouth.

You might see this signal when your furry friend tries to calm someone.

For example, they can do this in front of you if you raise your voice.

Or when another dog snarls at your Fido.

But they could also do this due to:

- Hunger.
- Nausea.
- Acid reflux.
- Dental problems.
- Excitement over food.

#3: Tongue flicking



When anxious, dogs can also stick their tongue out.

Then lick their lips alternately.

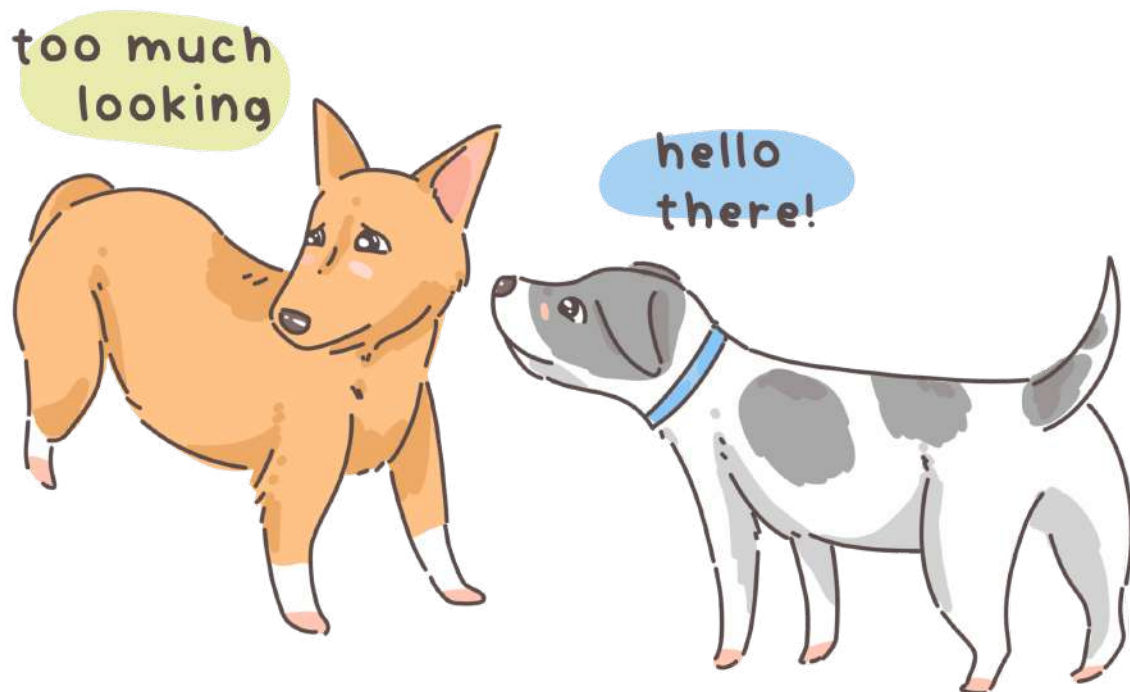
This is a clear sign they're stressed. Or they don't like whatever's happening.

So when your fur baby flicks their tongue...

Other canines usually back off.

And this lets them maintain a safe distance for interaction.

#4: Head turning



A dog turning their head to the other side's not being shy.

It's another calming signal. Or an action that means they're uncomfortable.

Your Fido may do this when another dog comes to them head-on.

Or if a stranger looms or stares directly at them.

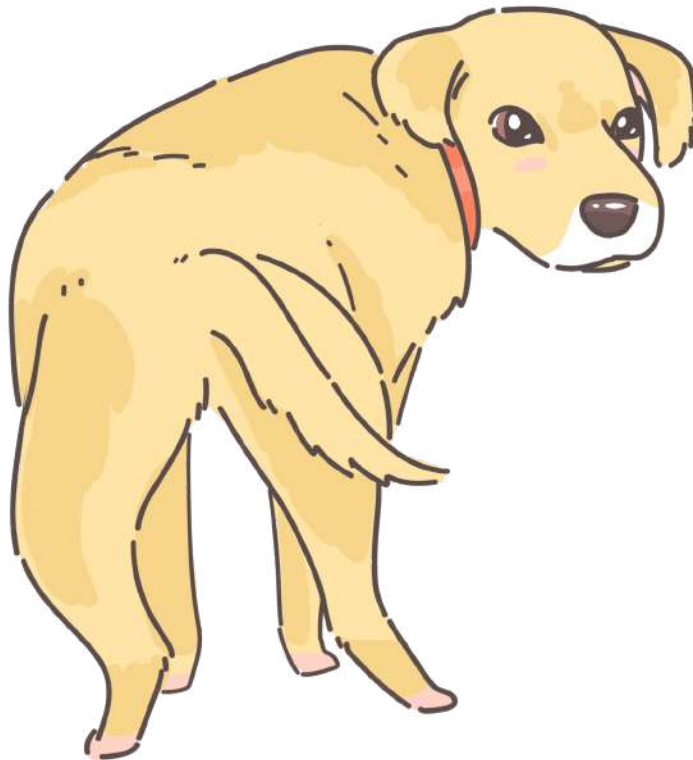
This is because in the doggy world...

A short eye contact's fine.

But a long, direct gaze means rude and threatening.

So your furry friend might bark at you if you stare at them for so long. As they'll be scared or confused.

#5: Full-body turn



Instead of turning only their faces...

Dogs can also do it with their whole body.

Again, they do this to avoid confrontations. Or to calm another dog or human.

#6: Avoiding gaze



Does your Fido look away when you stare at them?

If so, you might be invading their space.

Or doing things they find intimidating. Say gazing at them for so long or bending over them.

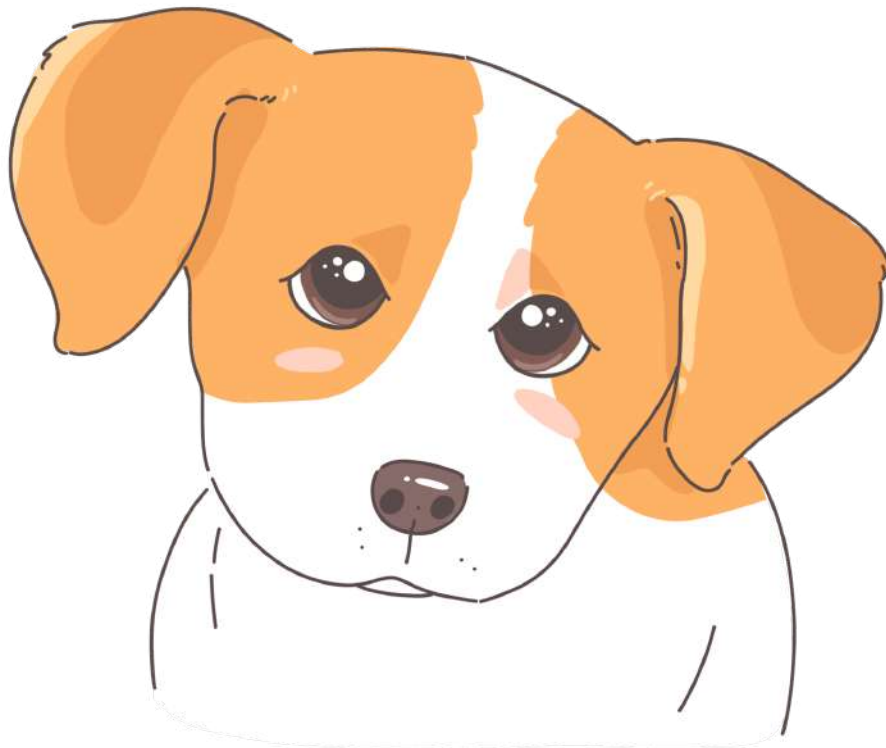
In short, avoiding eye contact's their polite way of saying,

"I'm scared."

Or *"I don't like what you're doing right now."*

 **Note:** Experts say this isn't a sign of guilt. Dogs can't feel complex emotions like this and shame. So if your dog looks away when you scold them, it's due to fear. And you must avoid doing it.^[3]

#7: 'Whale eye'



This is when a dog turns their head slightly.

Then show the whites of their eyes, a.k.a. 'sclera.'

Typically, this is a sign of stress or fear.

But a whale eye can also mean your dog will soon be aggressive when provoked more.

 **Note:** Avoid mistaking this for simply looking to their side. If your Fido's anxious, they'll also show some of the signs included on this list.

#8: Freezing



A study shows this is one of the dogs' most common calming signals.^[4]

And the list also includes other cues I said earlier, such as:

- Lip licking.
- Head-turning.
- Looking away.

Our furry friends can do this to tell other Fidos they're not a threat.

For example, your pooch may freeze when a big, unfamiliar Fido sniffs them.

But they can also stop whatever they're doing if they're threatened or in need of space.

Like if your dog's uncomfortable while being petted or hugged.

Now, as your Fido's not moving...

They might also be analyzing the situation. And wondering,

"Should I flee or fight?"

If your dog feels trapped and highly stressed...

Freezing can progress into aggression, as per vets.^[5]

Thus, stay away if you see this signal on your pooch. And ensure no one touches them until they settle down.

#9: Shaking off



A dog who hasn't taken a shower but keeps shaking their whole body might be stressed.

There's no moisture or dirt to get rid of.

So they must be relieving some tension.

You might observe this behavior while dogs play. Or after you pet your anxious Fido.

 **Trivia:** Doctors say this is also humans' way to destress.^[6]

"What does shaking do?"

It helps:

- Release tension.
- Calm the nervous system.
- Burn extra 'adrenaline' - a hormone that increases energy and heart rate.

#10: Yawning



If you see this behavior when it's not even naptime...

Your dog might also be under stress. Especially if they do it many times in a row.

Research shows that too much yawning can be a result of:^[7]

- Stress.
- Anxiety.

So you may notice this behavior while:

- Training.
- Learning tricks.
- Strolling in a dog park.

#11: Sniffing



During a stressful event...

Some dogs may look away from the trigger.

But other Fidos might sniff instead to avoid conflicts.

For example, they could suddenly smell the ground or air. As if they're looking for a treasure.

When in fact, there's nothing to search for anyway.

"Why do they do this?"

VCA calls this a '*displacement*' or '*avoidance*' behavior.^[8]

It's an action that dogs do to divert their attention in times of stress.

It helps avoid conflicts. Plus, it also lessens the tension in their body.

#12: Sudden scratching



A tense dog may suddenly have an itch too. Then shake off afterward.

In the human world, this is equal to nervous habits like:

- Nail biting.
- Thumb sucking.
- Knuckle cracking.

And dogs do this to convey and relieve stress.

#13: Panting at rest



Your furry friend doesn't have many sweat glands like you.

So the only way to cool down their body is by panting.

Thus, they'll do it when they feel hot or have finished exercising.

But if your dog isn't in either of the 2 situations...

They could be panting due to anxiety.

And some Fidos can even do it for hours.

"How would I be able to tell the reason?"

To know this, look at your dog's tongue.

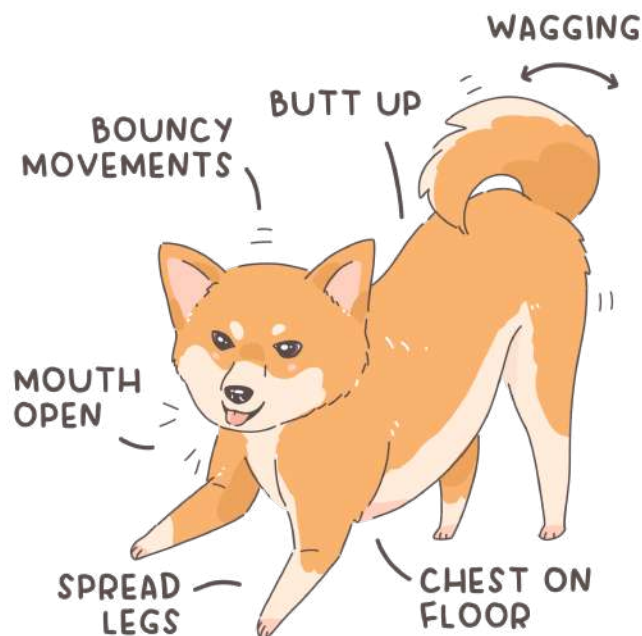
It'll be stiff and in the back of their mouth in stress panting.

But their tongue will be floppy if they're hot.

⚠ Warning: This can also be a sign of life-threatening conditions. Say poisoning, heatstroke, and heart failure. So bring your dog to the vet asap if they show these other symptoms:

- Vomiting.
- Seizures.
- Coughing.
- Excessive thirst.
- High body temperature.

#14: 'Play bow'



You might be familiar with this as a playful behavior.

It may look different per breed.

But you'll notice most of these actions:

- Wagging the tail.
- Raising of the rear end.
- Putting paws and elbows on the ground.

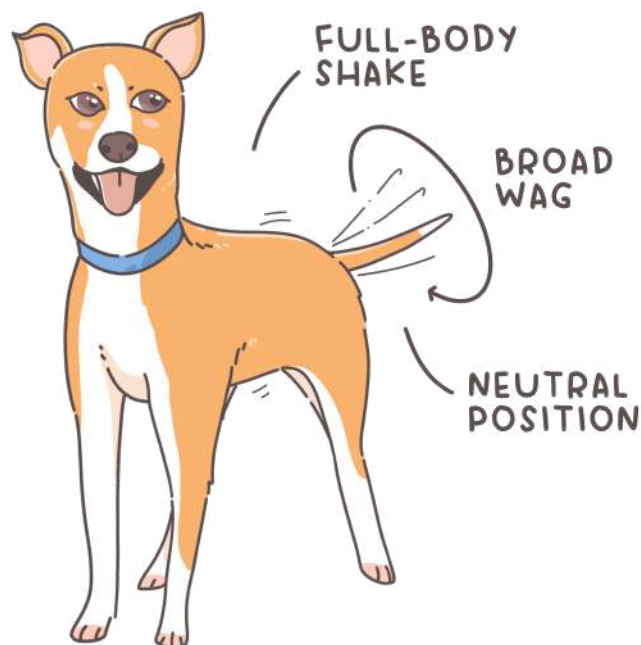
However, besides being an invitation to play...

It's also a dog calming signal.

They do this to appear friendly to other Fidos. Particularly those who are wary or shy.

But our furry pals also use this to calm other hounds during rough play.

#15: Tail-wagging



Dogs do this to greet other Fidos and humans.

So it's a typical friendly gesture.

But did you know it's not always the case?

One research says the meaning varies per direction.^[9]

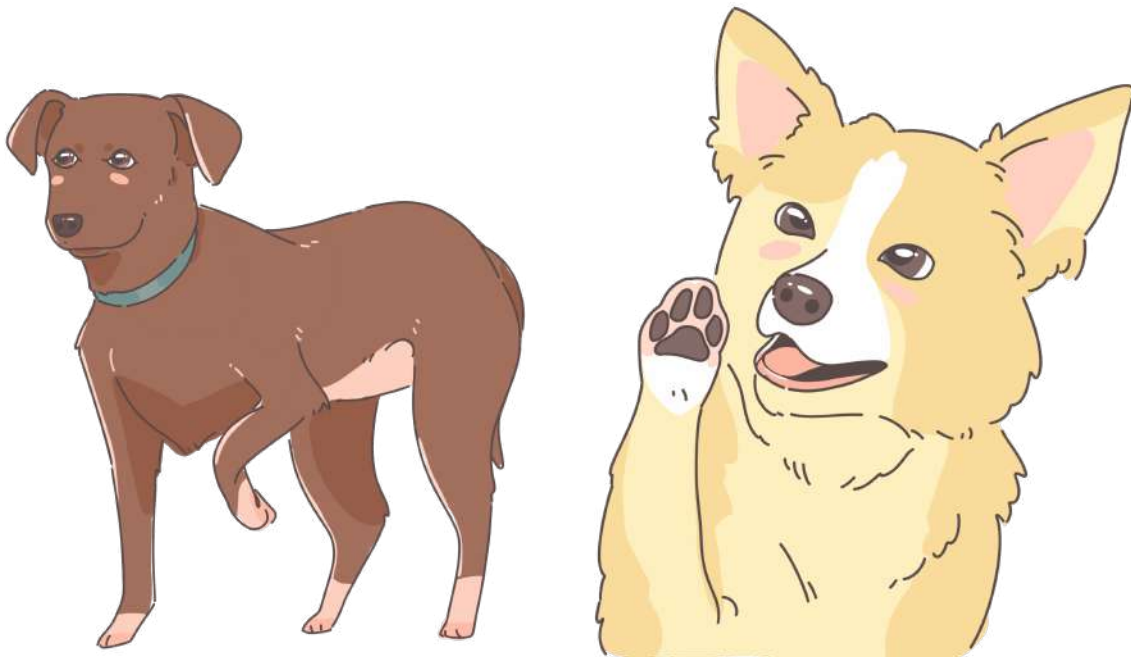
For example, dogs wag their tails to the right if they see someone they know.

But they'll wag it to the left when they meet a stranger.

So tail wagging can be both a:

- Greeting.
- Sign of fear or stress.

#16: Paw raise



In dogs, lifting a foot could mean many things.

They do it when greeting or when they're excited about a treat.

However, hunting breeds are trained to raise a leg. Then point in the direction of the prey.

But dogs can also lift a paw if they feel threatened. And if they want to escape.

#17: Splitting up



Here's a clear, calming signal.

When things get a little bit tense among dogs or humans...

A Fido may physically put themselves between them to prevent conflicts.

I remember a story from my friend.

Whenever 2 of her dogs start playing roughly...

Her other smaller pooch gets between them to reduce the tension.

 **Interesting fact:** This is commonly mistaken as jealousy while in fact, your dog just wants to keep you safe.

#18: Licking

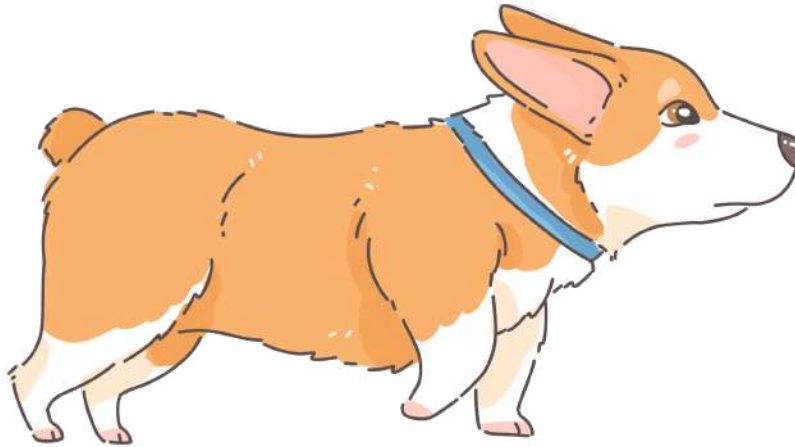


A dog may do this to calm a person or another Fido.

They might have gotten this from their puppyhood.

As mother Fidos lick their babies to soothe them down.

#19: Walking slowly



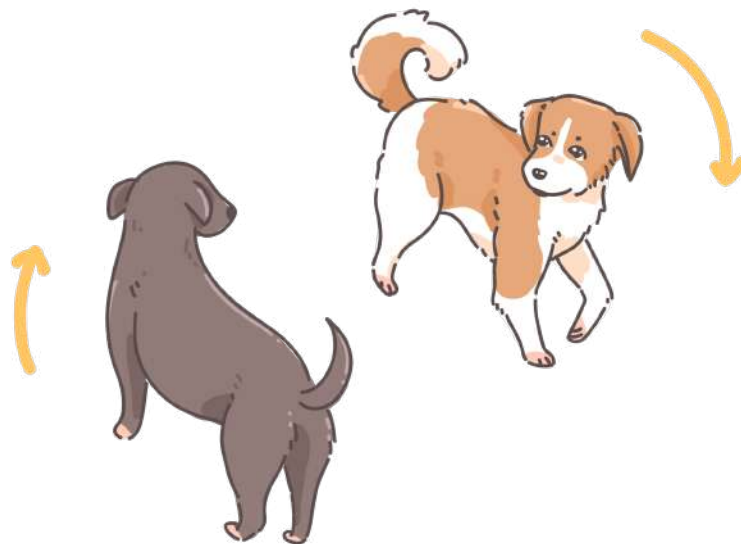
Dogs can sense human emotions.

And they mainly do this by listening to the tone of our voices.

So if you call your pooch upset, they'll pick up on it.

Then they may go to you with caution. Which causes them to move slowly.

#20: Curving



Instead of walking in a straight line...

Dogs who are unsure or meeting new Fidos often do the '*curving*.'

"How?"

Instead of approaching the other dog directly...

They'll walk to the side in a curve. Both when going and leaving.

Which help prevents confrontations.

#21: Sitting on the ground



This simple trick can get a dog out of stressful situations.

For example, if you call your Fido angrily or stress them during training...

They may turn away from you. And then sit down.

This means your pooch wants you to calm down. Plus, they need a short break.

Dogs can also sit as other hounds run toward them.

Which stops the Fidos from barking and potentially attacking.

#22: Lying down



This has similar effects as sitting.

Lying down can also help prevent conflicts in dogs.

Especially if they show their bellies.

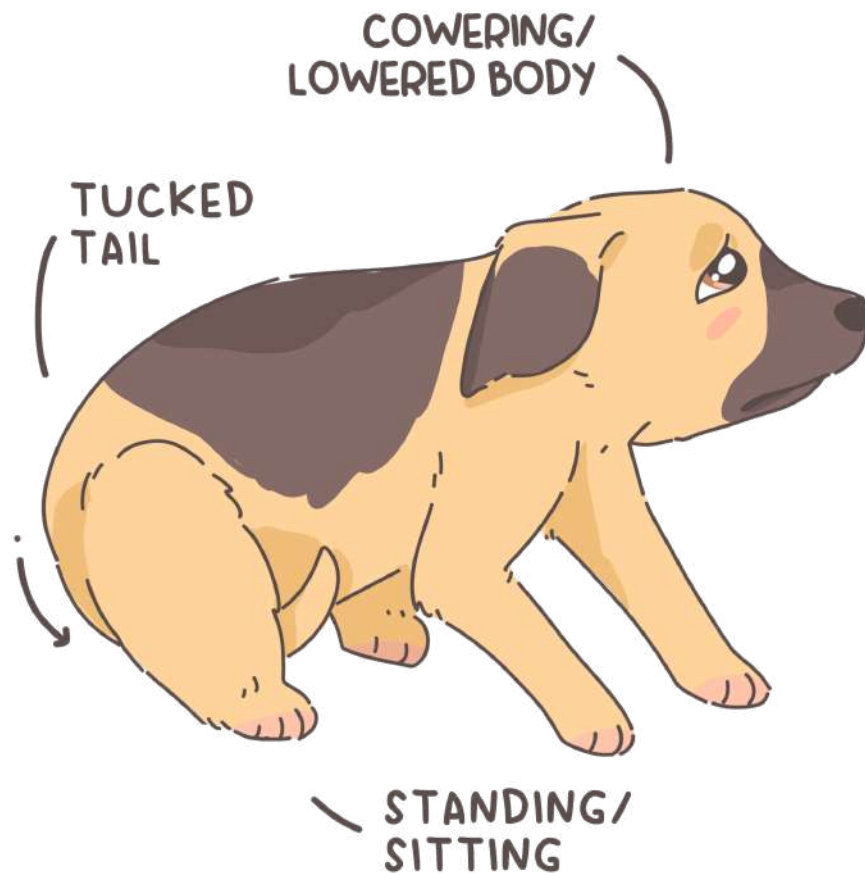
"But why's that?"

It's because the posture means submission.

Their tummies are one of their vulnerable areas.

So it's like they're surrendering. And saying to others, they mean no harm.

#23: Crouching



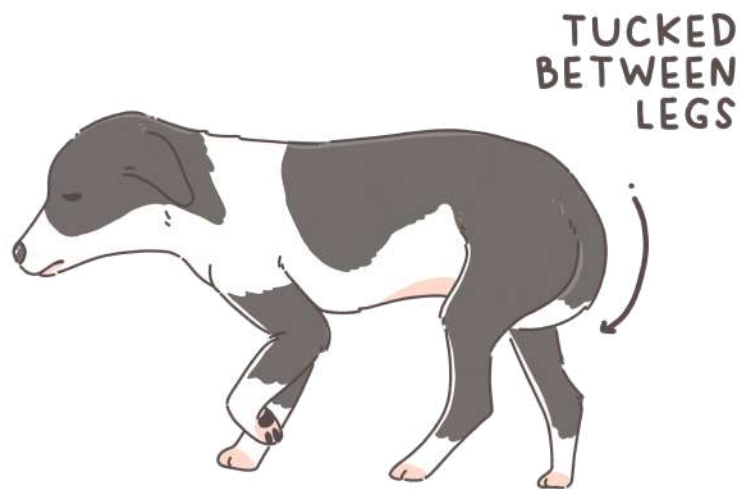
When scared, dogs might also curl up in a ball.

They do this to look smaller and appear less threatening.

And to '*shrink*' themselves, they'll:

- Cower.
- Arch their back.
- Lower their head.
- Have pinned ears.
- Put their tail down.

#24: Tucked tail



A nervous dog will also have their tail down between their back legs.

And this is like holding a note which says,

"Please go easy on me. I'm no threat."



Note: They may slightly wag it to the left. But they might tuck it closer to their body if they're too scared.

#25: Having a 'soft face'



Dogs are aware of other Fidos' facial expressions. As well as humans.'

In fact, vets share dogs are able to tell something's wrong when we frown.^[10]

And like us, they also communicate using their faces.

So to calm down others, dogs may do a 'soft face.'

"What does it look like?"

- Closed mouth.
- Lowered eyelids.
- Smooth forehead.

#26: Blinking



If a dog blinks, they're likely nervous and uncomfortable.

It's a way to tell others they have peaceful intentions.
So the Fidos don't have to be wary of them.

In addition, the eyebrows of the dog may be furrowed. And their forehead may be tense.

 **Note:** Consider the context and watch out for signs of illnesses. As blinking can also be a result of eye problems. Say glaucoma or foreign bodies.

#27: Winking



Lastly, did you know your Fido can wink?

It's a calming signal. Which also helps soothe a dog's nerves.

But winking with one eye can mean other things too, such as:

- Joy.
- Spasms.
- Invitation to play.
- Attention-seeking.
- Gratitude (done often after meals).

What to do when you see dog calming signals?

#1: Never ignore them



Once you spot a cue on your dog, find out what it means.

Then act accordingly - depending on what your Fido needs.

They're showing those signals for a reason. Either they're telling you to stop or soothing you down.

So ignoring those signs can make them more fearful, worsen things, and break their trust in you.

#2: Give your dog space

Usually, our furry friends use calming signals when they're not at ease.

And if they still feel threatened or restricted...

Fear can escalate to aggression.

So back off at once for your safety and your Fido's well-being.

If you're doing something with them, they might dislike it.

Thus, stop and move a few steps backward.

This won't only allow you to observe them from a distance...

But doing this can also make your dog feel safe. And let them settle down.

#3: Identify the cause

As you give your dog space, watch them closely.

Then figure out what's scaring them or making them uncomfortable.

It could be an object nearby, a noise, another animal, or a person.

Also, it might be your presence or action.

Anything's possible.

So observe how your Fido reacts afterward. And try to connect the dots.

#4: Avoid or leave



Once you know the cause, avoid it if possible.

Or leave the area with your Fido to prevent further conflicts.

For example, if your dog shows signals while you pet them, stop right away.

And avoid stroking them in that area in the meantime.

If the trigger's another Fido, prevent them from interacting as you train your pooch.

And keep doing this until your dog learns there's nothing to be afraid of.

Do what it takes to make your furry pal comfortable again.

But for a more long-term effect, try the other tips below.

#5: Don't use punishments

A scared dog might do an action repeatedly to soothe their nerves.

Say, scratching their neck or smacking their lips.

Also, during training...

An anxious Fido may not listen to you.

Instead of doing a command, they'll sit or lie down.

But although these might be annoying...

Be extra patient with your dog.

Never hit or scold them.

Because punishments, whether verbal or physical, will only cause more fear.

Or worse, it can even ruin your bond.

#6: Train to reduce anxiety

If you can't always avoid your dog's stressor...

Slowly get them used to it. Until they show no nervous reactions.

For instance, do this if your Fido shows calming signals as you bathe them.
Or while going to the clinic.

Now, to train your dog...

Vets say you must do these 2 methods:^[11]

Counter-conditioning

Changing a dog's negative reaction toward the trigger to a positive one.

You can do this with the correct timing. Along with the help of treats or toys.

Just replace the bad association your pooch made with a new positive experience.

Desensitization

This is slowly exposing your Fido to the stressor - from low to high intensity.

You can ask for help from a vet or trainer to do this.

But first, record your dog while doing the signals. This is to help them assess your Fido's behavior.



Note: Watch out for calming signals to keep the training positive. Stop and go back a step if they seem anxious. And go on if they're alright with it.

#7: Keep building trust



Lastly, did you recently adopt your pooch?

If so, they may refuse to come to you. And show calming signals while you're around.

In this case, get your Fido to trust you by:

- Being patient.
- Getting on their level.
- Respecting their space.
- Knowing their stressors.
- Keeping your composure around them.

You'll know if your dog trusts you enough if they want to stay beside you.

Or greet you excitedly when you arrive home.

Are dog calming signals bad?

Dog calming signals aren't bad. They use these cues to stop fights or prevent one from happening. And also to reassure their playmates if things get too rough.

So these don't necessarily mean they're stressed or in danger. As it'll depend on the situation.

REFERENCES

1. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/vet-school/services/behaviour-clinic/dogbehaviouralsigns/interpretingbehaviour.html>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1558787816302490>
3. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/canine-corner/202107/do-dogs-really-feel-guilt-informal-demonstration>
4. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267697031_Analysis_of_calming_signals_in_domestic_dogs_Are_they_signals_and_are_they_calming
5. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/fear-vs-aggression>
6. <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/can-shaking-your-body-heal-stress-and-trauma#Can-shaking-help-with-stress?>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3678674/>
8. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/signs-your-dog-is-stressed-and-how-to-relieve-it>
9. [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(07\)00949-9](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(07)00949-9)
10. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/do-dogs-recognize-facial-expressions>
11. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/introduction-to-desensitization-and-counterconditioning>