

Children's Resources: How Animals Feel



Word of the Day: Feelings

Feelings are also called emotions, which are what we feel on the inside. Feelings help us communicate with other people and help us understand ourselves. Everyone has feelings, including animals!

Some emotions feel good and some feel scary or uncomfortable. For example, sometimes we feel happy! We can also feel sad, scared, angry, or nervous. Your body will tell you how you're feeling, and then you can talk about it and figure out what to do next.

Discussion Questions

- How are you feeling today?
- How is your pet feeling today? How do you know?
- What would make your pet feel happy today?
- Have you ever felt sad? What helps you when you feel sad?
- What might help your pet when they feel sad?

Common Feelings Chart



Happy



Sad



Angry



Scared



Excited

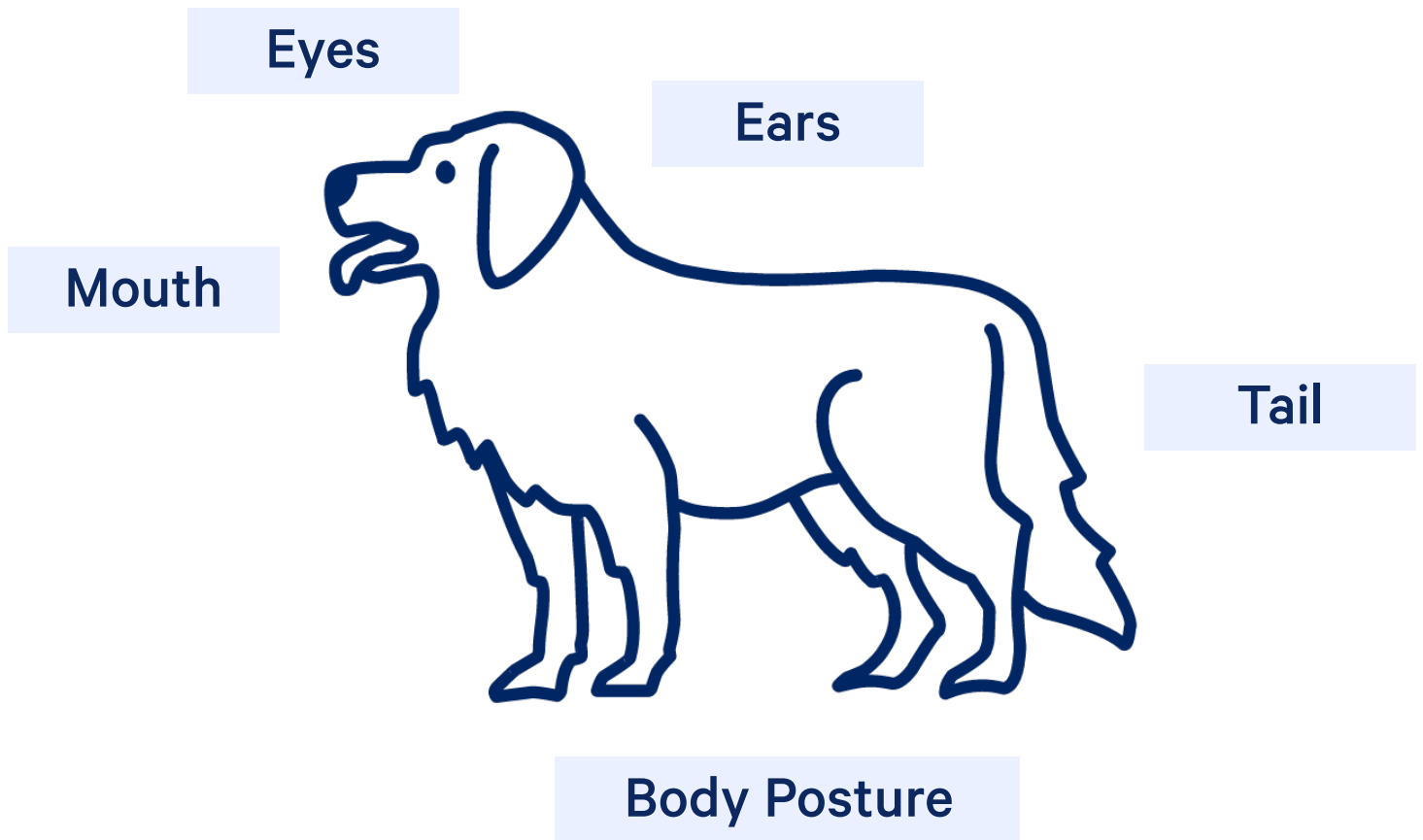


Nervous

Children's Resources: How Animals Feel

Understanding Dog Behavior

Unlike people, animals cannot talk to us when they are feeling happy, sad, angry, or scared. But, that doesn't mean we can't figure out how they are feeling! Dogs use their bodies to communicate (talk) with us. To understand a dog's body language, look for these clues:



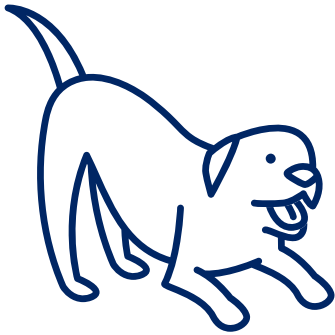
What to look for:

- Eyes — figure out where the dog is looking and for how long
- Ears — examine the position of the dog's ears
- Mouth — look to see if the dog's mouth is open, closed, or showing teeth and figure out what types of sound the dog is making, if any
- Body Posture — figure out what stance the dog's body is in
- Tail — examine the position of the dog's tail and how it moves

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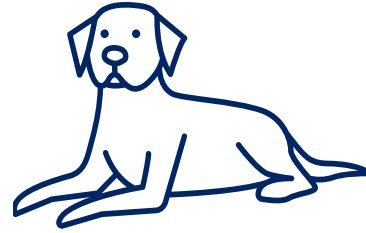
Understanding Dog Behavior

Happy



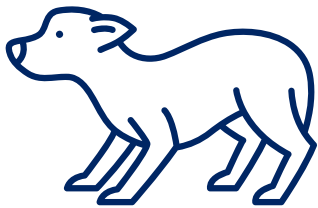
A happy or excited dog's mouth may be open and panting. The ears may be perked up and the tail might be held up and wagging side to side.

Calm



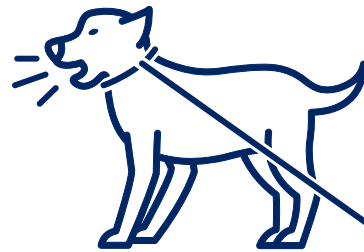
A calm or relaxed dog may have its ears to the side and its mouth slightly open. The dog's body will be in a relaxing position, such as lying down.

Nervous



A nervous or scared dog may turn its head away, put its tail between its legs, flatten back its ears, and crouch. You may also see the dog's body tremble.

Upset



An upset or aggressive dog may show its teeth, growl, and bark. The dog may narrow its eyes and hold its body very still.

Resources on Dog Behavior

Family Paws Parent Education - [link](#)

Fear Free Happy Homes - [link](#)

Doggone Safe - [link](#)

Reference:

AKC. *Canine Body Language: Your Dog is Trying to Tell You Something*

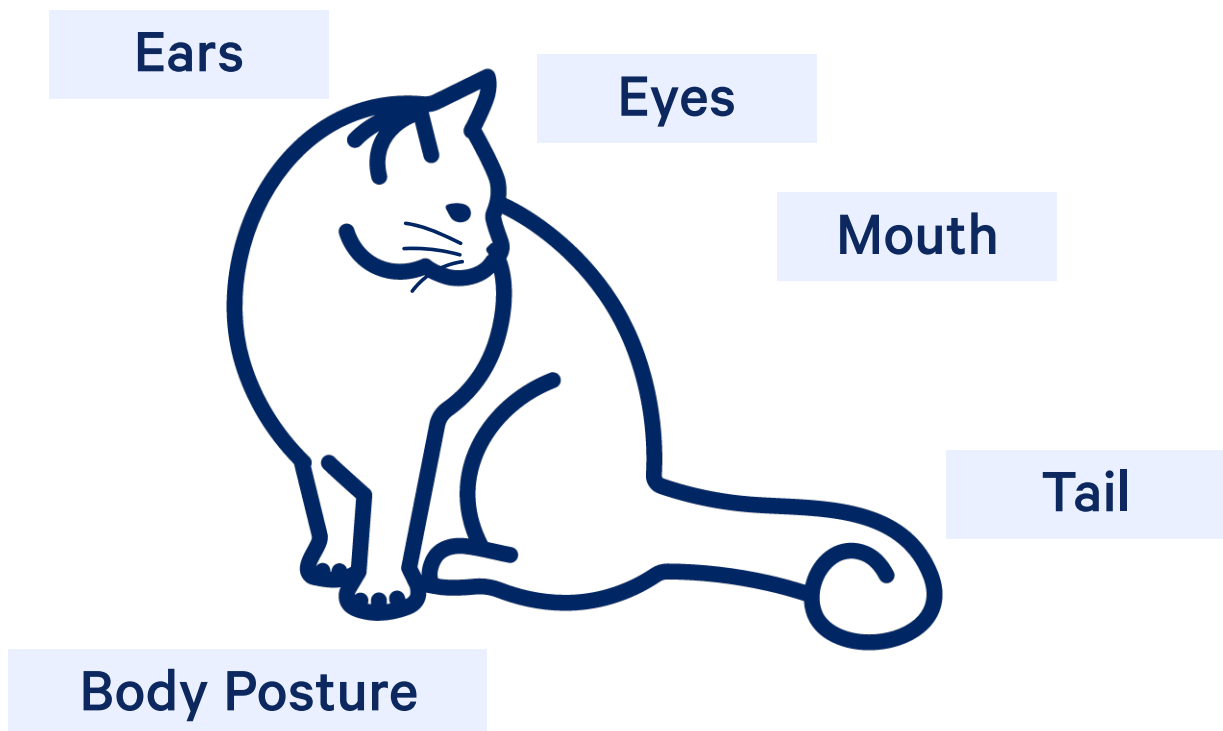
ASPCA. *7 Tips on Canine Body Language* (2017)

Pike, Amy L. *Canine Body Language Basics*. American Veterinarian (2018)

Children's Resources: How Animals Feel

Understanding Cat Behavior

Unlike people, animals cannot talk to us when they are feeling happy, sad, angry, or scared. But, that doesn't mean we can't figure out how they are feeling! Cats use their bodies to communicate (talk) with us. To understand a cat's body language, look for these clues:

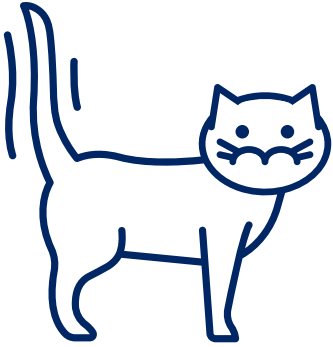


What to look for:

- Eyes — look for shape of the cat's pupil (the dark center of the eye) which can change from fully round to just a small slit
- Ears — examine the position of the cat's ears
- Mouth — watch the movement of the cat's whiskers and mouth
- Body Posture — figure out what stance the cat's body is in
- Tail — examine the position of the cat's tail and how it moves

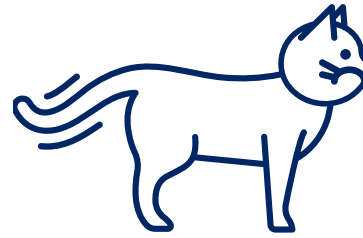
Understanding Cat Behavior

Happy



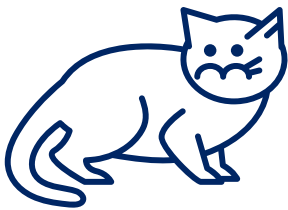
A happy cat may have its ears perked up and turned to the side. The cat may also hold its tail up or curl it around the things it loves most (like you!)

Calm



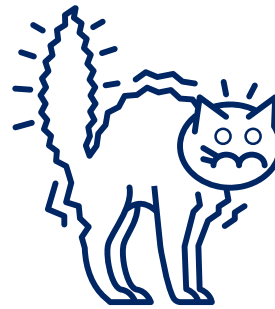
A calm or relaxed cat may hold its tail loosely behind them and have its ears forward and slightly to the side. The cat may make eye contact and blink slowly as well.

Nervous



A nervous cat's whiskers may fall flat against its face. The ears may do the same or twitch quickly. The cat's may avoid eye contact or dart its eyes around.

Upset



An upset or scared cat may fluff out its fur, arch its back to look bigger, hold its ears back, and hiss. The cat's pupils may dilate (grow larger) as well.

Resources on Cat Behavior

Family Paws Parent Education - [link](#)

Cat Friendly Homes - [link](#)

Reference:

Becker, Mikkel. *5 Keys to Decoding Your Cat's Body Language*. VetStreet (2015)

O'Brien, Christine. *What Is My Cat's Body Language Telling Me?* Hills (2018)

Empathy Building Activities



Infants/Toddlers

Practicing Interacting with Pets

Materials: stuffed animals

- If you have a child-friendly pet (or even a stuffed animal), you can demonstrate appropriate behaviors on how to interact with pets.
- Note: always supervise your child when interacting with an animal.
- Teach your child how to pet by using a gentle hand. Show them where on the animal's body it is appropriate to touch. Discourage pulling, tugging, pushing, or pinching.
- Encourage your child to use their quiet or indoor voice around a pet.
- If appropriate, allow your child to use a toy and play with the pet.



PreK - Kindergarten

Pet Feelings Chart

Materials: paper, photos, scissors, glue, magnets

- A Feelings Chart is a tool for children to understand and express how they are feeling. There are free printable versions online but it is also possible to make one yourself.
- Feeling charts have photos of different facial expressions with the emotion labeled underneath. If you hang a Feelings Chart on the refrigerator, your child can use a magnet and place it on top of the emotion they are feeling.
- To allow your child to better understand how animals feel, you can work together to make a Feelings Chart for your pet!
- Print out photos of different emotions and let your child glue them to the paper chart. Encourage them to figure out which emotion each photo demonstrates. Label the photos and hang it up on the fridge.

Empathy Building Activities



1st — 5th Grades

Write a Letter to Your Pet

Materials: paper, pen/pencil

- If you have a pet a family pet, it can be a wonderful exercise to show them your appreciation by writing them a letter.
- Ask your child what they would say to their pet if their pet could understand them.
- Encourage your child to write a letter to their pet. Once they are finished, bring your pet and your child together so they can read it aloud to their best friend.



All Ages

Do Something Nice for Your Pet

Materials: your choice

- It's always wonderful to shower our pets with love and appreciation! If there's a day you feel like pampering your special member of the family, encourage your child to get involved!
- Ask your child what they think would make their pet very happy today. Some ideas can include giving your pet their favorite food, letting them play with their favorite toy, or making a gift for them!

Pet Behavior Charades

Materials: animal dress-up items (optional)

- Make charades more interesting by practicing your animal acting skills!
- You and your child can act out different animal behaviors and try to guess what the "animal" is doing and how they are feeling.
- You can refer to the charts on pages 2-5 to help your child understand what different dog and cat behaviors mean.