

Calming signals are a means of communication used by wolves, wild and domesticated dogs. Our dogs use them to calm themselves, others of their species and often to try to calm us. However, in our case, we often misunderstand what our dogs are trying to tell us. Lucky for us, a trainer by the name of Turid Rugaas of Norway put down in writing what she has come to understand from her years of observation.

Once you begin to observe these signals that your dog uses, you will never look at them the same way again. It is fascinating to watch the communication that goes on amongst our dogs. You can use many of these signals to help calm your dog in times of stress. As you learn to speak 'dog' you will see the lines of communication open up, helping you understand just what your dog has been trying to tell you.

Looking Away – Probably the most common. Rover looks away from the object that needs calming. To stare directly at another dog can be considered a challenge or threatening. Sometimes, Rover may just cast his eyes away; the whole head turn is not needed.

Turning Away – When looking away isn't enough!

Turning Your Back – Very obvious! Please calm down.

Blinking – Blinking or lowering the lids, avoiding staring...

Walking Slowly – Often the more we rush around getting frantic; our dogs will move slower trying to calm us. Owners that get frustrated with their dogs on recalls or heeling for being slow, often get slower dogs when they try to correct/punish.

Sitting/Lying Down – When things are getting scary, this is a clear signal. A high-ranking dog may lie down to reassure another that he means no harm.

Yawning – Probably as common as looking away! While your dog may yawn when he's tired, yawning is also used to release stress and calm others. Watch Rover and see when and why he is yawning.

Sniffing – Sometimes Rover is sniffing to read the 'daily news' but often it is used to calm other dogs (or us). If your dog sniffs the ground when another dog approaches, let him, he's sending signals. If Rover sniffs during a recall, change your tone and stance. Chances are you're giving him reason to be concerned.

Curving – Dogs do not approach each other head on. Unless they know the dog, the straight-line tactic can get them into trouble. If your dog has tried to go to the other side of you when meeting another dog, let him do it. He is curving a clear message, let him do it! On walks, help your dog to curve away from the other dog while on leash so as not to send the wrong message (challenge).

Shake Off – Shaking off stress or over arousal usually happens after the situation is over.

Licking – You may see the dog licking its mouth/nose when it is in a tight situation such as when another dog or person is walking straight towards it or when you are bending over the dog.

RESOURCES:

[Calming Signals: What Your Dog Tells You](#), by Turid Rugaas – available in book and video