

Saying 'Hello' without words:

Scent contact



At their first meeting, the Australian Shepherd (left) holds his tail high, to give him an air of authority. The Icelandic Sheepdog firstly sniffs the Australian Shepherd's head, and then places his head across the back and shoulders, asserting his dominance.

Having noticed each other from afar, edged a bit closer, and made it clear that they come in peace, finally the moment of greeting arrives – a 'Hello' without words, or rather, without barking. Dogs use a very precise ritual here, in the same way that we would offer a handshake.

The home straight

As they finally reach each other, the dogs don't stand face to face, but instead approach each other diagonally, ending up standing side by side.

Now the greeting ritual can begin. Firstly, the dogs begin to sniff one another – their equivalent of a handshake. They start with the most important areas: the head, the tummy, between the hind legs, and under the tail. Very young dogs, or dogs who are

rather unsure of the situation, will lie on their backs and display their abdomens during the sniffing ritual, to show their subordination to the other dog.

What happens next?

While the dogs are checking out each other's scent (or perhaps the scent left on a nearby tree), they can begin establishing the pecking order. Sometimes this can be immediately obvious – for example, when a confident dog meets a more timid character, he will adopt an upright body posture to show who's boss, while his new acquaintance falls into line, making himself look smaller by lowering his body, and behaving passively. However, if both dogs are equally dominant types, then each must try to assert his superiority; tails aloft, strutting around

each other, each attempting to place their head on the other's back. Will one dog concede? Will both tails stay high and wagging, or will one finally stop? The suspense is almost unbearable!

No eye contact!

Watching this ritual take place, you'll notice that dogs do not use direct eye contact whilst meeting and greeting. This is a vital rule in the dog world, and one we'd do well to be aware of. No matter how lovely a dog's eyes may be, try not to look directly into them, as this could be interpreted as a threat.

The exception

Podencos are sighthounds (which means they use their excellent eyesight more than their sense of smell for hunting).

When meeting a stranger, sighthounds will actively seek out eye contact with them.

Of course, this often leads to aggressive reactions from other dogs. So, watch out!

Tip

Observing your dog

Keep an eye on your dog when he's with another:

What is your dog doing?

What is his body language telling you?

How does the other dog react?

This way you can begin to learn what the dogs are 'saying', and be ready to intervene if there are any problems. But remember – no direct eye contact!

Don't mind me!

Try not to stare too obviously at the dogs while they are greeting each other, if you are curious or anxious to check things are going well. By stopping and staring, you may create a tension which the dogs will pick up on. Don't call to your dog while he is busy with his 'meet and greet' – you won't succeed in attracting his attention. Once the meeting looks to be nearing an end, walk on a bit faster, and call your dog in a friendly but firm tone. He should then come to you.

No longer strangers; now the fun and games can begin!



Paws for thought:

Do dogs learn from one another?



Dogs learn by trial and error, so if begging gets them what they want, they will do it again. Young dogs will happily copy older dogs, and unfortunately this includes the bad habits as well as the good!

A basic principle

Dogs learn from the reactions of their owners: a positive response to a certain behaviour will result in a repeat performance. If a dog pokes his head over the dining room table to steal a piece of cheese, and meets with success (ie eating the cheese and getting away with it), then he will do it again. However, if your dog jumps up onto the sofa for the first time and you

tell him off for it, your negative response will deter him from trying this again.

Is goofiness learnt by example?

No, dogs are not really observational learners. How much easier would training be if this were the case! You would only need to show your dog how perfectly another dog performs during an agility course, and your dog would copy him. However, young dogs do pick up the same bad habits as older dogs around them. Why? Because they copy the older dogs, following their example: 'Aha, now I have to go this way, and then slip between these two fence posts, and then I can spend an hour sniffing this field ...'



Dog dialect

At first, puppies grow up alongside their own kind. They share many similarities with their siblings: the shape of their ears, tails, facial expressions and fur. The mother, while bigger, also has the same characteristics. So the puppies only learn their own 'dialect' form of dog-speak.

Dog breeds vary widely in their physical characteristics. They may have:

- Big, floppy ears that just won't prick up, as with Beagles



- Permanently upright tails, like Icelandic Sheepdogs, for example
- Different-coloured coats, such as a Dalmatian's spots
- Fur that always stands on end along the back, for example, Rhodesian Ridgebacks
- Large, wide-open eyes, for example, Pugs
- A forward-leaning stance, as with sheep dogs

It's important to socialise your puppy with a variety of other breeds, so that he can learn to understand their different body language, rather than being able to read the signals from only one type of dog. Otherwise, he may remain ignorant of the significant characteristics of a particular breed of dog.

Curiosity is 'catching'

Dogs react strongly to the behaviour of other dogs, and this gives them opportunities to learn. If they notice that a dog has a particular interest in something, perhaps another dog or a person, this acts like a signal: they absolutely must go and see what all the fuss is about. Dog owners can easily test out this instinctive behaviour.

Squat down in the grass and stare fixedly at a particular place. As soon as your dog notices this, he will run over to see what exciting thing you have discovered (and you can then quickly deposit a little treat there for him!).

As a predator, he will also react to small movements and subtle noises, like the squeaking of a mouse. Loud noises won't be quite so fascinating to him.



Top: In mixed, supervised play groups, puppies can practice their social skills.

Above: 'What's that?' Dogs are naturally curious, and love to discover exciting new things.

Tip

Body language

The better your dog is at running, balancing, fetching and swimming, the more expressive will be his body language, which means he will be able to communicate better.

Regular stroking and massage of your dog's entire body will help him become more at ease with expressing body language.

For the kids: How to make your dog happy!



Lie down next to me!

You may want to show your dog how much you love him with a hug. But your dog is not a human being – it can actually be quite threatening for him when you bend over him, and throw your arms around him. He may react to the hug in a rather scared way. In any case, he will probably feel uncomfortable. Try this instead: lie down on the floor, and your dog will come to you and lie close next to you. This type of contact will help you form an even closer bond with your dog!



Look – no hands!

When you are playing with your friends, your dog may run behind you, and try to catch you by biting at your clothes. When dogs play chase with you (and most have a hunting instinct which they simply must follow!) they can only use their teeth to grab you with. So they may bite into your clothes, and possibly even hurt you by mistake. Try throwing your dog a ball when you want to play with him, so he will chase that instead of chasing you!

