

How to Improve your Dog-Talk Skills: Look for Patterns in your Dog's Body Language, by Fred M. Haney

You might be surprised how much your dog is communicating with you. You just have to learn to speak its language, which is often behavior-related. A dog's actions can speak volumes; you just have to be clever about figuring out the message in "dog talk."

There is no better way to understand your dog's personality and nurture its "dog nature" than to tune into your dog's body language and become more interactive with it.

There was a peculiar pattern in Jamie's (the heroine of "My Doggie Says...: Messages from Jamie") decisions about "where to be." I believe that dogs are pretty thoughtful about deciding where to hang out. They often choose places for specific reasons.

Sometimes, Jamie would station herself comfortably along the hallway outside my office. She would lie on the floor with her body close to the wall.

At other times, she would position herself across the hallway, forcing me to step over her if I wanted to walk down the hallway.

Finally, I connected the dots. When I was working around the house and showed no signs of leaving, Jamie would lie along the wall. But if I put on business clothes or packed up my briefcase, she put her body across the hallway, as if to say, "Please don't go!"

Callie, my 28 month-old Golden Retriever, has one toy that she treats differently from her other toys. By observing when she plays with it and how she treats it (with reverence), my wife and I have concluded that this toy (Callie's "Stinky") is her security object. She uses it as a calming device almost every evening before bedtime.

Sometimes, to figure out what your dog is saying, you have to "connect the dots." Is there a pattern to the behavior? When does it happen? Where does it happen? How often does it happen? It might take some patience, but you'll "break the code."

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