



OR



Understanding Dog Consent

Dogs are incredible communicators, but their language is mostly non-verbal. As pet parents, it's our job to observe their signals to ensure positive interactions and build trust. This guide will help you understand how to recognize and honor your dog's consent—or lack thereof—during interactions.

How Dogs Communicate Consent

Dogs communicate using their bodies, and their movements often tell us how they feel about a situation. Here's how to interpret their signals:

- **Yes:** A dog saying “yes” will move toward you or the object of interest. Their body language will often appear relaxed, with loose movements, a wagging tail, and soft eyes. These are signs of comfort and willingness.
- **No:** A dog saying “no” will increase distance from you or the situation. They might back away, turn their head, or walk away entirely. These actions are clear indicators that they are not comfortable or interested. They may also display signs of stress like tongue flicking or a fast worried tail wag.
- **Maybe:** A dog saying “maybe” will display conflicted behavior, such as moving back and forth or hesitating. They may take one step forward and then retreat. This ambivalence means they're unsure and need more time or space to decide. Maybes are always considered to be a no.

When in Doubt, It's a No

If you're ever uncertain about your dog's signals, it's safest to assume the answer is “no.” Honoring their boundaries strengthens your bond and builds their trust in you.

Reinforce Communication with Positive Rewards

Encourage your dog to communicate openly by reinforcing all signals—including “no.” When your dog backs away, hesitates, or moves toward you, respond with tossing treats to show them you value their input. This helps them feel safe expressing their preferences without fear.

Practical Tips for Consent Testing

- **Pause and Observe:** Before initiating an interaction, pause to see if your dog moves toward or away. Watch for subtle cues like leaning, looking away, or lip-licking.
- **Test in Small Steps:** Introduce stimuli or activities gradually.
- **Honor “No” Immediately:** If your dog backs away, stop what you’re doing. Avoid chasing or insisting—they need to know their boundaries are listened to.
- **Create a Safe Environment:** Ensure your dog has escape routes or quiet spaces where they can retreat if they feel overwhelmed. Teach all family members to honor your dog’s safe spaces.

Why Consent Matters

Teaching and honoring consent fosters a deeper connection with your dog. It shows them that their feelings and comfort are priorities, which builds trust and reduces stress. Consent testing is not just about reading their signals—it’s about listening, respecting, and responding to their needs.

If you need help identifying consent or other body language signals Courteous Canine, Inc. is happy to help!
Happy Consent Testing!

Visit CourteousCanine.com or email us at LoveDogs@CourteousCanine.com!

