



Just like human's dogs are unique individuals. This means that dogs personalities are very different and so are their interests, which means it will manifest into different play styles.

Dogs play because it helps them learn motor skills and most importantly social skills. Dog play behaviour also helps your dog build social relationships with other dogs.

Not only does it help with social skills, but it even helps your dog learn how to interact with dogs appropriately.

Dog Body Language

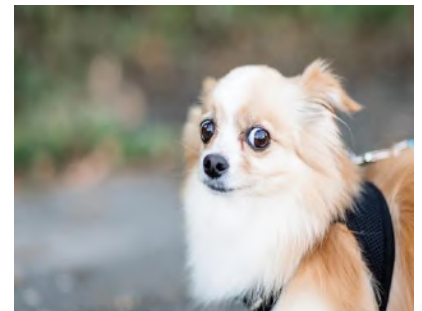
Happy

- Loose and wiggly body posture
- Mouth that is open
- Forward ears or relaxed
- Soft eyes (squinting, almond shape)
- Neutral tail base (position should be out from the dog's body)
- Play bow (front legs on the ground with rear end in the air)



Nervous

- Pinned ears
- Closed mouth
- Wrinkles around eyes
- Whale Eye
- Tail base is low or tucked between their legs



Dog Play and Body Language

Dogs that are nervous may also display calming signals, which indicates to another dog that they may be uncomfortable or that they mean no harm. Some calming signals to look out for are the following:

- Yawning
- Lip licking
- Turning away from another dog
- Shake themselves off
- Sneezing
- Looking away



Alert

- Closed or a tense mouth
- Forward body posture
- Eyes that are wide
- Hard eyes
- Tail is raised and still or wagging



Aggressive

- Tense, stiff, or frozen body posture
- Lip curling with teeth showing
- Raised hackles
- Ears forward
- Tail may be raised



Dog Play Styles

As mentioned in the beginning of this article dogs are different and their playstyles will reflect that. Dogs are most successful when matched with compatible playstyles. However, it is important to keep in mind that dogs can adapt to different play styles as well. Below are some common playstyles that dogs exhibit.

- **Rough and Rowdy:** Likes to wrestle, body slam with other dogs

Dog Play and Body Language

- **Cheerleader:** This dog is usually running with the group playing and barking. They sometimes may try and interrupt when play is getting too rough. If play is interrupted, it sometimes can lead to conflict.
- **Chaser:** Dog's that enjoy being chased and being the chaser
- **Tugger:** Enjoys a good game of tug with a toy or stick with another dog
- **Soft and Dainty:** This type of play is seen a lot in older and nervous dogs where other play styles may be too much. This type of play involves touching the other dogs with their muzzle softly.

What does appropriate dog play look like?

Dogs should be provided with time to be social with their own species in a fun and safe environment. For it to be a safe environment it is important to understand what appropriate play looks like.

Below is what good dog play should look like:

- Relaxed mouth
- Exaggerated movements with a loose body
- Soft eyes
- Periodic play bows
- Lots of pauses between play
- Role Reversals such as, taking turns being chased and being the chaser and taking turns being wrestled and being the wrestler
- Self-handicapping is when a dog can match their play partners playstyle



What does inappropriate dog play look like?

A cornerstone of good play is an understanding that is mutual between both play partners.

Sometimes during play a dog may push too much, which can result in inappropriate play.

Below are some inappropriate dog play that should be interrupted before it escalates.

- Tense and alert body language
- Change in vocalization: This may be hard to figure out, but once you know your dog's normal vocalization it will be easy to determine when it changes.
- Not listening to interrupters from playgroup leader or owner
- **Ganging up:** This means when multiple dogs gang up on another dog by chasing them for example. This type of play needs to be stopped right away.
- Pinning another dog down and not allowing them to get up
- Not listening to other dog's signs of communication when their uncomfortable, nervous or fearful during play. If a dog yelps, growls or backs away the other dog should

understand this social cue and give space. If they do not its important that we as guardians interrupt the play.

How do you interrupt inappropriate play?

The best advice is to pair your dog with a partner that has the same playstyle. However, sometimes there may be times when play becomes inappropriate. The best way to interrupt your dog is by:

- Calling their name and rewarding them when they come to you
- Using a recall cue such as 'come' will be beneficial, so you can call your dog and allow them to have breaks through play time.
- Making enticing non-verbal sounds such as, kissing noises with your mouth or slapping your thighs.

It is always best to be proactive when having off-leash play sessions with your dogs. Understanding your dog's body language and when to interrupt play is key to managing healthy play sessions and relationships.

Remember it is okay if your dog does not like to play with some dogs especially when they get older. Dogs can get pickier with their play partners when they get older because their playstyles might change.

Lastly, if you think that play is going to end in conflict or inappropriate play it is best to end the play session for the day.