



What's your pet trying to tell you?

Your guide to pet body language from the
behaviour experts at The Lost Dogs' Home



THE
LOST DOGS
HOME

What you'll find!

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Every pet deserves to be happy and healthy



As an animal lover, this guide has been created for you by behaviour and training experts at The Lost Dogs' Home. It will help you spot the signs that your pet is living their best life, or in need of a little extra love. Thank you for caring.

The Lost Dogs' Home has been caring for lost and abandoned animals for 115 years. That's plenty of experience of animal behaviour that we've poured into these pages!

In this time, the charity has grown to become one of Australia's largest animal shelters. We care for over 18,000 lost, abandoned and neglected dogs and cats each year.

Our team is committed to providing care and love to every animal who comes through our doors, now and long into the future.

Whether you're a dog or cat person, you'll agree that your companion deserves the very best care. That's why this guide is so important.

Thanks for loving pets in the way they deserve. I hope this guide helps you understand each other even more.



Pet care at-a-glance

Dogs



Exercise is love

Dogs need daily exercise to feel purposeful, stimulated and well. This can be a walk in the park, a garden fetch session or just sniffing all their pals in the dog park.



Keep them stimulated

Keeping a dog happy means engaging all their senses. Give them toys and play activities that appeal to their sight, hearing and smell.

Cats



Stimulate their senses

Most cats in Australia are indoor cats. Keep them active indoors to make sure they stay healthy and well. Try a cat tower and plenty of toys.



Keep them neat and tidy

Cats need extra grooming attention. Brushing your cat maintains fur health and can build your bond with your feline friend.

Dogs and Cats



Make sure they're neutered and microchipped

This way you won't get any unexpected kittens or puppies. And if your pet disappears, a microchip will make it easier for a vet to identify your pet, and return them to you.



Feed them well

Some people choose to feed their pets raw food, some choose kibble, others feed tinned food. What's important is that you give them a well-balanced diet, that is enough for their size and activity level.



Understand their needs

Pets have a lot to tell you – you just need to understand it. They're always communicating through their body language and sounds they make. Read this guide to learn more!




Your dog is telling you they're happy!




This is every pet parent's goal – a healthy and relaxed dog. A happy dog will be more relaxed, sleep well and eat well.

Happy dog body language



 Play bow




 Tail half way up



Be wag-cautious!

A wagging tail can also mean your dog is scared, or alert. Check for other signs if your dog is wagging their tail.

Happy dog sounds

 **Sigh** (I'm relaxing)

 **High pitched bark** (Let's play!)

How to keep your dog happy

Feed them well, and play as much as you can. Training helps keep your dog's mind busy and tires them out – a tired dog is a happy dog! Grooming is important to keep them fresh and clean. A daily walk is vital, as is time with their doggy pals. And like us, they love a little treat sometimes.

Is my dog enjoying their pats?

If you're patting a dog and they're drooping their eyes, relaxing and leaning in, that's a sign they're loving it just as much as you are. But if they're leaning away from you, yawning, licking their lips, turning their head or trying to escape, they probably need a bit of space.

Your cat is telling you they're happy!




Here are some telltale signs that your feline friend is living their best life.

Happy cat body language

-  Ears forward and relaxed
-  Whiskers down
-  Rolling on back
-  Slow blinking
-  Upright tail
-  Making biscuits



Happy cat sounds

-  Puuurrrrrrrrr
-  Chirrup
-  Prrrow!



Be purr – cautious!

Cats purr when content, but they also purr when stressed to help calm themselves down. Research has also shown that purring may help fast-track healing in cats that are unwell.

How to keep your cat happy

Cats love routine, so feed your cat at the same time every day. Keep them warm, give them love and attention. Keep them stimulated with toys, towers and plenty of treats. You can even train cats to help them build their confidence if they are shy or anxious.

Is my cat enjoying their pats?

Cats will purr and headbutt you if they're enjoying their pats. Don't be fooled by the belly exposing roll-over – it shows they think they're safe with you. But it's NOT an invitation for belly rubs. Many cats feel vulnerable when you pat their belly and could bite or scratch you. Aim for the head, chin and neck.

Trevor's journey from fear to forever home



Trevor arrived on The Lost Dogs' Home's doorstep at just 12 weeks old. He was curled up in a laundry basket, terrified, his tail tucked under, ears flat down, and crying out in pain.

"Pain relief was absolutely the most important thing for him. But anytime we touched him, even just a tiny touch to administer pain relief, he would react because he was so sore."

- Dr Edward, The Lost Dogs' Home vet.

We took the decision to put Trevor under, so that we could take a careful look at his wounds without causing him any more stress or pain. **Everything we do at The Lost Dogs' Home is to improve the health, happiness and welfare of animals.**

Trevor's condition was even worse than we first thought. His wounds were so badly infected that he needed a major operation, before he could start to heal.

Our vet nurse, Jess, gently put on Trevor's bandages after surgery. You can see by his little face that he was already beginning to feel much better.

After a little healing, and more trust in people, his tail started to wag again – Trevor was ready for cuddles.

How to calm a scared dog








Use slow movements –
Speak softly and slowly –
Make eye contact

Your pet is telling you they love you!








Dogs tell you they love you by...

-  Sighing
-  Leaning
-  Giving sloppy kisses – licking!*
-  Giving eye contact
-  Playing



Cat tell you they love you by...

-  Head-butting
-  Making biscuits – kneading
-  Slow blinking
-  Showing their tummy
-  Bringing you presents



*Remember

All pets are individuals and express themselves in different ways. Rolling over, and licking, for example can actually be a sign of stress or fear in some animals. It's important to look at your pet's behaviour as a whole.

Dogs in distress

Keep an eye on the fur on your dogs' back, their ears, their tail and their mouth to tell you what they're feeling. If you're seeing any of the behaviours illustrated below, it's likely they're in distress.

Body language

If you can see a dog's top teeth, it's a bad sign – do all you can to distract, redirect or calm them.

Sounds



Growl

(Back off)



Snarls

(Stay away)



Deep Barks

(I'm defensive)



Standing

Worried:

Low body, tail tucked, ears back, yawning

Defensive:

Stiff, weight forward, hair raised, tail up, staring



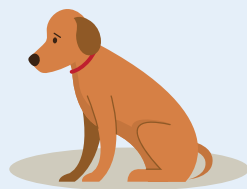
Lying down

Worried:

Looks away, licks lips, ears back

Defensive:

Cowering, teeth showing, tail tucked



Sitting

Worried:

Head low, ears back, tail hidden, yawning

Defensive:

Leaning back, snarling, tight mouth, eyes locked

You can calm your dog by getting them to lie down

If they're overexcited, scared or stressed, move them away from what's upsetting them to reduce their distress and make it easier for them to keep their cool. If it's you upsetting them – walk away. Also, a chewy treat can be a great distraction.

Behavioural support from The Lost Dogs' Home

Our expert team of animal behaviour specialists are dedicated to helping pets and their people build strong, positive relationships. We provide guidance through private consultations (in home and online) and group training for puppies and kittens.

Whether you need support with a new pet or an existing behavioural concern, we're here to help. For more information, visit dogshome.com/behaviour

Cats in distress

Keep an eye on your cat's ears, tail, body posture and eyes – they can all tell you what your cat is feeling. If you're seeing any of the behaviours illustrated below, it's likely your cat is feeling anxious, fearful, or defensive.

Body language

If your cat goes all fluffy, that's the first sign something is amiss. Try and find what's stressing them out before it escalates.

Signs of fear include:



Sounds

-  **Hiss**
-  **Growl**
-  **Yowl**










A cat's calmest state is when they're sitting or lying down with soft eyes and a gently flicking tail.

If your cat is anxious or overstimulated, give them a quiet, safe space to retreat. Pheromone sprays or treats can help them relax while you assess the situation.



Is my pet in pain?

Dogs and cats often have similar responses to pain. If you see any of the following, go and see your vet.

-  **Pacing, panting, or restlessness.**
-  **Sudden aggression or unusual behaviour** – even friendly pets may lash out when in pain.
-  **Excessive hiding** – cats tend to hide under furniture or plants when in pain.
-  **Rapid heartbeat or heavy breathing.**
-  **Seizures** – sudden shaking, twitching, or collapse. Seek emergency vet care.
-  **Straining or inability to urinate** – can be life-threatening.
-  **Laboured breathing or shortness of breath** – urgent emergency. Seek emergency vet care.
-  **Vomiting or diarrhoea** – especially if severe or persistent. Wait a day or two to go to the vet if this is fairly normal for your pet.
-  **Choking or continuous coughing** – may indicate blocked airways or illness.



**IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR PET IS IN PAIN,
CONTACT YOUR VET IMMEDIATELY.**

Make sure to always have details of animal emergency facilities so that they're at hand in a time of high stress.



Warning signs your pet is overweight...

As modelled by Gerald

Beautiful tabby Gerald arrived at The Lost Dogs' Home with an obvious love of snacks.

While eight-year-old Gerald was seriously cute, his size was putting his health at risk.

Gerald's appetite didn't stop at biccies – he also had a big appetite for cuddles! So we got to work getting him ready for his forever home, hoping someone would satisfy his hunger for love.

Gerald was put on a special diet, and given lots of playtime to get him ready for adoption.

Thankfully, once he was in better shape and ready for a happy and healthy home, Gerald captured the hearts of not one but three people. When housemates Cosima, Bella and Jas arrived at the shelter and laid eyes on Gerald, they were completely smitten with him!

Gerald now has three new people to love him, and two siblings to play with and keep him active! Gerald is happier and healthier than ever.







Pets need a balanced diet and regular activity to have a happy life.



When a pet becomes overweight, they are more likely to be less active. This makes them more prone to joint and mobility problems, putting them at greater risk of developing diabetes.

Your pet might be overweight if:

-  It's difficult to feel your pet's ribs
-  Your pet is reluctant to exercise
-  Your pet waddles when walking.
-  Your pet struggles to go upstairs.

It may help to talk to your vet about a weight management program for your pet.

Thank you for showing you care about giving pets a happy and healthy life

Use our The Lost Dogs' Home resource centre to learn more about how you can support your furry friends from our animal experts:

dogshome.com/factsheets

You can also receive tailored support for your pet's health and wellbeing through The Lost Dogs' Home Vet Hospital, which is Melbourne's trusted not-for-profit vet.

Visit vet.dogshome.com

If you'd like to make a difference for neglected and abandoned animals, please consider supporting The Lost Dogs' Home in one of these great ways:



Donate to help lost, abandoned or neglected pets get the veterinary care, shelter, food and love they deserve.



Fundraise to help animals get the expert care, loving support and behavioural teaching they need to thrive in a new home.



Leave a gift in your Will to let your love for animals live on.

