

Dog Training Articles By Beth Bradley

Dogs Don't Talk

Dogs don't talk, dogs communicate. Whenever I say to a client that their dog will not talk they look at me quizzically. Yes, dogs communicate with each other and with other species that they come in contact with but they do not speak the way humans talk to each other.

Because of our ability to communicate with our mouths, humans have lost the ability to read and interpret body language, human or other. It is amazing to see someone who has lost a sense (hearing, speech or sight) have heightened use of another sense; it is amazing the way nature takes over and assists this person in his or her everyday life.

Dog Communication:

When training with your dog, it is important to speak to your dog with the use of your body language. Dogs communicate with their whole, body; posture, eyes and ears. The last form of communication a dog will give is a growl. The sequences of events I have been able to detect are the following: Example: Interaction between a young dog and a dominant or Alpha dog:

1. Posture:

The Alpha or older dog stands tall and stiff. He holds his head and tail high. He 'hackles' or raises his fur from his neck to his back in order to seem even larger. The Alpha also uses his body to block a dog from doing something or going somewhere.

2. Eyes:

The Alpha uses his eyes in two ways. The first is when he raises his eyes to the sky when he is demonstrating that he is ignoring a young pack member. He will do this when a young dog is jumping on him and actually turn his face, body and eyes away from the young dog if the pup is jumping toward his face or licking his face. The second way is direct eye contact, used to threaten. He will stare at another pack member until that dog turns his gaze away or walks away.

3. Ears:

The Alpha dog holds his ears erect and alert. Ears held back towards the head shows submission or fear. The ears are held erect and pointed forward to the subordinate.

4. Vocalization:

The Alpha dog uses a low and guttural growl to control the pack. The Alpha does this in connection with his posture, eyes and ears. This is the last warning before a correction happens. The growl is short and not vocally drawn out. The growl is exhibited one time before a correction is used.

Please notice that the last form of communication is a growl. Speech is the last form of communication so why must everyone insist on talking and talking and talking when training with their dogs?

Speech:

Yes, one can give a command verbally (i.e. heel, sit, stay, etc) but everything else is of no use. It is not necessary to verbally praise a dog, a Dam (or Dog Mother) will lick her pups to show affection, a Dam will never speak and caress at the same time. Some dogs do need verbal encouragement but some dogs cannot handle any form of praise, as they will begin to lose focus and control. Some dogs feel that praise is a cue to the end of training and then must receive a correction to come back to attention.

There are two times when you should never speak to your dog: (1) when your dog is frightened. Speaking to your dog when he is frightened is telling him he is correct to be afraid. It is so aggravating to me when I meet a scared dog and the owners say to the dog as it is growling 'it's ok'. No, it's not ok. Your dog should not receive any praise (verbal or human contact) when he is afraid or acting suspicious. You should only praise or touch your dog when he is in a calm state of mind, not worried or upset.

The second time you should never speak to your dog is when he is acting aggressive. When dogs bark it is for excitement, when you yell or speak loudly to your dog when he is acting aggressive you are feeding into his excitement; you are joining him! The most important thing to do is say nothing and place your dog into a down position.

If you are speaking, yelling or commanding, you are definitely going to get the person bit by your dog because you are feeding into his excitement. I have entered homes where one dog is aggressive and its housemate is not; usually the friendly dog uses his body language to keep the aggressive dog away from me or will actually bite the aggressive dog for being aggressive. Never have I heard one dog tell another that I am a friend and welcome into his home!

Conclusion:

It is amazing to see a dog read a cat's body language or even a parrot's body language when he approaches it. Body language is universal among species so they can communicate with each other. When we as humans break the body language barrier and use it more to communicate with our dogs than our voice, it is so much easier for the dog to understand.

Our voice should be the last form of communication that we use when training our dogs. We can verbally issue commands but verbal praise is unnecessary. Humans need the verbal praise more so than dogs!

When training with your dog, especially in instances where your dog is acting aggressive or afraid do not speak or touch him by petting or caressing; you are only rewarding an unstable frame of mind. In those situations you want to use a correction to bring your dog out of the state of mind and use your body language to demand his focus on you and not your guest. Your sense of speech and touch should only come into play when your dog is in a calm and focused state of mind.