On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals

Turid Rugaas

A Dogwise Training Manual
Your dog is talking. Do you know what he is saying?

Yawning, lip-licking, sneezing, even scratching are just a few of the 30-plus signals that dogs use to communicate with one another. With On Talking Terms With Dogs you can learn to recognize these signals and use them yourself to interact with your dog.

Norwegian dog trainer and behaviorist Turid Rugaas has made it her life work to study canine social interaction. She coined the phrase “calming signals” to describe the social skills, sometimes referred to as body language, that dogs use to avoid conflict, invite play, and communicate a wide range of information to other dogs — and also humans.

Every dog needs his human to read this book!

- Learn to identify situations that are stressful to your dog so that you can resolve or avoid them.
- Rehabilitate a dog that has lost her ability to read or give calming signals.
- Become a keen observer of canine behavior at home, in the community, and among dogs to get better behavior and build a solid relationship.

Experts praise Turid’s work

Invaluable! The insightful observations of Turid Rugaas can help all of us have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with our dogs. This beautifully illustrated book belongs in the home of dog lovers everywhere. Patricia B. McConnell, Ph.D. author of The Other End of the Leash, Cautious Canine, Feeling Outnumbered and more

I personally owe Turid a great debt because her work validated my observations that dogs are trying very hard to “talk” to us. This book was my guide and added amazing volume to my knowledge base. Her book provided the confidence to continue watching and interpreting. What a lovely gift! Brenda Aloff author of Aggression In Dogs and Canine Body Language: A Photographic Guide

Turid has a wonderful gift of making everything so easy to understand and relate to. I truly feel that she has made, and is still making, an enormous contribution to mankind in our ever-increasing knowledge of man’s best friend. Pamela Dennison author of Complete Idiot’s Guide to Positive Dog Training, How to Right a Dog Gone Wrong and Bringing Light to Shadow

Norwegian dog trainer and behaviorist Turid Rugaas travels the world educating dog owners and professional trainers alike. Turid is also the author of My Dog Pulls What Do I Do? and the DVD counterpart to this book, Calming Signals: What Your Dog Tells You.
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Foreword

The social dynamics of a wolf pack is often used as a model for dog-dog and dog-human interactions. I have seen dog people (and some wolf people as well) caught up in the idea of always maintaining high rank by aggressive means, believing their only choices are between forcibly dominating the animal or submitting to it. The problem with this approach is two-fold. Firstly, aggression may well escalate, and secondly, an either-or choice between forcible dominance or submission is not the only choice available to wolves, to dogs or to humans.

With what she calls “calming signals” based on canine expressive behavior, Turid Rugaas introduces dog trainers and owners to another option to try to improve relationships between humans and their dogs and between dogs and other dogs. Pat Goodman
Foreword

The occasion was “Animals and Us,” the Sixth International Conference on Human-Animal Interactions in Montreal. A quiet, polite seminar attendee, Turid Rugaas, sat a couple of rows ahead of me during the canine behavior sessions. Turid should never play poker. I couldn’t help but notice her shoulders tensing up or relaxing depending on the speaker. The funny thing was, her body language was directly reflecting my own opinion of the various speakers’ presentations.

Networking! That’s what symposiums are all about! I wanted to meet this stranger from overseas whose response to behavior issues seemed to so closely mirror my own. Realizing that English was not her native tongue, and wondering if she would understand, it took me until the end of the day to gather the nerve to approach her. Since that meeting back in 1992, I have spent a lot of time with Turid. I’ve invited her to present at my behavior and training camps and seminars both in the United States and overseas. She has captivated her audiences wherever she goes. She was a big hit in Japan with her blue eyes and flaxen braids!

Turid’s farm, Hagan Hundeskole, is located on a heavily forested mountain top overlooking scenic fiords of Norway. People from all over the country bring their dogs for her instruction in basic manners and rehabilitation of problem behaviors. I have been there to observe during her work with dogs and she has amazed me. The stories she tells in this book are true. I have come to realize that she is on the cutting edge of understanding canine behavior. The following quote from Turid gives the essence of her theory on calming-signals.

“Dogs, being flock animals, have a language for communication with each other. Canine language in general consists of a large variety of signals using body, face, ears, tail, sounds, movement, and expression. The dog’s innate ability to signal is easily lost or reinforced through life’s experience. If we study the signals dogs use with each other and use them ourselves, we increase our ability to communicate with our dogs. Most
noteworthy of all canine signals are the calming signals, which are used to maintain a healthy social hierarchy and resolution of conflict within the flock. These are skills which, when carried over to our own interactions with dogs, can be highly beneficial to our relationship. Dogs have the ability to calm themselves in the face of a shock (fearful or stressful situation) and to calm each other as well. As an example let's consider the manner in which dogs meet each other. Dogs which are worried in a social situation can communicate concepts such as, 'I know you are the boss around here and I won't make trouble.' Furthermore, the boss dog is very apt to want the worried dog to realize that no trouble is intended. 'Don't worry, I'm in charge around here and I mean you no harm.' Dogs that do not signal properly can be the cause of problems.

On trips to Europe I make it a point to visit Turid's farm, Hagan Hundeskole, to observe her work. I have been on seminar tours with her in Europe, USA and Japan. Whether a training camp north of the Arctic Circle or national symposium in Geneva, each time she has left me favorably impressed with her ability to explain to her audience what is going on with dog at any given time. Terry Ryan
1 Calming Signals: The Life Insurance Policy

In books about wolves you will find the body language of wolves described as “cut-off” signals, as the observers saw how they were cutting off aggression in other wolves. These signals have been described for years and are well known. The same people describing these signals seem to think that dogs do not have the same ability to cut off aggression in each other (Behavior of Wolves, Dogs and Related Canids by Michael Fox) – and how wrong they are! Dogs have the same ability and the same social skills to avoid conflicts as wolves have. Perhaps those observers did not see them, because the wolves are much more intense in their behavior due to their life situation. Dogs, that is domesticated dogs, are much more subtle in their skills and use much smaller letters, so to say. They are usually not in the same position of danger as wolves, and they do not have the same need to speak to each other in such big letters.

When I started to observe and use these signals, I called them calming signals. Cut-off is not the appropriate word, as they are used much more as prevention than really cutting off behavior. The signals are used at an early stage to prevent things from happening, avoiding threats from people and dogs, calming down nervousness, fear, noise and unpleasant things. The signals are used for calming themselves when they feel stressed or uneasy. They are used to make the others involved feel safer and understand the goodwill the signals indicate. They are also used to enable dogs to make friends with other dogs and people.
Conflict solving

Those dogs that are able to develop communication skills with other dogs, and that have not lost their signals because of us, understand each other and need never be in conflict with others. Wolves and dogs try to avoid conflicts. They are conflict-solving animals. It is usually we, the human species, who tend to create conflicts between our dogs and ourselves.

We will look more closely at these signals throughout this book, what they are and how they are used, in order to help you learn to understand your dog better and be a better "parent" for your dog. It will help you in training and handling, and I am certain that these new skills will enrich your life as they have mine.
How do they work?

Think about an average day with your dog. You get up in the morning, with the "Monday morning" feeling, and tell the dog off with a bit of annoyance in your voice. He turns his face sideways to you, and licks his nose in one quick movement. You wash, finish getting ready and go to the door. The dog is happy to know that he is going out and fawns around you. You command him "SIT"! The commanding tone makes your dog yawn before he sits down. You put on his leash, go out of the door and he pulls a little. You jerk him back, he then turns his back on you and puts his nose to the ground.

At the park you let him loose for a few minutes, and before long your wrist watch tells you that it is time to go back. You call your dog. Was your voice a little stressed? Your dog starts moving towards you slowly and in a curve. You think he does it to annoy you, and you yell at him. He sniffs the ground, curves even more, and looks away from you. He finally comes and you scold him or, even worse, you shake him. He turns his face from you, licking his nose or yawning.