

You Know Animal Body Language – How Fluent Are You in Human?

Theresa McKeon, BA

Theresamckeon@gmail.com 704-995-9237

Why should we be interested in identifying human body language?

Being able to identify your human client's non-verbal behavior can mean better communication, and potentially better compliance when clients leave the clinic or training session. When we identify non-verbal human behavior, especially those that demonstrate confusion or fear in a learning environment, we can alter our delivery of information and instructions to better support our learner.

The similarities of animal and human body language

Those who work with animals are likely familiar with body language like the "whale eye" as a possible expression of anxiety or discomfort with a current situation. Therefore, it may not be difficult to look for a similar set of behaviors from a human in a learning environment. Humans also display a "whale eye" as an expression of discomfort. Humans may also display "lip lick/flick" in a similar context to a dog's display when they are uncomfortable with themselves, or another's discomfort.

Body Language Definition for this presentation

A definition of body language for this presentation -

Non-verbal behavior that may occur if we perceive danger, and was derived from the book, *What Every Body is Saying*, by Joe Navarro, copyright 2008 Harper Collins. Navarro is clear that non-verbal behavior should be evaluated in context, in groupings and from a baseline. Navarro also reveals, that in order to ensure our survival, the brain's very elegant response to distress or threats, is to demonstrate this non-verbal behavior in three forms: freeze, flight, and fight.

Fear of information/instructions – The potential cause of freeze, flight, flight behaviors in a learning environment.

The learning history of many humans leads us to have a fear of incoming information and instructions. Too much or too little, the fear of failing to understand or to ask, "can you explain that again," may cause a learner to start an inner dialogue that drowns out the incoming information/instructions, perpetuating the failure and reinforcing the behavior. Clients may try to cover with head nodding and verbal agreement, but we need to look for non-verbal behavior that tells us to change tactics.

Freeze

Avoid detection

- No chase response
- Time to assess situation and determine action
- May look like: Holding breath, raising shoulders, lowering head (turtling)

Flight

Escape of limit threat

- Block or distance ourselves
- May look like: Leaning away, eye blocking

Fight

Without options, fear may turn into rage (in order to “survive”)

- A more modern tactic is the verbal altercation
- May look like: insults, counter allegations, sarcasm

As the one delivering the information/instructions, what can you do when you see these behaviors or to prevent them? (Introduction – the full explanations and applications delivered in LAB/LECTURE)

Separate – Learner from animal

Use Locum - Separate the human from having to work with a live animal while they are acquiring the skills.
Use of puppets, stuffed animals, staff.

Separate What to KNOW (information) from What to Do (instructions).

Identify “passion talking” – The over delivery of information that comes from the passion of the instructor.
Deliberately separate general information from instructions using introductory phrase, “The instructions are:”

Focus Funnel

Formula for separating and reducing information and instructions for the learner

- The lesson is:
- The instructions are:
- The tag point is:

Tag point

Points of success for physical skills (pill delivery, bandaging, etc.) that are creating with a WOOF template

- What you want
- One thing at a time
- Observable/measurable
- Five words or fewer
- Delivered with the phrase, “The tag point is:” or another cue phrase chosen by the instructor

Instructor body position

Body language FROM the instructor that may improve learner focus and reduce human Freeze -Flight-Fright responses.

- “Cheat out” – reducing physical and visual energy from the instructor
- Limited eye contact – during delivery of instructions, limit eye contact to allow the learner a space free from social body language requirements... (eye contact, head nodding, etc.)

Demonstration

Refer to instructor body position

Validation

- Observation
- Allowing a teachback
- Practice time and to some measure of fluency

References:

What Every Body is Saying, by Joe Navarro, copyright 2008 Harper Collins.