

# The Endearing Ways Dogs Communicate with Us

Dogs have many ways of communicating with us, and some, like the slight tilt of the head when you talk or the warm, fuzzy nuzzling to get your attention, speak volumes. Find out what your pup may be thinking when he displays these and other heartwarming behaviors.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- One of the more endearing ways dogs communicate with their humans is nuzzling us with their noses
- When your dog nuzzles you, he might be saying hi or seeking attention from you, showing concern for your feelings or your health, looking for a snack, or for some other reason
- Another sweet doggy behavior is the inquisitive head tilt
- If your dog gets the zoomies, she's probably burning off pent-up energy, and as a bonus, she's making you laugh
- Dogs have many ways they communicate with us, and in fact, almost anything your canine BFF does or "says" in your presence is a form of messaging

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Dogs have many ways they communicate with us, and in fact, almost anything your canine BFF does or "says" in your presence is a form of messaging. Some of these communication techniques are not so great, for example, leg humping or loud barking for attention.

However, others are downright endearing, such as that slight tilt of your pup's head in response to your voice (more about this later), or her super enthusiastic, wiggly-waggly greeting when you arrive home. Another adorable behavior many dogs use to communicate with their humans (and each other) is nuzzling.

## 8 Reasons Dogs Nuzzle

1. **He's saying hello to you** — Canine companions display a variety of greeting behaviors when they lay eyes on (or sniff out) their favorite humans. As mentioned above, a wildly wagging tail is very common, along with spinning, dancing on hind legs, or running about with a toy or some other attention-getting object.

But one of the sweetest, most gentle ways your dog might greet you is to nuzzle your hand or some other available body part with his wet nose. He's saying, "I'm so glad you're home!"

2. **She's asking for attention** — Dogs quickly catch on to the importance of human hands to their existence. After all, it's hands that lower the food bowl to the floor, hold treats, and deliver pets and scratches. Many of us have had the experience, after petting a dog and removing our hand, of having the dog nudge our hand with her nose as if to say, "Please don't stop!"

3. **He's marking you** — Some dogs tend toward possessiveness when it comes to their humans (I'm looking at you, Señor **Chihuahua**). In addition, their faces contain scent glands, so it's possible some of your dog's nuzzling behavior is an attempt to mark you with his scent to let everyone know you belong to him, and him alone!
4. **She's displaying dominance or submission** — Some dogs power-nuzzle to show dominance — typically over other dogs, but sometimes people as well. You can usually tell it's about dominance by the persistence or excessiveness of the nuzzling. Interestingly, dogs with submissive tendencies also sometimes nuzzle and lick a more dominant dog's face as a display of respect.
5. **He's concerned about you** — Our dogs are very tuned into our emotions, as well as the state of our health. If you become upset about something in the presence of your dog, don't be surprised if he gently nuzzles you to comfort you. And if you're sick and laid up in bed or on the couch, there's a good chance he'll perform regular nuzzle-checks to comfort you and perhaps to try to **sniff out the problem** as well.
6. **She's hoping for snacks** — Depending on your history of indulging the behavior, your dog may nuzzle you when you're eating a meal or enjoying a snack on the couch. A gentle nuzzle is letting you know she's there and hoping for a taste; a more persistent nuzzle could mean it's her mealtime as well, and you need to get with the program. Or, it could mean you almost always deliver the goods in response to this behavior.
7. **He's greeting a new human friend** — Some dogs greet strangers with a sniff, and if their nose approves, they may rub their head against their new friend and nuzzle him/her.
8. **Her face is itchy or there's something on it** — Of all the reasons your dog might nuzzle you, this one is purely practical. Dogs with itchy faces like to rub them on things (for example, you) to relieve their discomfort. Dogs with remnants of food or drips of water on their muzzle often find something (for example, you) to use as a napkin.

## The Adorable Head Tilt Explained

How cute is this mannerism? The canine head tilt is definitely one of the more charming behaviors dogs perform. They tend to do it in response to a particular tone of voice or a familiar sound that means something good is about to happen.

Now, to us humans, a dog with his head cocked appears to be trying to understand what we're saying, or what a specific sound might mean. And according to veterinarian Dr. Sara Wooten, we're more or less right. She says the head tilt might signify that your dog is trying to make sense of what he hears.<sup>1</sup>

Experts believe dogs probably tilt their heads when they think what they're hearing might lead to something they enjoy, for example, a treat or a walk. According to Wooten, since dogs understand certain words, a pup who's tilting his head might be trying to pick up a key word or tone change that holds promise.

Another possible reason for head tilting in dogs has to do with the way they hear. Their movable earflaps help them locate the source of sounds. By changing his head position, your dog can better distinguish differences in the time a sound reaches each ear, enabling him to judge how far he is from the sound.

Wooten believes head cocking is probably a natural behavior in dogs that they repeat the more it is reinforced. If you praise your dog or show special interest when he cocks his head (and how can you not?), he'll be more likely to repeat the behavior. Wooten also says there's no evidence that head tilting is associated with a dog's breed, age, or intelligence.

It's important to know the difference between a cute "listening" head tilt and one that is persistent or intermittent and happens without a trigger, as the latter can be a sign of a vestibular disease and requires investigation.

## Dogs and the Zoomies

Just like exuberant children, sometimes dogs get wildly excited for no apparent reason and dash around in circles or back and forth, stopping abruptly to look at you before taking off again. In case you hadn't heard, the not-so-scientific name for this behavior is "zoomies."

Zoomies, by their very nature, can be quite difficult to capture on camera. Kudos to service dog Colt's humans who captured him on a work break, taking advantage of his time off:

According to veterinarian Dr. Patrick Mahaney, any dog can experience FRAPs, but interestingly, very young puppies may not show their exuberant selves in this way as often as older dogs do because their bodies haven't developed enough to exert such a high level of energy. Healthy and happy adult dogs, on the other hand, can catch a case of the zoomies at any time.<sup>2</sup>

Animal behaviorists aren't entirely sure why dogs get the zoomies, but a good guess is they're the result of surges of pent-up energy.

### Sources and References

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[Southern Living \(Archived\)](#).

<sup>1</sup> [VetStreet, September 8, 2015](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Pet Central, June 22, 2017 \(Archived\)](#).

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