

Face value

Lez Graham explains how you can often recognise canines' emotions by their facial expressions – and vice versa.

When I train people I always encourage them to smile at their dogs when their pet gets something right and from when their dog displeases them. Why? Well from an early age your dog is conditioned to learn that great things happen around people who are smiling and generally not so great things happen around people who are frowning. Unfortunately we humans tend to frown when we are learning something new, or when we're concentrating, giving very mixed messages to our dogs.

READING EXPRESSIONS

Dogs, more than any other animals on the planet, have learned to read our facial

Dogs can often tell what you are thinking by your facial expression, and vice versa.

expressions due to the amount of time they've spent in our company; in fact they probably read them better than many humans do.

It's not just smiling and frowning that our dogs see

normally as he's shaking his paw desperately trying to remove the offensive stuff.

When you train dogs, whether it's your own dog or someone else's, it's a really good idea to know what the basic facial expressions are for people. It's then a small leap to facial expressions for dogs. Without turning our dogs into mini humans, the facial expressions are surprisingly similar.

Many years ago I worked as a kinesiologist and part of my training was in behavioural structural genetics (physiognomy), which is basically how the shape of your facial features indicates the personality (or at least how the personality under stress will behave). Later I became interested in micro-expressions, which is the work of Paul Ekman (on which

to be able to read; if my younger sonatches a toy I use my 'surprised' face and he will immediately let go and sit back waiting to be told 'it's OK'). Similarly, if a dog jumps up I recommend people pull their 'disgust' face, as if they have a really bad smell under their nose. And you know what? The dog gets it! Have you ever seen a dog stand in dog poo? The look on his face is one of disgust, normally as he's shaking his paw desperately trying to remove the offensive stuff.

Sky1's Lie to Me is based; rather than inherent nature, this concept is based upon what you're feeling at that moment in time. The expressions that fill across the face are so revealing; all you have to do is watch someone read a book or write an email to see what I mean; watching people texting can be particularly fascinating.

COMPARING EXPRESSIONS

As a canine behaviour practitioner and dog trainer, I find having knowledge of physiognomy and micro-expressions invaluable. Both give such an insight into what is going on for the owner, the dog and their relationship.

For example, you may be walking out with an owner and their dog-aggressive dog. The owner spots another dog and you'll see fear cross their face; within a heartbeat it's on their dog's face and before you know it you're in a reactive situation – the owner reacting with fear to the dog across the street, then the dog reacting to the owner's fright and responding with aggression.

There are seven main emotions that we feel (see panels), although there are emotions within emotions – for example happiness and joy, disgust and dislike and so on. The following pages show human facial expressions indicating a variety of emotions, and similar expressions in dogs are pictured alongside them – but note they are not always indicative of the same emotion humans feel.

Happy

The two photos below are both showing happiness. In the photo on the left, however, the smile doesn't seem to quite make it to the subject's eyes, whereas in the photo on the right he has more crinkles around his eyes and the smile is wider, making it more joyous and sincere. It is the expression on the right that you would like to see on your friends' faces when you meet them.

Although there's no evidence that dogs 'smile' in the way that we do, or for the reasons that we do, there are a lot of smiling dogs out there – my two included. Whether we're humanising the expression or whether the dog is displaying happiness, there's no getting away from the expression in the eyes or the upturned corners of the mouth, complete with grin lines, which mirrors the human smile so much.

Fear

The top two photos show different degrees of human fear – the largest shows someone recoiling from the source; the corners of the lips are pulled back due to the tension in the face and the eyes are widened in shock. However, because 'fear' is present the eyebrows stay straight rather than being rounded in surprise.

The smaller of the two is more associated with worry or low-level fear rather than imminent danger and is often seen on the face of someone recounting or imagining fear.

The human expressions are more or less mirrored in the dogs (above). The white dog is pulling back in fear. His eyes are rounded and the corners of his mouth are pulled back. The black and tan dog is displaying aggression but appears to be doing so from fear – the eyes are rounded and the corners of the mouth are pulled back.

Training & behaviour

two dogs in the photos (below left and bottom left) may look surprised, they probably aren't and it's more than likely just part of their normal look. This 'surprised' expression is one of the reasons dogs look cute and why we want to cuddle them.

Sad
When someone is feeling sad, everything about their face becomes downturned: the corners of the mouth turn down and the corners of the eyes droop while the middle of the eyebrows is raised (in varying degrees in relation to the intensity of the sadness). The make-up that the 'sad' clown wears is an exaggeration of how we look when we're sad which is why we can relate to the

clown's face so much. The Labrador puppy below has the classic 'sad' expression. If you see this puppy you would no doubt go 'Aw' and want to cuddle and mother him. As I don't know the puppy I can't interpret whether he's feeling a bit worried or fearful, or whether his expression is a result of the angle that the photo has been taken at.

Angry
We can express anger either with tightly-pursed lips or lips drawn back showing our teeth. When we show our teeth, we tend to have made a noise – either an expletive or just simply a frustrated growl or snarl. These tend to be a drawing down of the eyebrows in the middle forming an angry frown, and the eyelids are tight while the eyes are glaring.

Surprise
When a person shows surprise a number of things happen: there is a rounding of the eyes, a rounding of the mouth and generally a raising and a rounding of the eyebrows, as demonstrated by both of the photos above, to greater or lesser degrees. While the

Find out more

So how do you learn to read and understand human facial expressions? Check out F.A.C.E. Training (www.pawshelpson.com).

If you want to know more about expressive behaviour in dogs then an excellent course is the Basic Dog Handling and Training module with the Cambridge Institute of Dog Behaviour and Training (www.cidbt.org.uk).

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