



Be Safe - Dog Bite Safety & Education

Pet Professional Guild Educational Handout #2

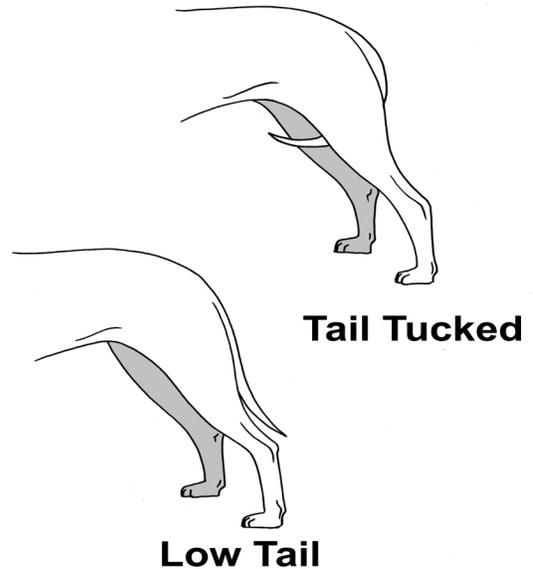
The Myth of the Wagging Tail

One of the most common misperceptions about dogs is the myth that a wagging tail means a dog is happy. While dogs do indeed wag their tails when they are happy, they also use them to communicate various feelings. Dogs are a non-verbal species and, while barking can sometimes be used to communicate, they mostly rely on body language to “talk” to us and other animals. As such, they use many parts of their body such as eyes, ears, lips, musculature, and also their tails to transmit information.

If you observe any dog closely for a period of time you will quickly notice that there is no such thing as a uniform tail wag. Instead, dogs use different wagging speeds and different tail positions depending on the situation, and what they are trying to convey. Generally speaking, the position (or height) of the tail can be used as an emotional meter, while the speed of the wag indicates how excited or aroused the dog is.

Tail Positions:

- **Tucked tail:** when the tail is tightly tucked under the dog's body it is a sign of intense fear or can also be a submissive display in a specific context.



- **Low Tail:** usually associated with worry or being submissive in a specific context.

- **Middle or Neutral:** how a dog carries his tail most of the time and is a sign of a relaxed dog. Some dogs naturally carry their tails high (e.g. basenjis) and others carry it low (e.g. greyhounds).

- **Horizontal and Tense (Straight Out at the Back):** means that the dog is alert and attentive.

- **High Tail:** usually used to show assertiveness or to challenge others.

- **Vertical tail:** is a clear challenge and is used by dogs to say they are confident and in control.

Tail Wag Patterns:

- **Speed:** in general, the faster the wag, the more excited the dog.

- **Intensity:** slight, barely noticeable wag of small breadth (often seen during greetings) means the dog is hesitant.

- **Broad Wag:** a sign of friendliness or contentment. This is the “happy dog wag.” If the dog is very excited, you may also see his hips wiggling from side to side.

- **Tiny, High Speed Wags:** if the tail is wagging in such a way that it looks like the tail is vibrating, it means the dog is ready for action, usually to run or fight (especially if the tail is held high).

When looking at your dog for clues about how he is feeling, remember to look at his entire body. Does the body look relaxed or are all the muscles tense? Is the dog staring hard at you (or another person, dog, animal, other object) or is he giving you soft eyes? Observe your dog regularly and take note of his postures to better understand him.

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Pet dog owners should begin training and socializing their dog as soon as he/she joins the family. All training should be done in a positive manner using rewards based, scientifically sound training methods.

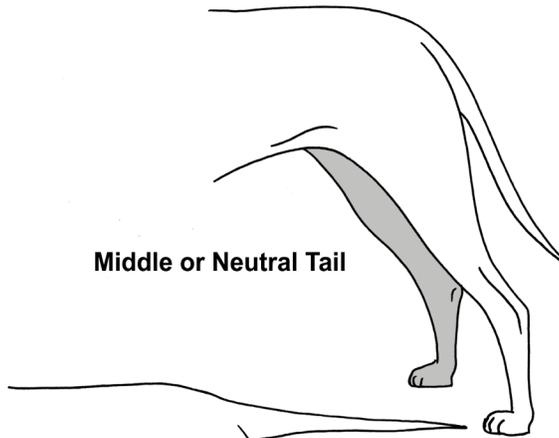
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Pet Professional Guild Directory:

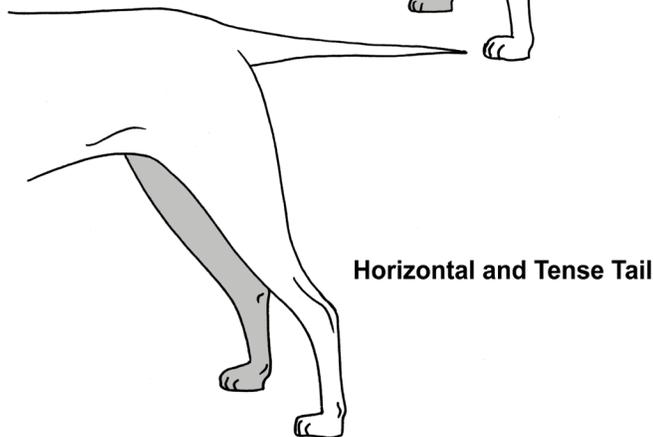
www.petprofessionalguild.com/PetGuildMembers.

To learn more about force-free training and humane, up-to-date, scientifically sound behavior modification and training methods, see

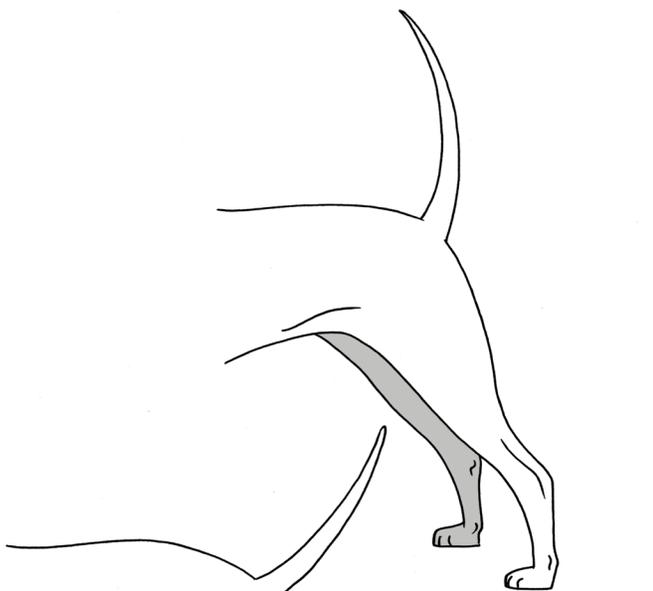
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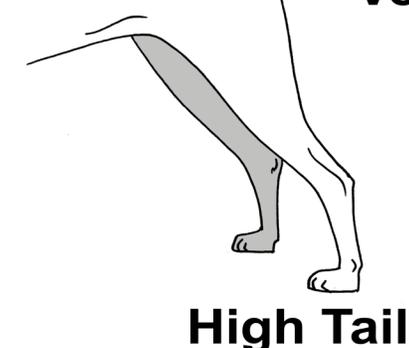
Middle or Neutral Tail



Horizontal and Tense Tail



Vertical Tail



High Tail