UNDERSTANDING YOUR CAT’S BODY LANGUAGE

Your cat is communicating with you all the time. It’s important for you to listen. They use their body to show you when they’re feeling calm and relaxed, and when they’re feeling stressed out and anxious. Try to avoid labels like “fractious or grumpy” and instead describe the behavior and body language you are seeing. Labels don’t describe behavior, can’t be tested, gives a false understanding of the problem, increases the use of ineffective training and not addressing the function of the behavior, provides excuses for people to get rid of their animals, and more.

THE GREEN ZONE

When your cat is in this zone, they’re feeling calm and secure. They’re likely resting or exploring an environment they feel comfortable in.

SLEEPING / RESTING

- EYES: Closed to open
- HEAD: On surface or over body
- TAIL: Extended or loosely wrapped
- EARS: Normal or forward
- SOUNDS: None or purr

RESTING

- EYES: Open, relaxed
- BODY: Lying on belly or sitting
- HEAD: On surface or over body
- TAIL: Extended or loosely wrapped
- EARS: Normal or forward
- SOUNDS: None or purr

PERKED AND INTERESTED

- EYES: Looking directly but not intensely
- BODY: Back is horizontal
- HEAD: Head slightly down
- TAIL: Closer to body, may flicker slightly
- EARS: Perked forward
- EYES: Pupils slightly dilated

EXPLORING

- EYES: Open, staring but not intensely
- BODY: Back is horizontal
- HEAD: Over body
- TAIL: Up and winding or loosely down
- EARS: Normal or perked
- SOUNDS: None or “meow”
**THE CAUTION ZONE**

When your cat is in this zone, they're feeling moderately anxious and stressed. While in this zone, they're alert and likely uncomfortable in their current environment. When your cat is in this zone, consider whether you can remove or redirect them.

**ARoused / mildly anxious**
- **EYES**: Wide open, avoiding eye contact
- **BODY**: Shifted away
- **HEAD**: Turns head away
- **TAIL**: Closer to body, may flicker slightly
- **EARS**: To the side
- **EYES**: Pupils slightly dilated

**Frightened**
- **EYES**: Fully open, pupils dilated
- **HEAD**: Little or no movement
- **TAIL**: Tucked, hair standing
- **EARS**: To the side
- **BODY**: Flat, tense / tight
- **SOUNDS**: None

**TryIng to flee**
- **EYES**: Pupils dilated
- **HEAD**: Turned toward stimulus
- **TAIL**: Close to body, hair standing
- **BODY**: Poised to flee, back arched
- **SOUNDS**: None, meow, hissing

**THE RED ZONE**

When your cat is in this zone, they're over threshold, they're stressed, terrified and may exhibit offensive or defensive aggressive behavior due to this. It is critical that you remove the trigger and if that isn't possible, remove them (by luring) into a safe, comfortable space to calm.

**Fight / terrified**
- **EYES**: Fully open, pupils fully dilated
- **HEAD**: Lower than body
- **TAIL**: Tucked, hair standing
- **EARS**: Forward
- **BODY**: Leaning forward, thrashing
- **SOUNDS**: Growling, hissing

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