

Feline Body Language



Cat communication is a combination of body language, scent marking, and sounds like meowing, hissing, growling, and so on. Since, as humans, we aren't able to use scent or sounds to communicate with our cats, understanding their body language is very important.




When looking at your cat, watch their whole body – ears, tails, whiskers, and all that's in between. No one part of your cat can tell you everything but together they give a picture of your cat's state of mind.

- Are they relaxed and stretched long? Tense and curled tightly? Crouched low?
- Are their ears up, back, or sideways?
- Is their tail up and relaxed, stiff, or swishing?
- Are their pupils tight slits, wide and round, or somewhere in between?
- Is their fur laying flat or standing up?

Below is a review of some important emotional states in your cat. This is meant to provide a general sense of what to look for and lists some of the body language that most cats use. However, every cat is an individual and may use a slightly different combination of body language to communicate. Take time to watch your cat and you will begin to see what they're telling you.

Signs Your Cat Is...

<p>Happy, Relaxed, Confident</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose body, stretched out or standing with a flat back • Tail up with slight curve or held loosely • Eyes open with “normal” almond-shaped pupils • Ears forward or slightly to side • Meowing or purring 	
<p>Hunting, Playing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body low, tensed to pounce • Ears forward • Pupils narrowed • Tail low and still or swishing • Approaching and retreating • Grabbing and holding with paws • No vocalizing (typically) 	

<p>Irritated, Annoyed, “Overstimulated”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body tense • Raised hair along back • Rippling back • Tail flicking or swishing • Pupils dilated (rounded) • Ears sideways • Growling or hissing • May turn head toward hands or lift a paw in warning 	
<p>Shy, Fearful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body tense and still, lowered • Leaning away • Tail wrapped tightly around body or arched at the base • Pupils dilated • Ears turned sideways or toward the concern • Growling or hissing • Swatting 	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">shutterstock.com • 449064385</p>
<p>Terrified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body tightly crouched or standing with arched back • Raised hair on back and tail • Stiff, straight tail, tail arched at the base, or wrapped tightly to body • Pupils dilated, possibly eyes tightly closed • Ears fully sideways and/or back (“airplane ears”) • Growling or hissing • Swatting, striking, or biting 	 <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">shutterstock.com • 64580206</p>

Silicon Valley Pet Project is here to help! Visit our website at www.svpetchproject.org or email us at info@svpetproject.org.

This material was written in collaboration with cat behavior consultant Jessica Char. Learn more at www.FelineEngineering.com.