



Does Your Dog REALLY Know What He Did Wrong?

Despite what many humans think, dogs do not lay awake at night plotting revenge – nor are they consumed with feelings of guilt after chewing up your favourite pair of shoes. Dissecting your shoes or landscaping your yard is not an act of retribution; it was simply something fun to do at the time! Dogs live in the moment and have no concept of consequences beyond what is occurring at the time.

Getting angry with your dog and punishing him when you arrive home to find your couch redesigned is an exercise in futility. The fact is that your dog probably chewed your couch at 10am and it is now 6pm – 8 hours later. Your dog is incapable of connecting the two events; therefore your punishment is inhumane. Sure you're angry, but let's look at the reality of the situation.

You arrive home from work and open the door to find your couch dissected. Your dog takes one look at you and lowers his body to the ground, his ears are back, he is avoiding eye contact, he licks his lips – in general he looks very 'submissive'. To you, he looks very guilty indeed! This is where people often say "He KNOWS what he did wrong!"

In reality, the very second you looked at his redesigning attempts your body gave away cues to your anger. I have listed some of the clues you may have given away below:

- 🐾 You sucked in a breath
- 🐾 Your eyes went 'hard'
- 🐾 You pursed your lips
- 🐾 You lifted an eyebrow
- 🐾 You gritted your teeth
- 🐾 Your nostrils flared
- 🐾 You groaned

Your dog, who is acutely aware of the signals your body is giving, has tuned into your anger and wants to calm you down. Through experience, he may have learned that he is at risk when you act in this manner so he gives you a series of calming signals (see picture at the bottom of this article):

- 🐾 He turns his head and averts his gaze
- 🐾 He licks his lips
- 🐾 He lowers his body posture
- 🐾 He pulls his ears back
- 🐾 He moves very slowly, curving his body

These signals ARE NOT SIGNS OF GUILT – they are calming signals. He is trying to communicate that he is no threat to you and is trying to avoid a possible violent outcome. He probably has no idea whatsoever about WHY you are angry, he just knows you are.



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If you are sitting there reading this and are still not convinced try this experiment:

Get a piece of paper, screw it up and throw it behind your dog. Now ask him in an angry manner while pointing at the paper "Did you do this????"... "You're a baaaaad boy!!"....

Your dog will try to calm you down by giving you the same set of signals you get when you come home to find he has destroyed something. Of course you KNOW your dog did nothing wrong in this instance. He is simply reacting to your anger.



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