# 5 Subtle Signs Your Dog Is Feeling Unsafe

***(and What Helps Instead)***

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Many dogs don't growl, snap, or hide when they feel unsafe. Instead, they show quiet, easily missed signals. These subtle signs are part of your dog's stress and survival system doing its job — not "bad behaviour."

Learning to spot them early can prevent escalation and help your dog feel safer, faster.

## 1. Freezing or Sudden Stillness

- **What it looks like:** Sudden stillness, tense muscles, wide eyes, paused breathing.
- **What it means:** A stress response where the nervous system goes into high alert.
- **What helps instead:** Increase distance, avoid touching, calmly create space, note the trigger.

## 2. Lip Licking or Tongue Flicks

- **What it looks like:** Quick tongue flicks or repeated lip licking with no food present.
- **What it means:** An appeasement and stress signal linked to social pressure.
- **What helps instead:** Reduce pressure, soften body language, pause interaction.

## 3. Turning the Head or Body Away

- **What it looks like:** Avoiding eye contact, angling the body away.
- **What it means:** A polite request for space and de-escalation.
- **What helps instead:** Honour the space request, allow choice, reward disengagement.

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## 4. Excessive Sniffing or Sudden Distraction

- **What it looks like:** Intense sniffing or sudden interest in the environment.
- **What it means:** A coping strategy that helps regulate emotions.
- **What helps instead:** Allow sniffing, build it into walks, avoid rushing.

## 5. Yawning Outside Sleepy Contexts

- **What it looks like:** Repeated yawning during training or social situations.
- **What it means:** A stress-regulation behaviour, not tiredness.
- **What helps instead:** Shorten sessions, lower difficulty, add breaks.

**If your dog is showing these signals, they're communicating - not misbehaving. Behaviour changes when the emotion underneath feels safer.**

Support safety with distance before exposure, choice over compliance, predictability over pressure, and observation before intervention.