



Behavior Club

University of Illinois

College of Veterinary Medicine

RED LIGHT! GREEN LIGHT! GAME

A game for interpreting canine body language!

Body Language of Feline Anxiety



Slight crouching



Major crouching

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Dilated Eyes



Ears Turned Back,
Furrowed Brow



Staring,
Focused on Object



Hiding,
Looks Half Asleep



Laying on Side,
Tail Flicking



Hair Raised, Staring,
Ears Turned Back



Walking with Flat Back,
Tail Down, Head Down



Ready to Jump Off Perch



Suddenly Grooming,
Excessive Grooming

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Body Language of Fear in Dogs



Slight Cowering



Major Cowering

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Licking Lips
when no food nearby



Panting
when not hot or thirsty



Brows Furrowed, Ears to Side



Moving in Slow Motion
walking slow on floor



Acting Sleepy or Yawning
when they shouldn't be tired



Hypervigilant
looking in many directions



Suddenly Won't Eat
but was hungry earlier



Moving Away



Pacing

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When observing dogs, try to assess their body language and decide if they are showing:



- Signs of being calm and relaxed where you are okay to approach (**Green**),
- Signs of *slight* fear or anxiety where you should approach slowly with caution (**Yellow**),
- Or signs of *extreme* fear or anxiety where you should NOT approach the dog (**Red**).

Green

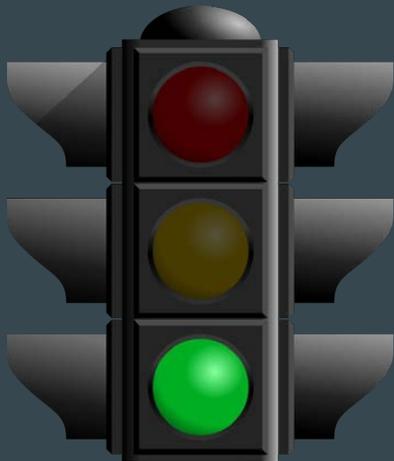
A dog may be labeled as **Green** (calm and relaxed and okay to approach) if they show behavioral signs such as:

- “The Whole Body Happy Wiggle”
- Relaxed Facial Expressions
- Dog rubs up against you
- “I’m overjoyed to see you” body posture
- Eyes soft
- Ears in a neutral position

ST
SL
G



P
W



Yellow

A dog may be labeled as **Yellow** (*slight* fear or anxiety where you should approach slowly with caution) if they show behavioral signs such as:

- Hard Stare - staring directly at you without breaking contact
- Ears back
- Moving away from you
- Whale Eye
- Tail wagging slowly
- **Approaching you in a crouched or slow motion posture**
 - Just because a dog comes up to you doesn't mean it wants you to pet it

ST
SL
G



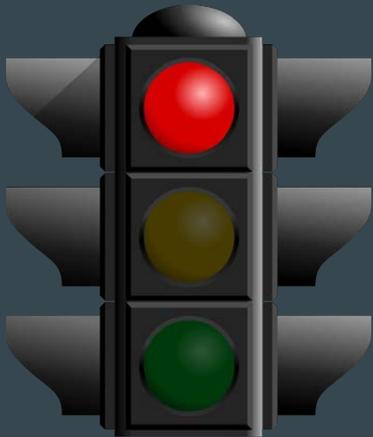
P
W



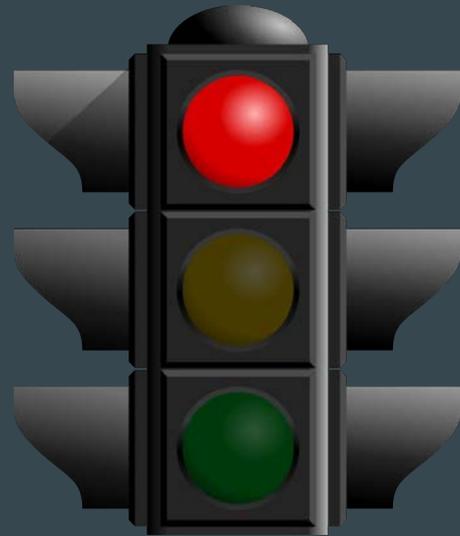
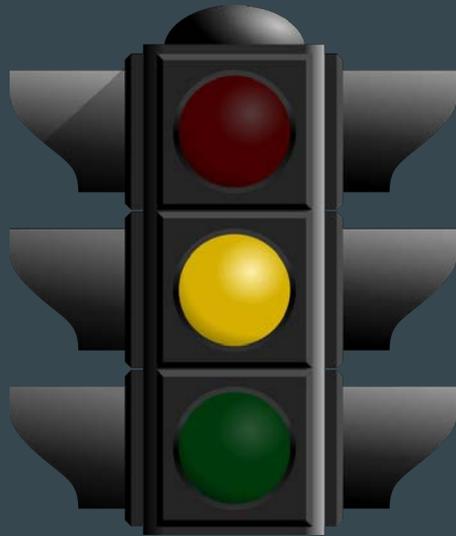
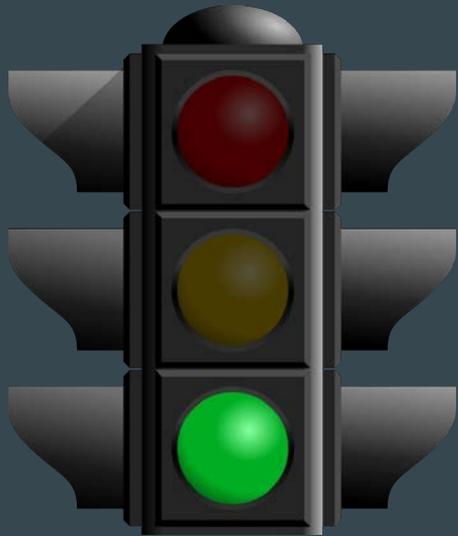
Red

A dog may be labeled as **Red** (*extreme fear or anxiety where you should NOT approach*) if they show behavioral signs such as:

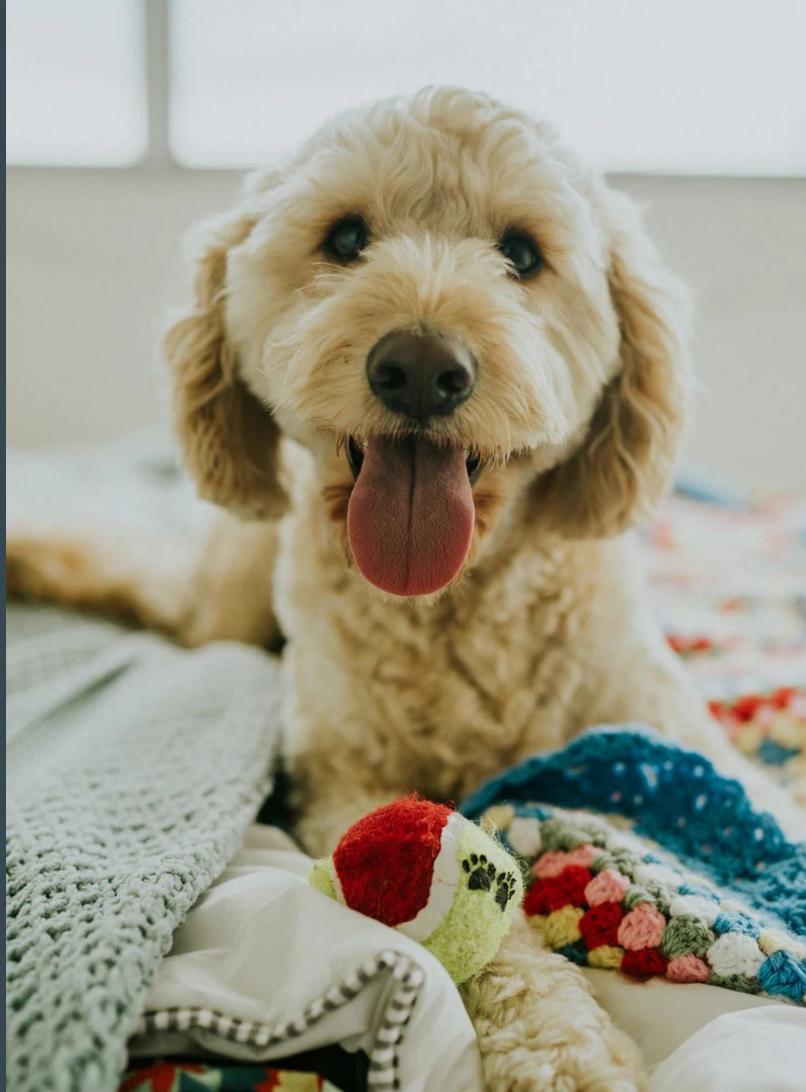
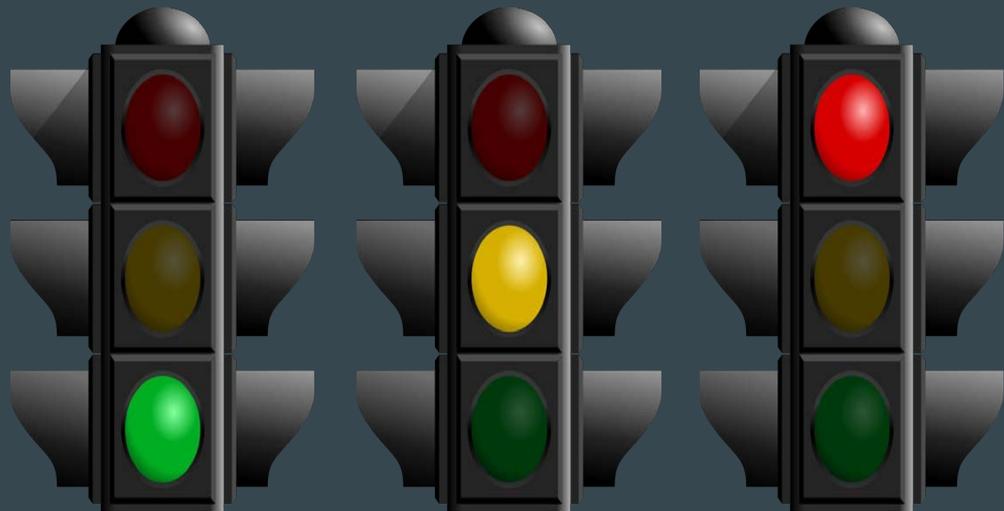
- Snarl
- Snapping
- Cowering
- Moving in slow motion with hard stare
- Stiff body posture
- Lunging at leash

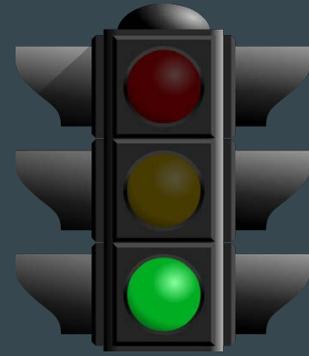


Instructions: Assess the body language of the dogs in the following pictures and decide if you'd label each dog as “Green,” “Yellow,” or “Red”



Green, Yellow, or Red?



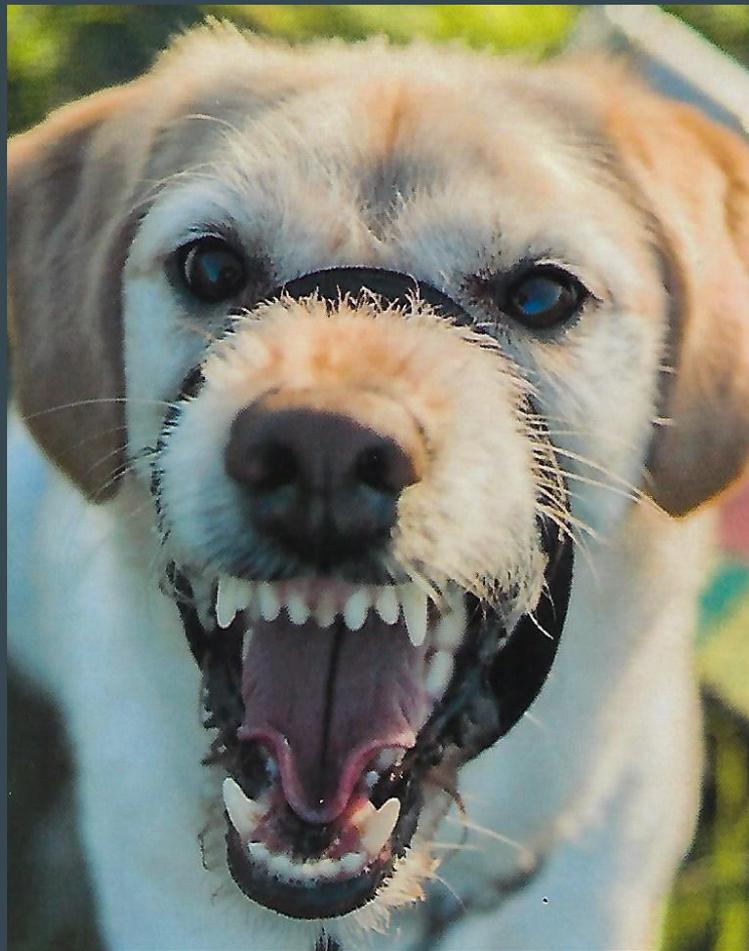
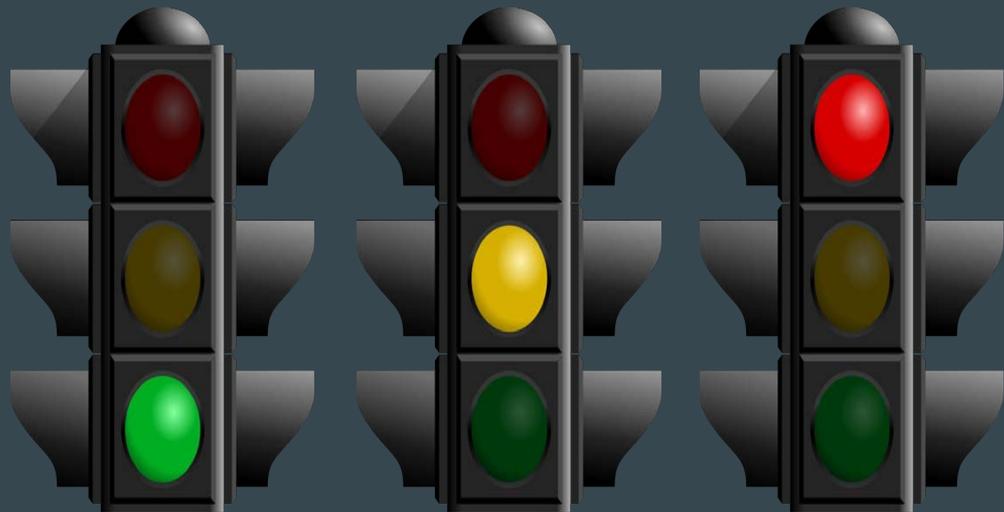


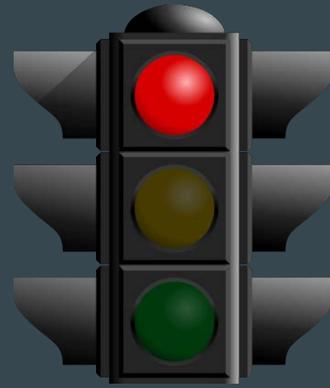
GREEN LIGHT

This pup is most likely OVERJOYED to see you, but always watch the whole body language just to be sure.

Always let a dog come up to you instead of you coming down toward them to get off on the very best foot!

Green, Yellow, or Red?



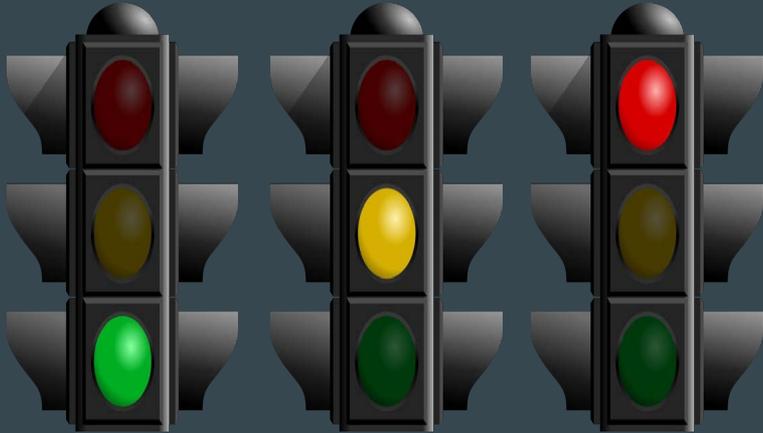


RED LIGHT

This animal is very fearful and may bite.

DO NOT approach this animal. Put distance between yourself and this animal as safely as possible!

Green, Yellow, or Red?

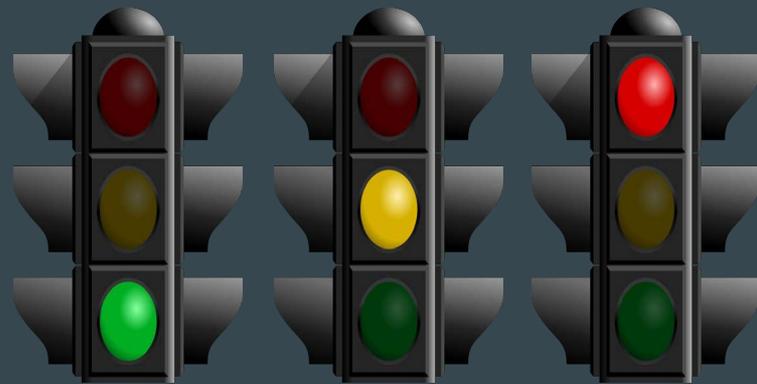




GREEN LIGHT

This dog wants to play, just be ready for a very rowdy play session!

Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- Creased forehead
- Ears slightly back
- Head turned away slightly



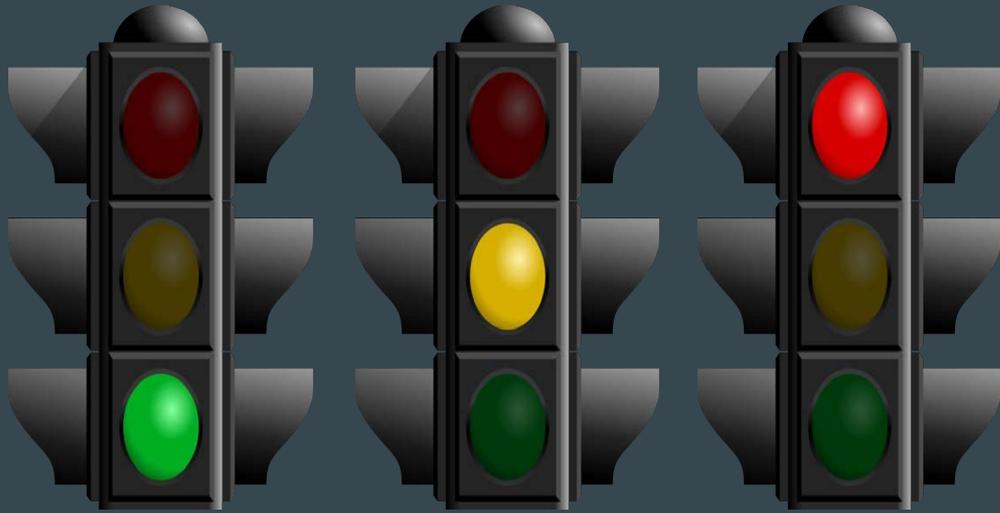
YELLOW LIGHT

Watch this dog's body language carefully when approaching.

When laying down, he may feel more vulnerable and you should carefully watch for more signs of stress if you choose to approach, and you should NEVER approach a sleeping dog.



Green, Yellow, or Red?





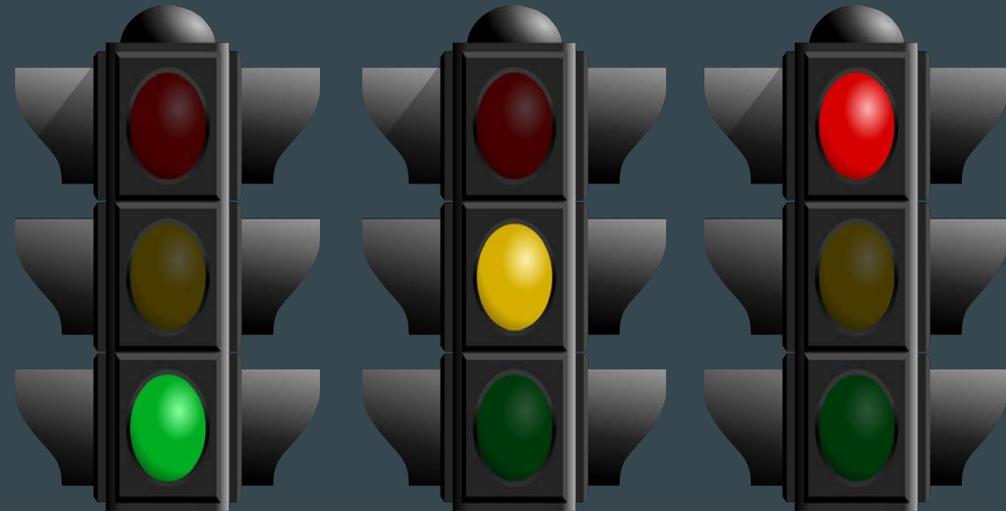
YELLOW LIGHT

Signs to watch out for:

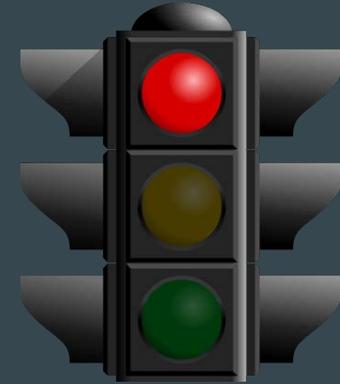
- Hard stare
- Tense facial features
- Alert ears
- Tail being held stiffly or wagging in slo-mo

Proceed with caution and look for changes in the body posture that could turn into red - light signals!

Green, Yellow, or Red?



RED LIGHT



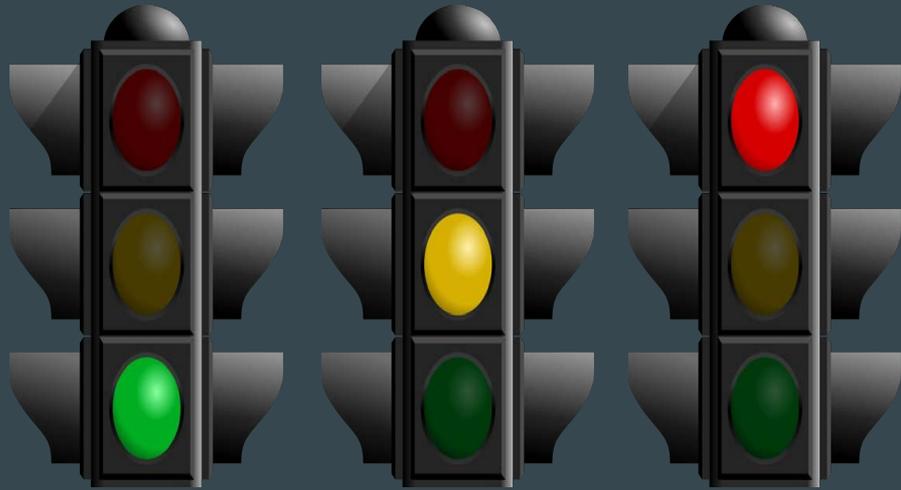
Signs to look for:

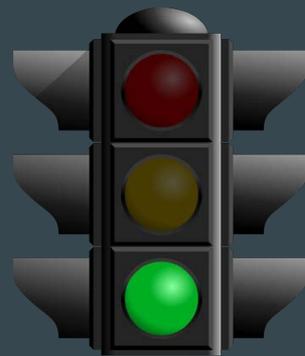
- The ears are back and tense
- The skin around the eyes looks tense
- The eyes are in a hard stare
- The mouth is snarling
- Head held high and stiff

DO NOT APPROACH!

This animal is very afraid and trying to approach this animal can result in physical injury.

Green, Yellow, or Red?





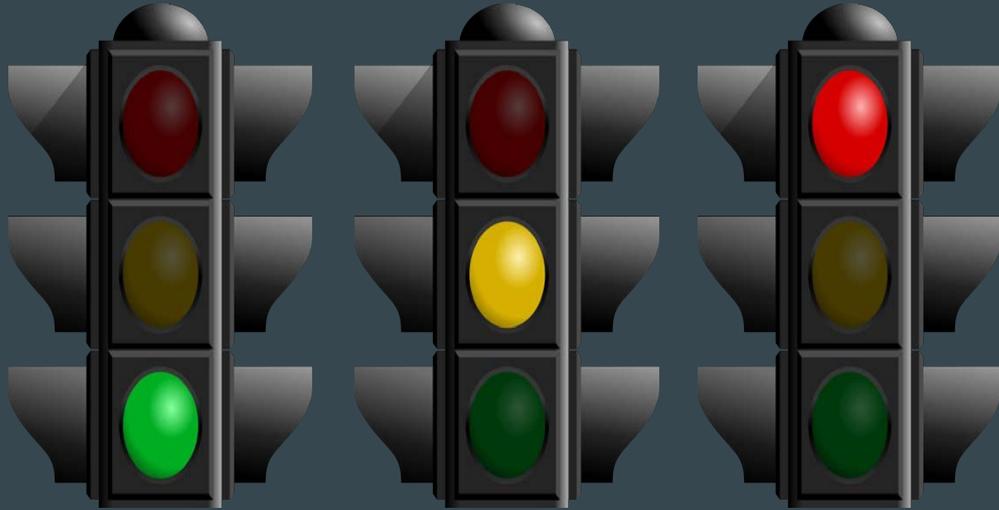
GREEN LIGHT

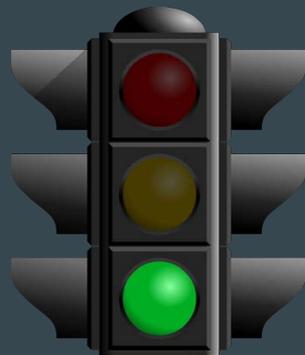
Signs to look for:

- Face is relaxed
- Eyes are soft

This pup looks relaxed and you are ok to greet! Refer back to the beginning to see how to politely greet a dog!

Green, Yellow, or Red?





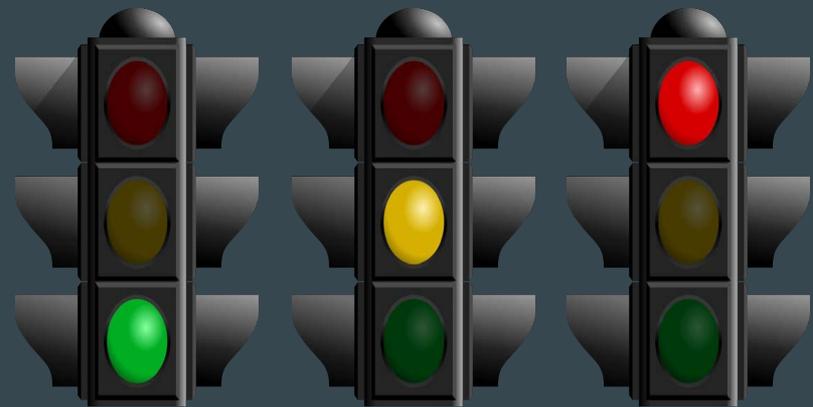
GREEN LIGHT

This dog looks happy to see you!

To make sure this greeting goes well, encourage the dog to come to you without leaning toward the dog! If the body language stays relaxed, your good to GO!

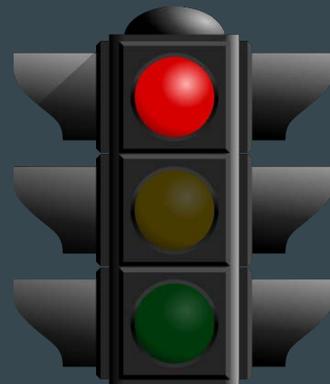
Refer to “How to Greet a Dog” Handout

Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- The ears are back and tense
- The skin around the eyes looks tense
- The eyes are in a hard stare
- The mouth is fully snarling
- Head held high and stiff



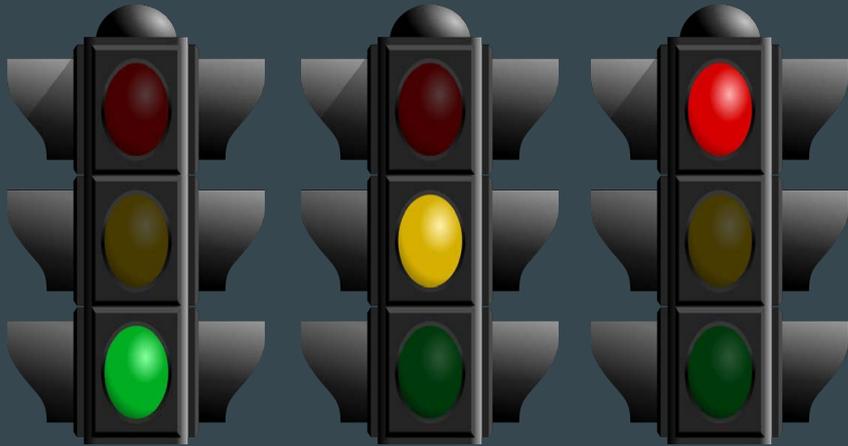
RED LIGHT

DO NOT APPROACH!

This animal is very afraid and trying to approach this animal can result in physical injury.

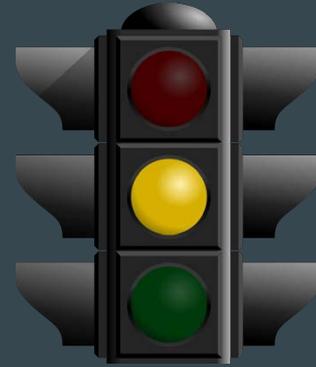


Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- Whale eye
- Tense facial features
- Head lowered



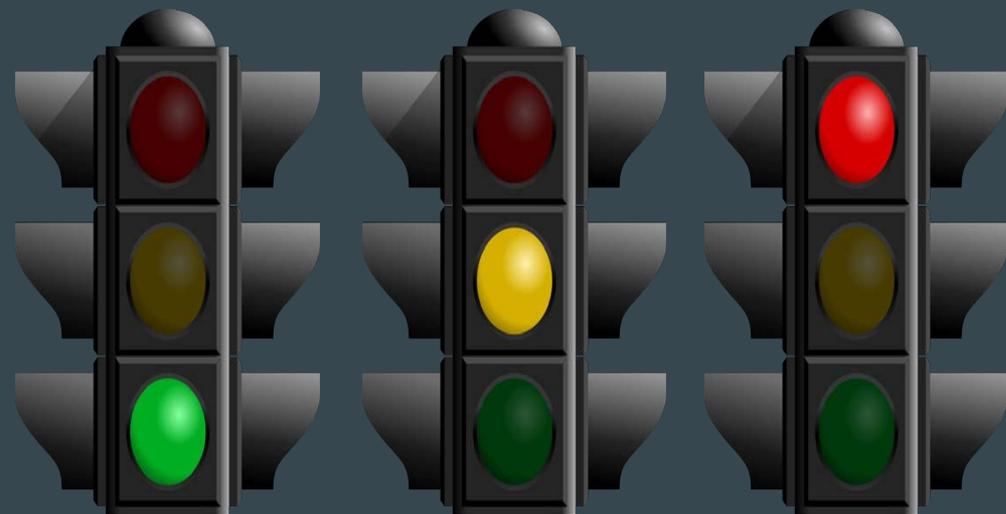
YELLOW LIGHT

This dog is giving the characteristic “whale eye”. Meaning that she is very unsure about the person approaching and wants some space.

Proceed very slowly and with caution.



Green, Yellow, or Red?



YELLOW LIGHT



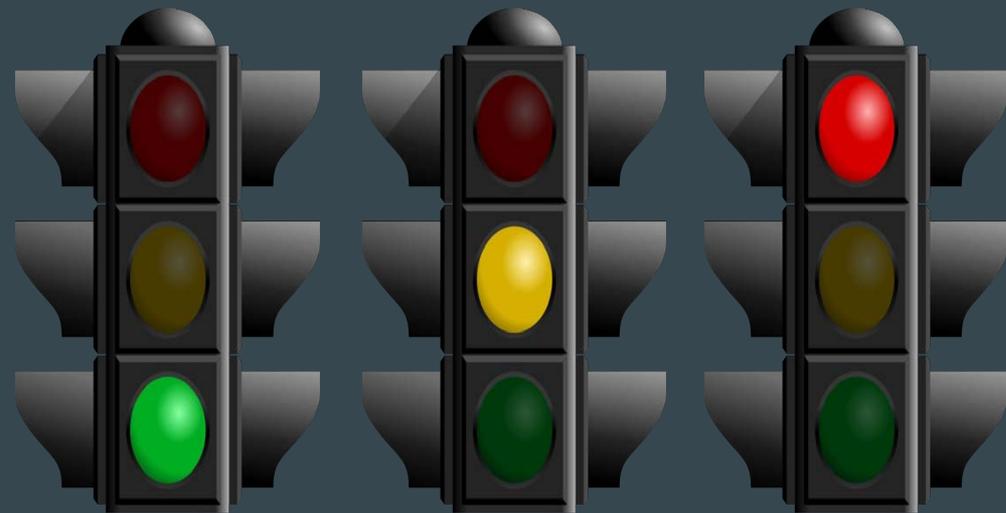
Signs to look for:

- Panting (-)
- Ears forward (+)
- Creases at sides of mouth (-)
- Relaxed eyes (+)
- Mixed signals??

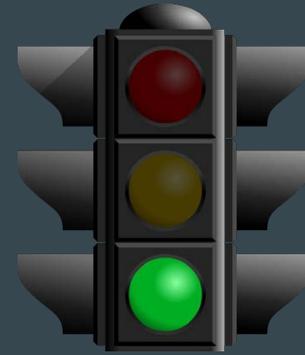
This pup may be smiling because he is happy to see you. BUT he may also be panting because your presence is making him nervous!

Be careful and allow him to initiate a greeting!

Green, Yellow, or Red?



GREEN LIGHT

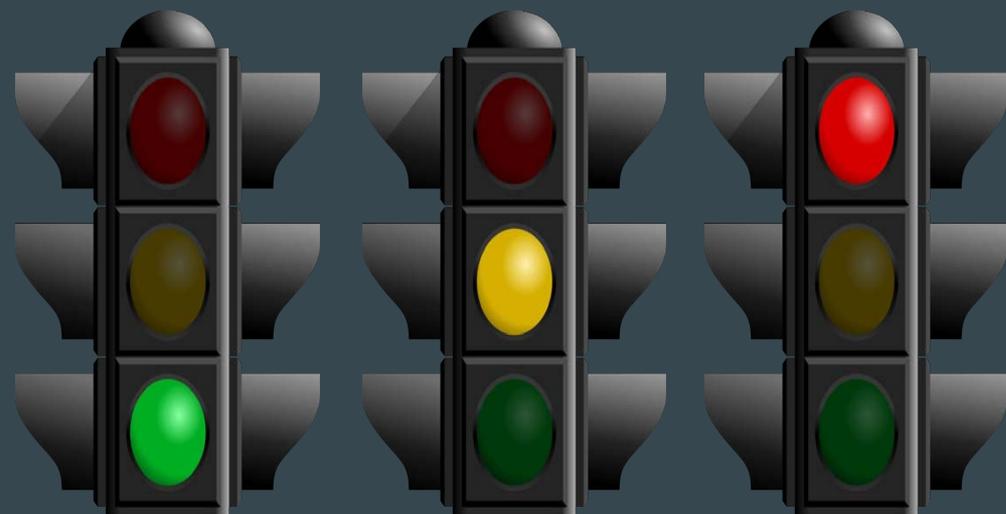


Signs to look for:

- Face is relaxed
- Ears are relaxed
- Eyes are soft
- Leaning toward you

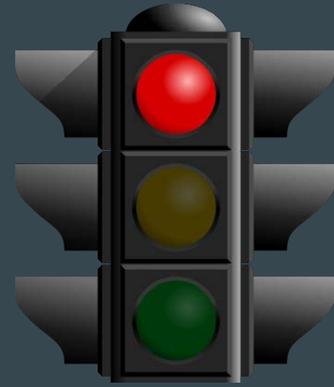
This pup looks relaxed and you are ok to greet! Remember to always invite a dog to come greet you instead of leaning in or extending your hand.

Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- The ears are back and tense
- The animal is snapping and trying to bite
- The animal is lunging at the end of the leash



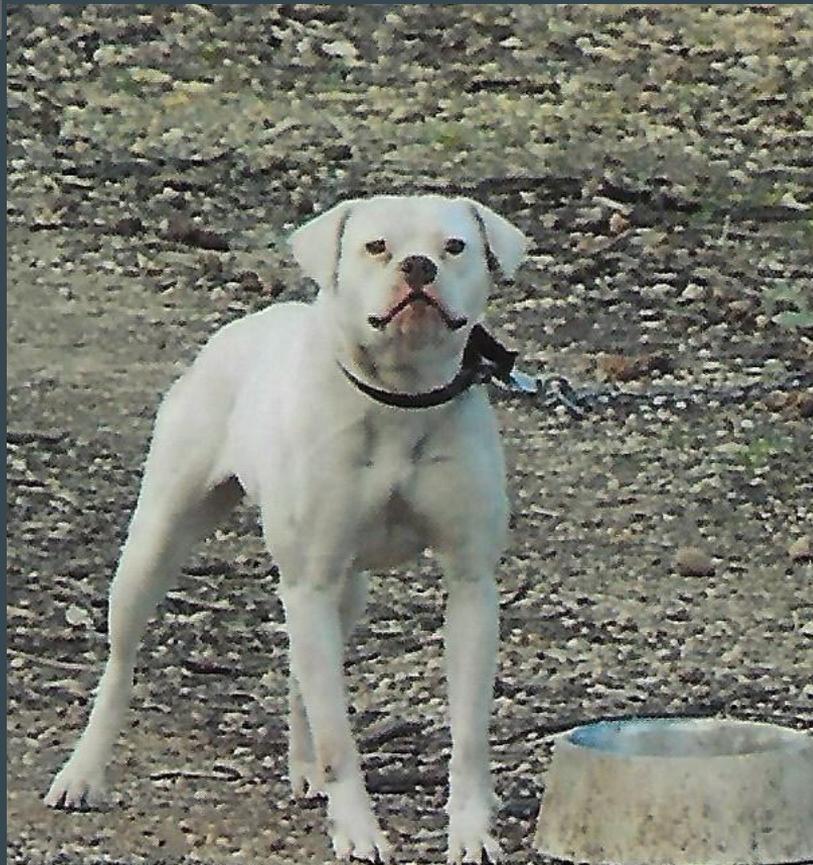
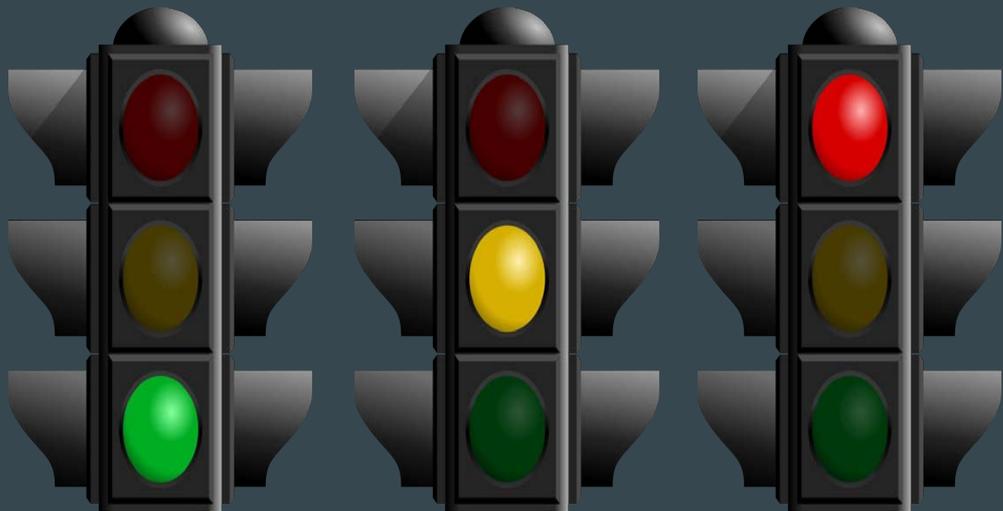
RED LIGHT

DO NOT APPROACH!

This animal may be very dangerous! Put distance between yourself and this animal immediately.

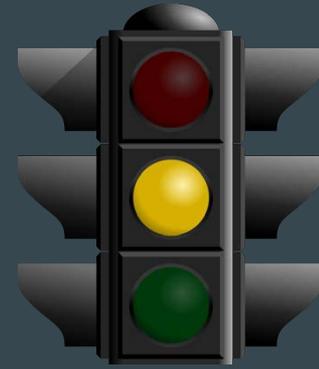


Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- Hard stare
- Standing still
- Head raised with ears alert and staring
- Tense body
- Standing next to a food bowl



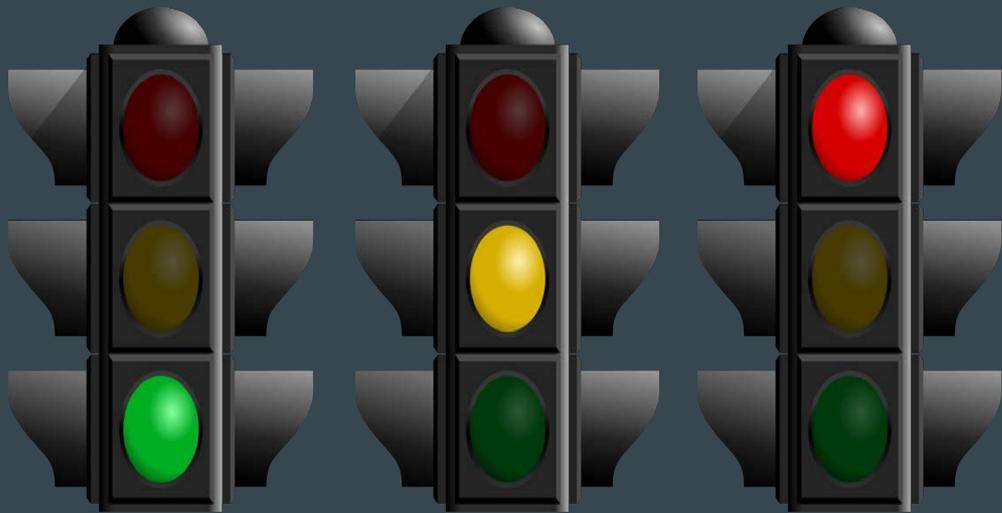
YELLOW LIGHT

This pup is NOT SURE about you!

Not approaching this animal is safest, however if approaching is necessary, carefully watch the animal's body language to ensure that the signals aren't crossing into "red light" territory.



Green, Yellow, or Red?



Signs to look for:

- Ears back
- Licking lips
- Eyebrow furrowed
- Face tense



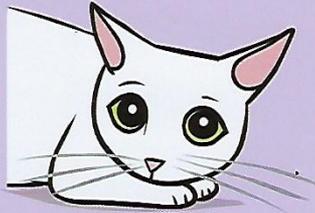
YELLOW LIGHT



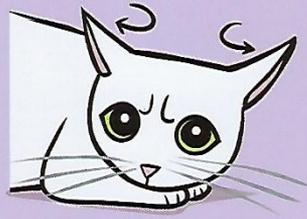
This pup is anxious. Licking the lips can be a sign of stress.

This dog is also on a leash, which can make her feel more vulnerable.

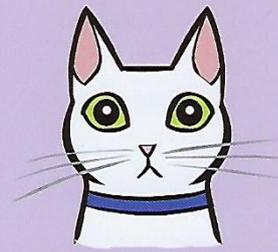
Inviting this dog to approach you to greet first would be appropriate, but carefully watch other body language signals that the dog is giving you.



Dilated Eyes



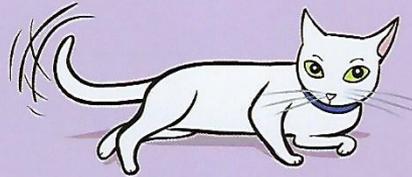
**Ears Turned Back,
Furrowed Brow**



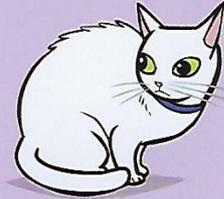
**Staring,
Focused on Object**



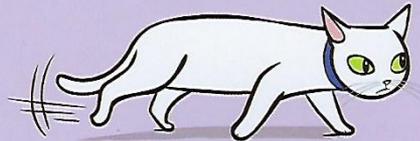
**Hiding,
Looks Half Asleep**



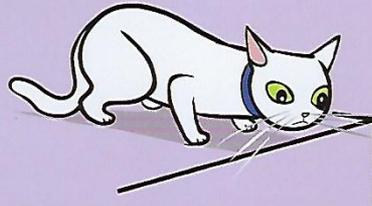
**Laying on Side,
Tail Flicking**



**Hair Raised, Staring,
Ears Turned Back**



**Walking with Flat Back,
Tail Down, Head Down**



Ready to Jump Off Perch



**Suddenly Grooming,
Excessive Grooming**

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Licking Lips
when no food nearby



Panting
when not hot or thirsty



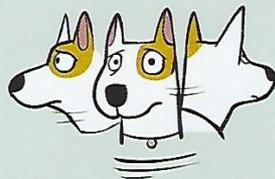
Brows Furrowed, Ears to Side



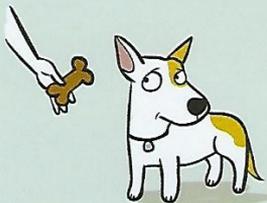
Moving in Slow Motion
walking slow on floor



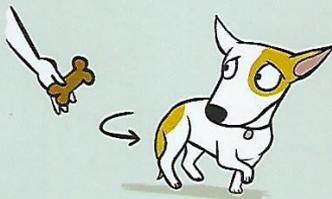
Acting Sleepy or Yawning
when they shouldn't be tired



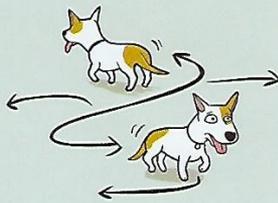
Hypervigilant
looking in many directions



Suddenly Won't Eat
but was hungry earlier



Moving Away



Pacing

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