

Reading Animal Language

Objective: Students will be able to identify visual signals that communicate emotions and possible behavior.

Concept: Both humans and animals give constant visual signals that communicate how they are feeling, what they are thinking and how they may respond to situations. By identifying these signs, you can more effectively deal with a potential situation that could lead to danger. In humans, you can usually address the issue by talking. Since animals cannot talk, your own behavior can ward off problems by avoiding the dangers.

Targeted Age: Middle School

Materials: Paper and pencils

ACTIVITY 1

Ask each student to observe a group of people in a crowded setting (lunch room, mall or any location where people congregate). Record observed body language (facial expressions, hand gestures, body movements, etc.). Notice any voice pitch or tone change if close enough to hear. When back together as a group, ask the students to interpret their observations. Relate this information to what might be observed in animals.

Q: How do you know if body language is positive or negative?

A: In humans the most expressive signals usually come from the face, especially the mouth. Other parts of the body (examples: voice level and tone, arm movements) can also give clues. Each animal has a different set of clues to its emotions. A cat may raise his back, a bull may snort, a ram may paw the ground, etc. By recognizing these signs, you are better able to take precautions if the animal is upset.

Q: What should you do if you observe that an animal is upset?

A: If you identify a sign that an animal may be upset, get away from the animal. Put a fence between yourself and the animal. Always be with an adult when you are around unfamiliar animals.

ACTIVITY 2

Find video clips of animals. These can be home videos, commercials showing animals, TV shows or do a search on the internet. Mute the sound so you are paying more attention to body signals. Discuss how the animal's body changes to indicate emotion. Interpret the similarities between human and animal behavior.

