



# Showing Belly

## Is Your Dog Asking for a Belly Rub or Showing Belly?

Just because your dog flips over and shows you their belly does not mean that they are asking for a belly rub. Many dogs flip over and show their belly to communicate to people (and other dogs) that they are overwhelmed.

### How Do You Tell the Difference?

- Asking for a belly rub: if your dog is lying beside you pawing at you when you stop petting them, or nudging your arm or hand with their nose then they're most likely asking for a belly rub or wanting you to continue petting them. Your dog's will likely display soft eyes, a loose body and seemingly melt into your or the floor.
- Showing belly: some dogs do this from a sitting position, raising one hind leg to expose their belly. More commonly the dog will flip over on its back or side and show its belly to you. It can happen sometimes when you go to pick them up or leash them, or if they think you're angry with them. Rough play can also elicit a "showing belly" response from some dogs – most likely because they haven't decided if you are playing or threatening them. Sometimes meeting new people or having folks loom or reach over them can cause it too. In these instances, think of this as more of a 'tap out' or submission rather than a request for affection.

### What do You do if Your Dog is Showing Belly?

When your dog shows belly, we suggest you give them some breathing room and allow them to approach you. You'll want to avoid walking directly towards them and reaching directly over their head. Notice the trigger for the behavior. Did he show belly when you approached? As you reached for his head? As you put on his collar or leash? Was there a lot of commotion in the house/yard? If it happens because there's a lot of activity going on, like the kids running around playing, make sure the children learn to recognize your dog's request for some space, rather than mistakenly thinking he's asking for a belly rub.

Sometimes giving the dog time to adjust to his new life is all that is needed, however, if your dog continues to show belly after a week or so in his new environment, you will want to start training using counter conditioning techniques. A reward based trainer can also help you with this so that your dog becomes more comfortable with your approach and touch.

**Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation**

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