

Your dog doesn't trust you when you're angry

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Credit: Noël Zia Lee, Wikimedia Commons

BYU psychology professor Ross Flom recently conducted a study to find out just how well dogs understand humans, specifically human emotion.

"We know that dogs are sensitive to our [emotional cues](#)," Flom said, "but we wanted to know: do they use these emotional cues?"

Flom conducted two experiments where he looked at the frequency in which dogs followed a pointing gesture to locate a hidden reward. Those gestures were paired with either positive or [negative behaviors](#) from the person pointing. Positive behaviors included smiling and speaking in a pleasant tone. Negative behaviors included frowning, a furrowed brow and speaking in a harsh tone.

The main finding of the study is that dogs use [human emotions](#) in determining how quickly or how slowly they're going to go and explore an unfamiliar location. While positive behaviors didn't improve response time from the control group, negative behaviors, which simulated emotions closely tied to anger, delayed the [response time](#).

You can read more of the findings from the study in *Animal Cognition*. Peggy Gartman, a BYU masters' student in psychology, is listed as a co-author. Darren Gunther, James Parker and Will West contributed as undergrads.

For Flom, as well as other dog lovers, the study further confirms something long known.

"There is a unique and special bond between humans and dogs," Flom said.

Even when you're angry.

More information: Ross Flom et al. Does affective information influence domestic dogs' (*Canis lupus familiaris*) point-following behavior?, *Animal Cognition* (2015). [DOI: 10.1007/s10071-015-0934-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10071-015-0934-5)

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