

# Are These Dogs Playing or Fighting?

Understanding the meaning behind canine interactions can be difficult because so much of what dogs express through their movements and expressions has to do with their individual personalities and the exact context. Take, for example, when things appear to heat up when two dogs get together—it's not always easy to tell if they're playing or fighting. ASPCA® behavior experts share this list of signs to look for when determining if you should intervene:

## GREEN LIGHT:

- Play bow
- Bouncing body movements
- Open mouths
- "Self-handicapping" (When a dog adjusts her play behavior in response to another dog's smaller size or inhibited play style. Example: a larger dog rolling over onto her back to encourage a smaller dog to approach.)
- Pauses or rests that last several seconds before resuming play
- A breathy vocalization that sounds like "huff-huff"

## YELLOW LIGHT:

- One dog continually chases another with the other dog looking to escape or no role reversal
- Humping behavior, of either dog to the other
- Lack of pauses or rests in play for some time
- Cues intended to cut off play, such as suddenly licking themselves or sniffing
- Three or more dogs playing together
- Raised hackles
- Mouths stay closed

## RED LIGHT:

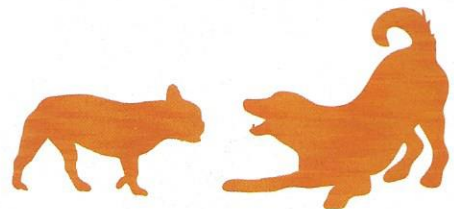
- Escape, avoidance or hiding behaviors under objects or near people
- Bared teeth, lip wrinkle, ears staying forward
- Body is stiff or still, no longer loose and wiggly
- Growling or snapping at the air

If you're not sure whether both dogs are having fun, try leading the more excited dog away and see if the other dog follows playfully. Consult our Canine Communication webinar series on [ASPCApro.org](http://ASPCApro.org) to learn more.



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Play bow



### YELLOW LIGHT

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### RED LIGHT

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