INTRODUCTION TO BODY LANGUAGE

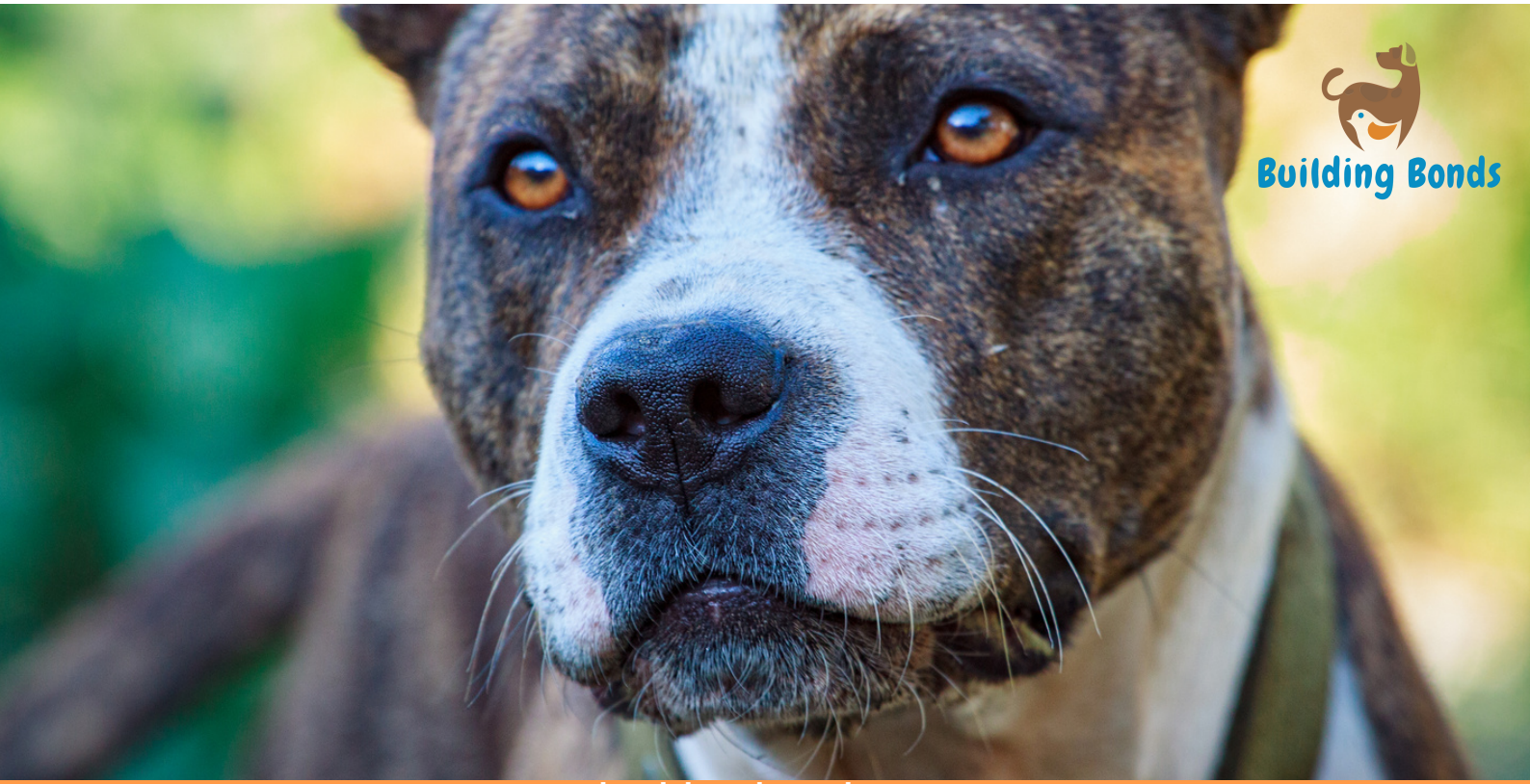
We can all recognize the obvious behaviors of reactivity: barking, lunging, and growling. But are you aware of the behaviors that often happen before this?

Learning your dog's body language will help you see what your dog is telling you well before they have to shout by barking, lunging, or growling!

Dogs communicate their discomfort in many subtle ways. Consider what your dog does before they overreact? Does their mouth go from open to closed? Do their ears get tall and forward? Does the tail go high up or is there a change in how they walk? Body language is like a sentence, specific body parts are words but the whole body tells the story.

Seeing how your dog communicates with their body can be a game changer when it comes to resolving reactivity. Let's look at the head turn as an example.

If your dog turns their head and their upper body follows to go and enjoy a good sniff, that's fantastic. This is a nice cut-off signal that says, "I am not a threat" and your dog might use this behavior to diffuse a situation that they are finding stressful.



If your dog turns their head and averts their eyes to the left or right yet the rest of the body remains stationary, this is saying, "I need a break for a minute." Stop whatever you are doing and wait for your dog to turn their head forward again before continuing.

If your dog turns their head while keeping their eyes focused on a trigger, this communicates a very high level of stress - you'll see the side of their face and the whites of their eyes. This says, "I need that to stop right now, please!"

When your dog is on alert they might face forward and hold their head high - perhaps they hear or smell something?

When they dip their head very low and sideways, they may be communicating fear and concern.

This is just one example of how important a dog's body language is. It is a quiet, polite communication but if you notice it, your dog may not have to shout, "please stop!"