

LET DOGS CHOOSE IF THEY WANT TO SAY HELLO



WHY IT MATTERS

Lots of people LOVE dogs – and it's easy to see why! Dogs bring us companionship, fun and comfort. Many dogs also enjoy being around people... but not all of them, and not all the time.

When you see a dog, it's natural to want to say hello. But here's something dogs want you to know:

Meeting new people can feel scary or uncomfortable for some dogs.

This is true:



At home



On walks



When they are busy, tired, or unsure

Approaching a dog when they don't want you to can lead to stress, and sometimes even bites.

Think about it this way

How would you feel if a stranger walked up and touched you without asking?

That's what it can feel like for many dogs when we don't listen to what they are trying to tell us or we don't give them a choice about whether to say hello.

Take extra care with kids and dogs

Children do not have the skills to be able to read dog body language well and are the most likely to be bitten. Teach your kids not to approach dogs in people's homes or when out in the community. This keeps everybody safe.



HOW TO STAY SAFE

1 BE COOL

Not every dog wants to say hello – and that's OK.

The safest choice is:

- Don't touch dogs you don't know
- Give dogs space
- Avoid eye contact
- Let them come to you first
- Allow dogs that approach you to sniff to gather information without touching them
- Ask the caregiver if it's ok to approach their dog



- Don't touch them until you are confident that they feel comfortable (see more below)
- Respectfully advocate for your pet if they get worried about people approaching them

This is important:



When visiting someone's home

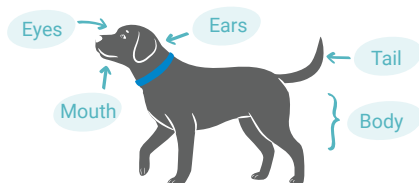


When you see a dog out and about

2 LEARN TO READ DOG BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs don't use words – they use their body language to communicate. To understand how a dog feels, look at all of these body parts **together**:

You need to look at the whole dog – not just one part

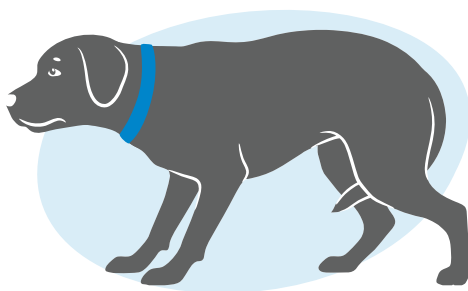


Also consider what the dog is doing at the time. If a dog is resting, eating or avoiding you – do not try to interact.

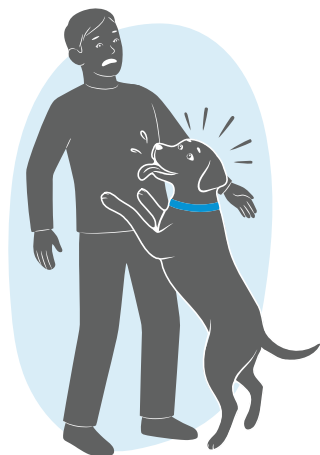
3 LISTEN

Signs a dog may NOT want to interact:

- Looking away, even if they are not moving away. This is especially important when dogs are on lead as they have no choice or control to be able to leave
- Moving away
- Ears back, stiff, or very alert
- Body stiff or very still
- Eyes wide or showing the whites ("whale eye")
- Tail high and moving fast, or tucked between their legs or held tightly against their belly
- Lowering their body (may be subtle or obvious, like cowering)
- Rolling over (this does NOT mean they want you to pat their belly)
- Mouth tense or baring teeth



These signs can mean the dog is scared, unsure, or overwhelmed. Give them space.



A dog that is not coping may also look like the dog is a "frantic friend maker". These dogs may jump up, lick you and generally appear very excited.

- Even though the dog may appear friendly, they are likely feeling anxious or overwhelmed and aren't sure how to behave
- Interactions with these types of dogs need to be very calm

4 ASSESS WHAT YOU HAVE OBSERVED

Signs a dog MAY be relaxed include:

- Soft, relaxed eyes
- Loose, wiggly body
- Calm movements

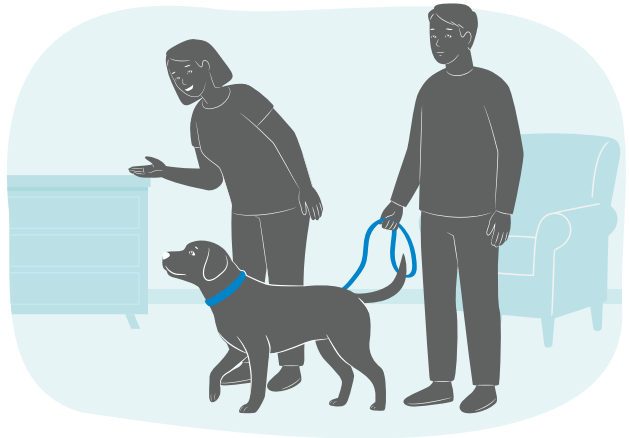


5 LET THE DOG CHOOSE

Even if a dog looks relaxed, it still doesn't always mean they want to interact. Always let the dog decide and ask the owner for permission first.

Here's how to ask a dog if it wants to say hello:

- Stand side-on (not face-to-face)
- Avoid staring into their eyes (this is threatening to dogs)
- Move slowly and calmly
- Give them space
- Let them come to you



If the dog comes close and leans into you, you can gently pat them for a few seconds, then stop to see if they move away or ask for more.

Start with the shoulder or chest. Try not to reach over their head – this feels scary.



Avoid touching head, legs or back end – dogs don't like it.

Dogs that want to keep interacting will often look at you or nudge you to encourage the interaction to continue.

6 CHECK IN OFTEN

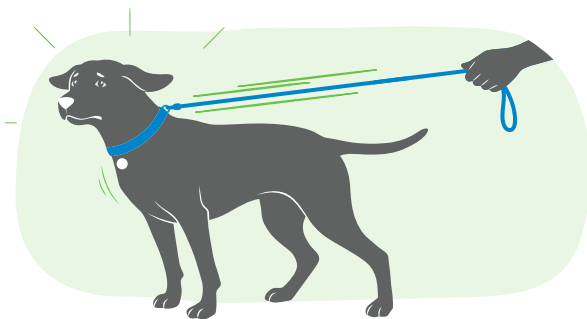


Remember: Dogs can change their minds! If the dog turns their head, leans away or moves away after you touch them:

- Stop touching them
- Give them space

That's their way of saying "I'm done."

Be extra careful before interacting with dogs on a lead. They might not be able to easily tell you they don't want to interact or move away. This can increase the risk of growls or bites.



FINAL TIP

While you might love to pat dogs, the best way to stay safe and be kind to dogs is to pay attention to what their body is telling you and always give them a choice about whether they want to interact. When dogs feel safe and in control, everyone has a better (and safer) experience.



To learn more about safety around dogs, visit [Living with Pets](#).



