
GREETING RITUALS + SOLITICIOUS BEHAVIORS

Dog distractions can be some of the most difficult distractions our Raisers will face. The way people approach and greet one another is quite different from how dogs prefer to approach and greet. We inadvertently set our dogs up for potentially tense greetings. People walk head-on to one another, whereas dogs will move in an arc if possible. Approaching head-on, like what happens on a sidewalk, is done by dogs to intimidate each other. It allows the dogs to stare at each other as they approach, building tension and excitement. The pulling, lunging, and jumping can really start when they get close enough. By understanding dog body language and polite greeting behaviors, we can set our dogs up for success.

Puppies are often given a pass by older dogs, who will tolerate the puppy's behavior until they're about 6 months old. Then the puppy card gets revoked. Puppies will run head-on to other dogs, often immediately going to lick the older dog's lips and face, maybe even nipping a little bit. When this occurs, it's perfectly acceptable for the adult dog to growl or do a quick snap to teach the puppy that's unacceptable and rude. Quick corrections like this are how puppies learn what is appropriate behavior for interacting with other dogs. An adult dog carrying on with a correction, such as chasing the puppy across the room or pinning them to the ground is not desirable. If that occurs, please contact PAWS® for help trouble shooting.

Well-socialized, confident adult dogs will sniff each other's hind ends, and then move on to other parts of the body. They may take turns standing still while one investigates the other, then switch roles. After that initial interaction, they may play bow to initiate a game, sniff the ground as a displacement behavior, or shake off the stress of the interaction. Under-socialized dogs may display fearful or aggressive behavior, such as cowering, rolling over, urinating, lip-licking, yawning, growling, lip-raising, hackling, snapping, or lunging. Dogs convey so much information with the slightest body language changes that people often miss or ignore a cue. That's how a dog who "suddenly snaps" is created – because they escalate their behavior to get their point across when calm signals don't do the job. Paying close attention to a dog's body language will help you help them in social situations by knowing when to move them away if needed.

Dogs become socially mature between 2 and 3 years old. Puppies have the first couple of months of their lives to learn how to interact appropriately with other dogs. Puppies tend to run towards other

dogs head-on, very excited, and do appeasement gestures—signals to the other dog that say, “be nice to me, please.” These include ears pulled back, a front paw lift, rolling over to show their bellies, or licking the other dog’s mouth. Puppies learn bite inhibition, appropriate play, and how to be polite to other dogs from stable, adult dogs. At around 6 months old (though sometimes sooner), the adult dog will become less tolerant of those rude behaviors and correct the puppy more than it did previously. Look over the “Canine Communication” article to familiarize yourself with the signs that an adult dog is happy and relaxed and will be a good play mate for your puppy.

On-leash greetings need to be handled carefully. If you are going to allow the dog to greet another dog on leash, it needs to be an all-or-nothing situation. This is not to say you should allow the dog to pull towards another dog, rushing up and getting in the other dog’s space. All-or-nothing means either the dog is permitted to greet on a loose leash, or not at all. Having the dog strain and pull on leash while greeting another dog can create tension in both parties. When a dog greets another dog on-leash, they should be given enough slack in the line so that they aren’t feeling any leash pressure. You should still have a firm grip and be prepared to pull the dog away if needed. For example, if two handlers are chatting, their dogs should either be free to investigate each other on loose leashes, or not at all. If the handlers choose not to allow their dogs to greet, the handler should be working on having the dog sit, stand, or lay quietly, checking in with the handler. If the dogs are so close that they’re straining on their leashes to try and greet, the handlers need to step farther away from one another so the dogs can succeed in behaving appropriately. Doing otherwise allows the dogs to practice pulling, straining, and lunging at nearby dogs. The leash skill “Say Hello” is helpful in interactions where dogs are greeting one another on leash. Dogs sniff the ground when they are trying to diffuse a situation, or to say “let’s be cool” to another dog. By using “Say Hello” with the dog, you are setting the stage for a calmer interaction.

Understanding dog body language and communication with other dogs can seem overwhelming, but over time you will become familiar with the puppy and be able to recognize when they are happy, scared, excited, or stressed during an interaction with another dog. You will be a better trainer for the puppy when you understand what a dog is trying to communicate through body language.