



How To Be Your Dog's Bestie

The Purpose of this document is to provide clear protocols for interacting with and handling canines that display shy, fearful, cautious, hesitant, wary and/or distrustful behavior. These behaviors may include but are not limited to lip licking, panting, rolling on their backs, whale eye, shaking and barking. Please remember our goal is to always “Be Humane and Train without Pain” when interacting with canines that display fearful behavior. We want to limit our invasiveness and use minimal aversives, always remembering that what is invasive and aversive comes from the dog's point of view not ours.

Rules of Engagement:

1. Ignore Ignore Ignore
2. Sideways is the Best Way.
3. Keep Your Hands to Yourself
4. Don't be the Creep in a White Van
5. Follow the 3-second Rule

1. Ignore Ignore Ignore:

The best way to interact with a canine that you are meeting for the first time and/or displays fearful behavior is to ignore them. This gives the dog agency and control over the interaction. They will approach when they are ready. We are not forcing contact but leaving it up to the dog.

2. Sideways is the Best Way

In many human cultures making eye contact and facing the person you are meeting is considered respectable and appropriate behavior. Dogs are not linear like humans but move in arcs and circles. In dog culture it is rude to meet face to face. Dogs sniff butts and approach from the side. If our desire is to make a dog feel comfortable and relaxed, we must always avert our eyes, not stare and turn our body to the side. This is using our body language to communicate to the dog that we mean no harm.

3. Keep Your Hands to Yourself

Following the line of thinking from above, we need to keep our hands at our sides. There is a myth that tells people to reach out our hand to the unfamiliar dog, so they can sniff us. This is a grave error. First, dogs have an amazing sense of smell and don't need us to place our hand next to their nose to smell us better. Secondly, and most importantly, most dogs do not enjoy having a stranger's hand thrust into their face. This is rude behavior in both human and dog culture. Additionally, dogs do not enjoy having their heads patted or “scruffed”. Just keep your hands to yourself if you want to show a dog that you are a friend.

4. Don't be the Creep in a White Van

Yet another myth is that it is a good thing to offer dogs food from your hand to show that you are friendly. When a dog is unsure of a human the worst thing you can do is to try to bribe them with a treat or something they may want. This behavior places the dog in a conflicted situation. They want the treat, but do not want to approach the human. It can be helpful, but possibly triggering, to think of a creepy person trying to lure another person into a van. We do not want to be that creep in a white van. We want to help the dog to relax and not put more pressure on them.

Always toss treats behind the dog to take off any social pressure. This allows the dog to move away from you and still get the treat.

5. Follow the 3-Second Rule

The 3-second rule is a consent test. We are asking the dog if they would like us to continue touching them. If the dog approaches you and is a few inches away, slowly reach your hand out to the dog's chest and gently scratch on the chest for no more than 3-seconds. This gives the dog an opportunity to walk away if they feel uncomfortable. If the dog returns, then it is an indication that they want you to repeat the behavior. Continue to be gentle and watch the dog's body language. Do not force your affection on the dog.