



Understanding Dog Body Language

Being able to interpret a dog's body language is very important as it helps us to know whether a dog is safe to approach.

Angry dog = unsafe to approach

- The dog's teeth are bared
- Lips are curled back and ears are stiff
- The tail is held high and stiff, but may be wagging just a little bit
- May be barking or growling



Scared dog = unsafe to approach

- Ears are low or back
- Head is low
- Tail is low and still or between legs
- Body may be shaking or close to the ground



Happy dog = safe to approach, but still ask the owner first

- Ears are forward and relaxed
- Tail is low and wagging
- Mouth is open and relaxed



Why do dogs bite?

Understanding dog behaviour and practising responsible dog care is the best way to minimise the risk of dog bite incidents.

Firstly, it's important to know why dogs bite.

A dog might bite if it...

- is unwell or injured
- is in pain
- is afraid or startled
- is protecting something (its owner, its home, its food, its toys)
- is put in a situation that makes it uncomfortable (at the vets, in costumes, surrounded by lots of people).

Meeting a dog safely

Here are some hints to meet a dog safely:

- Always ask permission from your parent or guardian.
- Ask the dog's owner if it is OK for you to meet their dog—the owner knows their dog well so they can decide if it's safe for you to interact with it
- Stand side on to the dog, put your hands by your side and allow the dog to sniff you and decide if it's happy to say hello
- If the dog is happy to meet you, gently pat it on its chest. This is so the dog can see where your hand is
- If the dog tries to pull away from you, let it—it's telling you it has had enough pats.

Meeting a new dog alone:

- Remain calm
- Don't run, jump or move too fast
- Keep your arms close to your body
- Turn side on to the dog
- Keep quiet
- Don't stare—check the dog's position from the corner of your eye.

Every dog is different, and **even a dog you know well can bite if it feels unhappy**. That's why you should always behave appropriately around dogs, even those you know, and especially those you don't know.

How to behave appropriately around dogs

DO

- ✓ Always ask your parent or guardian, and the dog's owner before patting a dog
- ✓ Stand still when a dog comes towards you
- ✓ Talk softly to the dog while it approaches and sniffs
- ✓ Stand sideways to the dog to make it feel more relaxed
- ✓ Only pat the dog when it appears to be relaxed and wants a pat
- ✓ Pat the dog's chest below its face
- ✓ Always supervise children when there are dogs close by.

DON'T

- ✗ Touch, grab or hug a dog you don't know
- ✗ Put your face near a dog's face
- ✗ Disturb a dog who is sleeping, eating, playing with its toys or caring for puppies
- ✗ Stare a dog in the eye or grab its tail or ears
- ✗ Approach a dog who is tied up
- ✗ Yell, scream or shout at a dog
- ✗ Chase a dog you don't know
- ✗ Run or ride a bike past a dog as dogs like to chase fast moving objects.