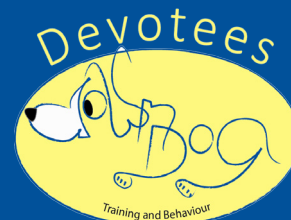


Down Dog Digest



In this packed issue

Main feature: How to protect your pooch from unwanted attention

Education feature: Can you understand what your dog is telling you?

Carol's Challenge: Improve your meetings and greetings

Do you need to protect your pooch? How to deal with pesky public pesterers

Catherine's 14 week old puppy, Cali, is doing really well. But Catherine has been getting quite annoyed by members of the public trying to attract or pet Cali.

One particular gentleman tried to get Cali to come to him by bending down and making kissy noises at her. Sensibly Cali ignored him and kept her attention on Catherine.

Cute puppies act as a very strong magnet for members of the public. But why should this be?

Adult humans feel a range of positive emotions when shown pictures of human babies. They feel less aggressive, act more tenderly and want to take care of and protect the infants they see. Such feelings are thought to increase the ability to parent, and the survival of human babies and young children. And it seems they feel the same way about baby animals too.

Young mammals, whether babies, puppies, kittens, calves, lambs or just about every other mammalian species, have evolved to have certain characteristics that induce adult mammals to want to love, protect and care for them.

These characteristics include a head that is big in proportion to their body, large, soulful eyes, cute noses, fluffy faces and infantile features. Which may be why some of the newer so-called "designer" breeds are so very popular - because they have been bred to look cute, even as adults.

So perhaps it's not surprising that people want to come up close and want to touch and pet our pooches when we are walking our new puppies or cute looking adult dogs out and about.

But we don't always want our dogs to become the focus of a stranger's attention.

We need strategies to help. I think all parents should teach their children how and when it is acceptable to approach dogs (or indeed any animal) and to retreat with good grace if requested to do so.

The owner's wishes are paramount. After all, you know your dog best. You know what might frighten him, what might make him too excited, or might cause him to react. You know what stage of training he's at and when an approach from a stranger might damage a key part of his education. You might be working on teaching him not to jump up, or to sit to greet people and you know he's not yet ready for an unplanned meet.



So what can you do if you are put in this situation? Here are a few things that will help:

1) Turn away

If you spot someone focusing on your puppy and walking purposefully towards you, simply turn and walk briskly away.

How to deal with the pesky public

They are highly unlikely to follow you and anyway you'll have a head start on them.

2) Use the stop hand

Remember us teaching you about the stop hand in your Perfect Pet course? This is exactly the situation when you should use it.

Step across in front of your puppy and hold up your hand, palm outwards, towards the approaching person. (Just like a policeman when he's directing traffic.) Say "Please stop there. I'll let you say hello to my puppy, but only if I bring him to you. I'll tell you what to do."

For those bombastic people who say "It's fine, dogs like me" or "I love dogs, it'll be fine" you may have to be more forceful, especially if they continue to approach, by saying "NO, please stay back. He is MY dog and I decide who he meets or not."

3) Control the person

Large adults can be intimidating to small puppies or tiny dogs, especially if they stand facing them or bend over and loom over them.

Ask the stranger to stand sideways on, and to crouch down, so they look smaller and less scary. You can also ask them to smile at your puppy (if you have taught him to recognise and appreciate human smiles of course).

4) Watch your puppy

Always watch your pup's body language. Is he relaxed, with a happy looking expression, and showing interest in the person? Is his tail wagging in a relaxed and happy way?

Or is he cowering or pulling away? Is his body tense and still? Is his mouth closed and does he look worried or scared? Is his tail tucked in or wagging only the tip?

If you see any sign at all that your puppy is not happy about being near the stranger, then please make your apologies to the person "Sorry, he doesn't want to meet you today", turn and take your puppy away.

Only allow your puppy to meet the stranger if you are sure your puppy is happy to do so.

5) Manage the greeting

Gradually take your puppy towards the person, checking every step or so that your puppy is still calm and still paying attention to you. Take your time. Your aim should be to keep your puppy calm.

When you reach around 3 feet or so from the person invite them to bend down and stay sideways on and to reach their hand out towards the puppy, at puppy's chest height with the palm facing up.

If your puppy shows he wants to sniff and move towards the person, allow him to sniff the hand. Then allow the person to give him a fuss for 3 seconds only. Call your pup away, praise then see what he wants to do. If he wants more fuss from the stranger he will move back towards him.

Then you can let them interact for as long as you decide, always watching your puppy for any signs of becoming overwhelmed or over-excited at which point you need to stop the interaction.

There are also some things that every human ought to be taught about how to approach a dog they want to say hello to.

1) ALWAYS ask the owner's permission first

2) Stand sideways and crouch down

3) Smile

4) Talk quietly and keep any movements slow and steady

5) Interact for 3 seconds only then stop to see what the puppy (and owner) want to do.

6) Respect what the owner wants, even if you think differently

7) Say thank you afterwards

That's the way to keep dogs and owners happy.

What is your dog telling you?

How to read your dog's body language

Our dogs can't speak, but they are telling us what they feel about life all the time through their body language.

All dog owners should learn to "speak dog" and in each of the next few issues of Down Dog Digest we'll be looking at some specific areas of doggy communication.

You'll be amazed at just how much you can learn about what your dog is feeling by observing how they look, stand and move.

For example, in the photos below, one shows Shelby feeling calm and happy, the other shows him feeling worried. Can you tell which is which?



Turning their head away shows they are not happy about you or someone else approaching. In these pictures, Lola is showing she doesn't want you coming any closer, in the other she is happy about you approaching.



Posture tells us a lot too.

A dog who is alert to something stands tall, with a relatively stiff or still tail, ears pricked towards the stimulus and possibly a closed mouth if they are concerned about it, as Sam shows below.

If they are happy about the stimulus they usually look goofy, with mouth open and tongue lolling out.



With some dogs it can be difficult to spot and read their expressions.

Black dogs and hairy breeds in particular can be more difficult to read.

Kona, below, is looking worried in one picture and is looking happy in the other. Can you tell which is which?



There's more information on dog body language on the Down Dog Devotee site.

Carol's Challenge

Each month I'm going to set you a challenge.

This month your challenge, should you wish to accept it, is to improve your dog's meeting and greeting behaviour.

Use the information from this newsletter to observe your dog every time they encounter or meet someone, for a whole week. Do this in your home, and when you are out and about.

And please, please, record your answers to the following questions. Then, when you change something you have a baseline to measure your progress against.

What signs does your dog show when they see and/or meet someone? Are they happy about the situation or are they showing any signs of concern or distress?

How do they respond to the approach of a stranger? Are they happy and keen to meet or are they worried or scared? Are they relaxed with some types of people but more wary of others? (Why might that be?)

How much attention do they like? A little or a lot? What sort of attention or touch do they prefer?

Are they confident in themselves or do they look to you for help and guidance?

Watch carefully!

Once you're happy you really understand what your dog is telling you, decide what you need to change in order to improve their greeting manners.

If there are several things, list them and choose the most important one first.

Then make a plan.

For each thing you want to change decide how best to do it. If your dog loves being tickled on their tummy but hates hands over their head, what can you do and/or say to make sure people greet your dog in the way he or she prefers?

If you need to work on your dog staying calmer during meetings, can you arrange to do some practice with people your dog already knows well?

You may need to do some training at home first. For example, you may need to work on your dog paying more attention to you, or to sit the first time you ask, every time.

It's always worth starting any new things at home first where there are few distractions before taking them out and about.

Once you've finalised your plan, write it down and send it in for me to review through our Down Dog Devotees discussion forum.

Good luck!

We hope you enjoyed our first Down Dog Digest.

Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting.

To get more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, become a Down Dog Devotee. You'll get these regular newsletters sent to your home. You'll also get access to our huge range of training tips, videos, information sheets, webinars and podcasts as well as access to our Discussion Forum where you can ask any doggy related questions you need answers to. You get big discounts off all of our online and in-person classes too.

Go to the website, www.downdog.co.uk, to find out more.