

I can say hello, but MAY I?

Dogs are naturally inquisitive and social. Yet, some are shy and even fearful when encountering someone new. These are reasons why your dog should seek your permission before engaging with any human. As the handler, you need to feel the emotional, physical and spacial temperature of the greeting environment and assess the energy level of the “friendly” stranger AND determine if your dog might like the interaction AND how best to keep your dog safe. If your dog gets to make the decision on her own to charge forward and greet someone, there could be serious consequences for the person, your dog and you.

The person could be older with fragile skin or unbalanced. A child could have previously been hurt by a dog. The person might be heavy handed and harm your dog. Remember, your dog is the perpetual teenager. As the adult, you must:

1. Determine if the person wants to and is capable of saying hello to your dog;
2. Determine if your dog is up to saying hello to one more person today? When we walk into an

elevator we don't automatically like everyone in that confined space. Or, if we are tired and sore we might not even want to visit with people we like. Our dogs are the same.

3. If the stranger is shy, but you believe that some kind of interaction would be beneficial, determine how far away you and your dog need to be and give directions to your dog AND the greeter.
4. Determine if the environment too hot, or too noisy or too busy today? If you force your dog, they may never want to go back again.

So, how do we go about a friendly greeting when we determine that the environment is safe?

Remember, if your dog is at the end of a six foot leash you have little or no control over the interaction. As always, remember how to get and keep your dog's attention, use simple verbal and visual cues, and the click/reinforce method of positive learning.

1. Teach your dog some impulse control. The need to ask PLEASE.
2. Create a zone of reinforcement

3. Teach your dog to sit at your side, put that on cue and use that position before starting any greeting.
4. If the greeter is polite enough to ask “May I pet your dog?”, just ask them to wait a moment until you get your dog set up as she is in training. If the person is not so polite, use your hand as a stop sign to get them to wait.
5. That slight delay gives you the opportunity to decide if you want the person to come toward you or you ask them to stand still and you will approach them. There are benefits to both styles. For a toddler with his parents, you might choose to walk toward the child while his parents hold him. That way, you can decide when enough is enough and back away and reinforce your dog close to you after you have backed away. For others you might ask them to approach your dog at an angle from the front. A head on approach could be seen by your dog as an aggressive move. Likewise, approaching your dog from behind, even at an angle, could startle your dog and cause a fear reaction.
6. Above all, tell the person how and where to touch your dog and where NOT to. You might even ask the greeter to place their hand over yours as you pet your dog. You might ask them

to get down on a knee (and you might want to as well).

7. Cues (taught in future sessions) for “Touch” and “Chin” can enhance friendly greetings.
8. When you step away, let your dog know they are awesome. Not only does this make your dog happy that the encounter went well, but also that being close to you is the best part of the process.

Throughout the entire greeting, **S**mile, **S**peak conversationally, be in **T**ouch with your dog, keep your **E**yes on your dog and keep your dog in close **P**roximity (preferably at your side).

Yes, let's visit together!