

# LEASH Manners



You're enjoying a pleasant walk with your dog when around the corner appears a visibly stimulated, tense, growling dog. Following behind is a person who insists he or she, "Just wants to say 'hi,'" before heading directly toward your now-intimidated dog. There are a few different ways to respond to this situation. You can trust the owner and allow the dogs to meet, keeping your fingers crossed. You can tell the owner you are not comfortable and hope that, in your efforts to avoid an uncomfortable canine confrontation, you don't provoke a human confrontation instead. Or you can cross the street and avoid any encounter altogether. The latter is usually my choice.

There are also those of us whose dogs don't do well greeting other dogs on leashes. We are aware and accepting of this

# For People!

By Marisa Scully

fact, and take the responsibility of preventing it from happening. We have our dog on a "heel" command, so that he or she understands not to leave our side, even to move toward another dog. We are working on getting our dogs to ignore passing-by dogs, so they don't even think about interacting. However, along comes a pup about fifteen feet in front of his or her human on a flexi lead. The pup immediately wags and does an excited puppy dance upon seeing another dog while we panic trying to wave down the attention of the owner, who is having a conversation on a cell phone. In a frantic attempt to get the owner to exert control over the innocently eager dog, we yell, "My dog is not friendly." Thankfully the owner scoops up her puppy just in time, telling us we should, "Not allow our dog to endanger friendly, well-behaved dogs."

These are just two variations of the types of interactions that can occur between passing dog-owner pairs in the crowded streets of our city. Although both are tense situations, they are still better than the situation I have not mentioned: where one dog is mauled and the other labeled vicious.

A city is not a natural place for a dog, and a leash is not a part of their body they have the instincts to understand. It is our job to

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show them how to live in our environment and to accept and feel comfortable with the equipment we use on them. Most people do hardly any training at all. Many try to train and, though the effort was there, come away unsuccessful. Some people have rescues that, even with formal training, will never fully be able to adjust to certain stimuli. And some have had dogs since puppies that, because of their specific breed instincts or personal temperament, are just not cut out to do a lot of the things we wish they would. It is extremely important to try to socialize and train our dogs, to show them how to interact with other animals and people, to teach them that a fire truck is not the end of the world, and a person on a bike is not to be chased. However, even more important than training is remaining realistic about your dog's limits, and not putting your own or someone else's dog in danger by being in denial.

A leash is a funny thing. Dogs don't come equipped with "leash instincts" and, during their earliest learning experiences about how to interact with other dogs (through their mother and littermates), they were not on leashes. Many dogs are perfectly friendly and social but, when walking with their owner on a leash, may become defensive, protective, frustrated, or afraid; the list goes on and on. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "He's never done that before! He loves other dogs when we're at the park." These people made a very honest and common mistake in believing that their dog's behavior would be the same on and off leash. It is wonderful if your dog is perfectly friendly and sweet off leash and on. But if your dog

is not, accept it, and understand that the dog is not being irrational. He or she is just being an animal, something we all too often forget our dogs are.

I have had experiences walking dogs that are friendly off-leash but not on, never friendly under any circumstances, and dogs that are complete angels all the time. Whichever type of dog I'm with, my general rule is to encourage them to be more focused on me than on other dogs. If I personally know that both my dog and the approaching dog are friendly, I will let them interact; not just because the other owner, who is a stranger, says so.

If most of the time you allow your dog to meet canine passers-by, then the one time you would rather not, it can be very difficult, as your dog has been conditioned (by you) to expect to meet every dog in sight. If you want your dog to socialize with other dogs, there are many opportunities beyond the sidewalk. While on a walk together, your dog should be content that he is with his best friend, you. Your stroll together and time spent bonding are more important than anything else!



Marisa Scully is a certified Canine Training and Behavior Specialist. She received certification from Triple Crown Academy for dog trainers in Hutto, TX. She lives with her two dogs in center city and does private, in-home training in Philadelphia and surrounding areas. In her spare time she enjoys participating in canine sports with her own dogs, and is constantly learning and expanding her knowledge of dog training and behavior. Contact her at [Marisa@PhillyFitmagazine.com](mailto:Marisa@PhillyFitmagazine.com)

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