



6 Reasons Why You Should Say No to On-Leash Greetings

One of the very first things I teach to every single client is to never allow their dog to greet other dogs while they are on a leash. This bit of advice is often met with looks of confusion because the idea is foreign to most dog owners. So, I say it again, “Never let your dog greet other dogs while on leash”. Most people really dislike the idea. After all, it seems perfectly natural and harmless to introduce your new dog to all the other dogs in the neighborhood. It’s so fun to watch dogs romp and play together! Besides, it seems rude to avoid your neighbors and not let their dog meet yours, right?

To be clear, when I suggest no on-leash greetings, I’m not saying dogs shouldn’t play and socialize with other dogs. I’m just saying they shouldn’t do it while on a leash. It is important to keep in mind that by no means are we expected to like and want to socialize with every person we see, so why do we expect our dogs to like and want to play with every other dog they see? Too many owners think that having their dog engage with every dog they come across is an essential part of dog socialization. *It is not*. In fact, social distancing is really a blessing when it comes to walking your dog.

6. On-leash greetings always promote bad leash manners. Everybody wants to their dog to walk nicely on a loose leash. Since behavior is driven by reinforcement, if you don’t want your dog to pull you, you can’t reward them for pulling. If your dog is a social dog and sees their friend on a walk, how likely is it that you will be able to let your dog “say hi” without him pulling on the leash to get to the other dog? Probably, not very likely. The bottom line is that if you allow your dog to pull you to greet his friend, you are rewarding him for pulling.

5. If on-leash time becomes all about social time for your dog, you will quickly become irrelevant. Relationships with other dogs should not be your dog’s favorite thing. You should be the center of your dog’s universe and not just something on the other end of the leash that he pulls around and ignores. The walk should be a time for relationship building and bonding for you and your dog. While walking on-leash, I want my dog to pay attention to me instead of constantly looking for dog friends to “say hi”. NOTE: Your relationship with your dog is about mutual respect. You must give him the same attention you expect from him. In other words, get off your phone!

4. Leashes prevent dogs from greeting each other properly. Dog greetings are a very intricate kind of dance full of subtle cues. Appropriate greetings usually begin with a kind of banana curved body, sniffing noses and booty sniff circles. One or both dogs may initiate play, one dog may feel the need to correct the other dog, they may have an argument, or just move on. Leashes provide a very small radius for the greeting and in an instant the leashes can get all tangled up. This throws a wrench into the dogs' efficacy to communicate with each other. Furthermore, the leash is like an umbilical cord and owners tend to yank, pull and send all kinds of tense energy through tight leashes, which also majorly inhibits proper greetings. In other words, we mess it all up!

3. Don't worry, he's friendly! Don't assume that every owner knows their dog well enough to know for sure that their dog will get along with your dog. Many people feel the need to force their dog to meet other dogs because they are desperate for their dogs to be social. Letting dogs approach stranger dogs is not a good way to test their socialization skills. Oftentimes owners believe that if their dog has acted aggressively, or what they perceive to be as unfriendly towards other dogs in the past, their dogs will eventually get better if they are forced to be social. Unfortunately, this technique never works, and it almost always damages the owner's relationship with their dog since the dog typically gets punished for being a "bad dog".

2. Be your dog's advocate. There are so many dogs that shouldn't or don't want to meet other dogs. Perhaps they are ill or have recently had a medical procedure. Maybe they have just been adopted from a shelter and have suffered traumatic experiences. There are also many fearful and anxious dogs that need space to build their confidence. And, of course there are dogs who are very happy with their people, thank you very much, and have no interest in other dogs! It is decidedly not rude to not allow your dog to greet other dogs. This is your dog and your relationship, and you must stick up for him. The easiest and most polite way to avoid other people who want your dog to meet theirs, is to keep your distance, keep walking and say "*Sorry, we are in training!*"

1. On-leash greetings create leash reactivity. All of the reasons listed above can result in leash reactivity. Leash Reactivity is when a dog that is on a leash, sees another dog and goes berserk. For many dogs, on-leash greetings and being forced into close proximity with other dogs, can result in fear-based reactivity. They want to get away, but the leash makes them feel trapped and helpless. As a result, they will do things like bark, lung, and growl, which can often be mistaken for aggression. Leash reactivity is always progressive and requires serious behavior modification work.

Do yourself and your dog a favor and avoid on-leash greetings. When your dog is walking nicely next to you, without pulling, and only showing mild interest in other dogs, you will be glad you did!