

Common Mistakes in Meeting an Unfamiliar Dog

Our topics for this week are:

- **Eight mistakes people make in meeting an unfamiliar dog**
- **Better ways of meeting unfamiliar dogs**

Dog bites are common in the United States. Sadly, most are avoidable. There are vicious dogs that will chase and bite people, but this is a small minority of the bites that occur. Many bites result from a lack of knowledge in how to properly meet an unfamiliar dog.

People who are bit greeting a dog are often dog lovers and have their own dog that they can greet in about any manner without problem. However, a dog that is unfamiliar with you is in a caution mode and thinking of self-defense options. We will cover 8 common mistakes that push an unfamiliar dog into defensive aggression.

Mistake #1: Greeting with a squeaky, high pitched voice

Some people greet unfamiliar dogs with an excited party-time squeaky voice. High pitched, squeaky sounds are distress signals to animals. Prey animals make those sounds when their life is in danger. The more appropriate approach is to use a slow, calm, lower pitched sound including the dog's name, if you know it.

Mistake #2: Quickly making a direct approach toward the dog

Dominant aggressive dogs directly approach other, more submissive dogs. This is highly stressful for the submissive dog. Such an approach can be viewed by the dog as an attack. Except for very large dogs, a stranger to the dog should wait for the dog to approach them. Lowering your body by kneeling is an invitation to them to approach you. Small treats can also be helpful beginning with tossing them in front of you to initiate the dog's interest in approaching you.

Mistake #3: Staring directly at the dog's eyes

Dominant aggressive dogs use several means of showing dominance through their body language. A principle means is staring at another dog as they approach. You should use short glances toward the dog that you are trying to encourage to approach you, not stare at it.

Mistake #4: Bending over the dog

Another animal intent on injuring or killing a dog will try to attack from above and behind it. Leaning over a dog is very intimidating to it. You should present yourself in a lowered position in front of the dog.

Mistake #5: Attempting to pat the top of the dog's head

Reaching over a dog's head and attempting to pat it is similar to leaning over. The dog cannot see above its head and watch you at the same time which can make it defensive.

Mistake #6: Extending a hand, palm up, fingers extended

Even if you greet an unfamiliar dog in the least threatening way possible, there is always a chance it may bite. Presenting your hand palm up and fingers extended risks a very serious, permanently debilitating bite injury to your hand. However, it is very difficult for a medium to small sized dog to bite the back of your hand. When the time is appropriate to let the dog smell your hand, you should slowly present the back of your hand, palm down and fingers curled. After the dog smells your hand, you may be able to slowly stroke the side of its head or neck with the back of your hand. If this is well received, you can turn your hand over and stroke it in a more typical manner.

Mistake #7: Trying to hug or otherwise hold the dog still

Tightly holding an unfamiliar dog can scare even friendly dogs. Holding a dog in attempt to kiss it is worse. Dogs should be restrained with the minimum restraint possible. For dogs in veterinary hospitals and boarding kennels, this is achieved with a slip leash. Slip leashes can be easily applied with one hand and provides a secure collar for any size dog and a leash. They should not be used on dogs with respiratory problems. Slip leashes provides a dog freedom to move while giving the handler control of the limits of movement.

Mistake #8: Picking a small dog up when it is unnecessary

Small, unfamiliar dogs should not be picked up or taken from an owner's arms, if it is not necessary. Being picked up by a stranger can often frighten a dog, causing it to struggle and attempting to bite. Sitting on a couch with the dog next you gives the dog a chance to safely crawl on your lap, if it feels secure.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. When meeting a small to medium-sized unfamiliar dog, you should lower your body by kneeling and wait for the dog to approach you.**

- 2. You should never lean over an unfamiliar dog or try to pat the top of its head.**
- 3. Your hand should be presented slowly to an unfamiliar dog with the palm down and your fingers loosely coiled so you can first stroke the dog's face or neck with the back of your hand.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my recent books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.