



GREYHOUND PETS OF AMERICA SOUTHERN NEVADA INFO SHEET

HE JUST WANTS TO SAY "HI!" (excerpts from the original article) By Suzanne Clothier

Sitting quietly on the mall bench beside my husband, I was minding my own business when the man approached. I glanced up as the man sat next to me. He was a bit close for my comfort, so I edged a little closer to my husband who, busy reading a book, ignored me. Still feeling a bit uncomfortable with the strange man so close, I then turned my head slightly away from him, politely indicating I was not interested in any interaction. To my horror, the man leaned over me and began licking my neck while rudely groping me.

When I screamed and pushed him away, my trouble really began. My husband angrily threw me to the ground, yelling at me "Why did you do that? He was only trying to be friendly and say hi! What a touchy bitch you are! You're going to have to learn to behave better in public."

People all around us stared and shook their heads sadly. I heard a few murmuring that they thought my husband should do something about my behavior; some even mentioned that he shouldn't have such a violent woman out in public until I'd been trained better. As my husband dragged me to the car, I noticed that the man who had groped me had gone a bit further down the mall and was doing the same thing to other women.

This is a silly scenario, isn't it? First, anyone who knows me knows that I would never be in a mall except under considerable duress. More seriously, no rational human being would consider my response to the man's rudeness as inappropriate or vicious. By invading my personal space, the man crossed the lines of decent, civilized behavior; my response would be considered quite justified.

That my husband might punish me for responding to such rudeness by screaming and pushing the offender away is perhaps the most ridiculous aspect of this scenario. If he were to act in this way, there would be no doubt in the minds of even the most casual observers that his ego was of far greater importance than my safety or comfort, and that he was sorely lacking even rudimentary empathy for how I might be feeling in this situation.

Fortunately for me, this scenario is completely imaginary. Unfortunately for many dogs, it is a very real scenario that is repeated far too often. Inevitably, as the owners who have allowed their dogs to act rudely retreat from the situation, there are comments made about "that aggressive dog" (meaning the dog whose space had been invaded) and the classic comment, usually said in hurt tones, "He only wanted to say hi!"

During an off-lead play session at our camp, two adolescent dogs began to roughhouse at top speed, resulting in one of them crashing hard into an older dog who'd been minding his own business. With a loud roar, he chased the offender for a few steps to make his point: "Watch where the heck you're going!"

A few minutes later, with the game still going strong, we watched as that same youngster found himself headed once again on a collision course with the older dog. It seemed another crash and altercation were inevitable. To the surprise of many who were watching, the youngster used all of his skills to avoid the crash, neatly swerving past the older dog who made no comment. The puppy had learned that no matter how excited he might be by the game, he still had an obligation to be polite.

We would look with a raised eyebrow at a mother who allowed a child to simply carom around a room bouncing off people and did nothing to calm the child, and who told those her child had shoved and pushed that, "He's just over excited." Just as parents bear some responsibility for their children's actions, dog owners have a responsibility to help their puppies act in an appropriate way - not to excuse rudeness.

Sometimes, this requires that we not allow a young dog (or a dog of any age) to escalate to such a high level of excitement and arousal. As a rule of thumb, the more excited and emotional a dog becomes, the less capable they are of thinking clearly and acting appropriately. (This is also true of all other animals, including people.) Wise handlers know that when emotions are running high, a cool down period is a good choice to avoid problems. Sometimes, helping a young dog learn what is appropriate requires the assistance of a normal, well socialized dog who can make his or her point without leaving anything but a clear message imprinted upon the puppy.

Normal dogs, like normal people, are often incredibly tolerant of the antics of youngsters. The tolerance level is highly individual and dependent upon the dog's experience with puppies. Dogs without much experience with puppies may not be nearly as tolerant as dogs who have seen a lot of puppies come and go.

Tolerance levels are also highly dependent upon the youngster's age; there are different expectations for what constitutes appropriate behavior at any given age. What we might find acceptable behavior in a 3 year old child would be frowned upon in an 8 year old. Dogs also have a timetable in their heads - puppies under 16 weeks of age can usually take appalling liberties with an adult dog. As Dunbar notes, there appears to be a "puppy license" of sorts, possession of which entitles you to be an utter pest without much repercussion. Past the age of 4 ½ months, the "puppy license" expires as hormone levels shift and psychological changes occur. At this point, adult dogs begin to gradually insist on more controlled, respectful interactions from youngsters.

Here's my advice for dealing with the "fool factor."

1. Socialize your dog thoroughly with other dogs; for puppies, choose playmates of a similar age and adults who have been well socialized themselves. This means off-lead socialization, not sniffing noses at the end of the lead. The more experience a dog has with other dogs, the more refined his judgment will become about what constitutes rude or foolish behavior and how best to deal with it. He'll also learn how to be a polite dog himself.

If a dog has not or cannot be well socialized, be realistic about what you can expect from him in his dealings with other dogs. This may mean altering your training or competition goals to be fair to a dog who may not be able to cope with the stresses of these situations.

2. When socializing your dog under someone else's instruction or guidance, be careful. Some instructors and trainers are appalling ignorant about basic behavior, and unable to set up a positive socialization situation. If you feel uncomfortable with a situation, remove your dog. It only takes a few seconds for a bad experience to leave a lasting impression, particularly on a young dog.

Just turning dogs loose together to play is not socialization. There has to be supervision, and intervention when the potential for a problem appears. The instructor must pay attention to each individual dog as well as the pairings or subsets within the whole play group. If one dog is getting overly excited, it's time to gently capture him, take him out of the play group and calm him down before letting him play again. If a fearful dog has reached his limit, it's time to remove him from the group and give him time to relax and build his courage before putting him back in. If a particular dog or dogs begins to gang up on another dog, time to break up the brat pack.

Instructors need to carefully assess groups and not pair dogs inappropriately. For example, a rambunctious Labrador puppy should not be paired with a timid Sheltie pup. Since Lab puppies often resemble a cannonball crossed with a Sumo wrestler on drugs and consequently like heavy duty physical contact (preferably in mid-

air, at great speed), the more sensitive Sheltie may be quickly overwhelmed and quite possibly hurt by the Lab pup. Not only might this leave a very bad impression on the Sheltie but it can also teach the Lab puppy that rudeness is acceptable.

3. Watch your dog. Your dog will tell you all you need to know about his perception of the world. When you're with him, really be with him. Pay attention to his behavior. Position yourself and/or the dog so that the dog is always in your peripheral vision. Practice checking on your dog often. If he appears to be concerned, find out why. And then help him. Protect him.

Teach yourself to recognize the small, subtle signs that he's shifted out of a perfectly relaxed state of mind. These may be as simple as the tilt of an ear, a raised eyebrow, a slight holding of the breath or tensing of the muscles. Each dog is different - learn to read your own dog.

If you can't watch your dog in a situation where there are potential problems, put him somewhere safe. I've seen far too many incidents occur unnecessarily because a handler was engrossed in a conversation or fascinated by what was happening in the ring and ignoring the dog at their side.

When a handler's attention is elsewhere, I call this handling by Braille - meaning, knowing nothing more than that there was still pressure on the lead and thus the dog was still present. Unbeknownst to you, the dog could be acting rudely himself or trying to avoid a rude dog. Handle your dog with awareness, not by the length of your lead.

4. Be pro-active in protecting your dog. If you see a fool and his rude dog headed your way, do your best to protect your dog. If possible, walk away, lightly and quietly asking your dog to come with you. Be sure you are breathing and relaxed - don't let your apprehension about a possible altercation impact negatively on your dog.

If you can't walk away, try to get the fool to stop. Position yourself between the fool and your dog. If necessary, loudly & firmly tell the approaching person that your dog is not good with other dogs. In close quarters where there really aren't any options for moving away, shield your dog with your own body. (Remember, stepping between dogs is an act of protective leadership.)

If you need to, sharply tell the fool to "please control your rude dog." You'll probably get a dirty look (fools rarely believe they or their dogs are rude and are shocked when spoken to sharply) but chances are good they'll at least make a show at controlling their dog or move huffily away from you.

DOs & DON'Ts

DON'T bring an intolerant or undersocialized dog to a puppy kindergarten or other concentrations of rudeness & stupidity when you know he can't handle puppies, stupidity, or rudeness!

DON'T put your dog in a situation you or he are not prepared to handle.

DON'T turn a rude puppy or dog loose with an intolerant adult.

DON'T expect your dog to like every dog he meets (at least until you like every person you meet.)DON'T allow your dog to become overexcited or rude - help him find a more appropriate behavior or remove him briefly from the triggering situation

DON'T allow other people to allow their dogs to be rude to your dog.

DON'T ignore your dog or what your dog tells you about his feelings.

DON'T punish a dog for telling another dog to get the hell out of his face.

DON'T punish an adult for reminding a puppy to mind his manners.

DON'T let your training or competition goals overwhelm your good sense - always be fair to your dog.

DO respect the fact that your dog has a need for & a right to his personal space.
DO socialize your dog so that he's wise in the ways of other dogs.
DO accept the inexplicable disliking that your dog may have for another dog.
DO build your dog's tolerance levels through repeated, positive experiences.
DO continually educate yourself regarding normal and appropriate canine behavior in any given situation.
DO plan ahead to how you will handle difficult situations, people or dogs.
DO earn your dog's trust by keeping your promise to protect him.
DO pay attention to your dog when you are with him.
DO insist that your dog behave politely.
DO respect that your dog's individual needs may or may not be in line with your training or competition goals.
DO put your dog first - all your hopes, dreams, titles & goals all mean nothing if you ignore the needs, fears and realities of who your dog is.
DO honor & respect your dog's concerns, whether or not you share them. (Remember how your mom left the light in the hall on at night when you were a kid? It probably wasn't because she was afraid of the dark.)

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