

The problem with 'friendly' dogs

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I've been a dog trainer for over 15 years and have met a lot of 'friendly' dogs.

The vast majority of those 'friendly' dogs are in fact rude, have no dog-dog social skills and rarely listen to their owner when distracted or highly aroused.

As a result, innocent dogs and their owners are being terrorized by other dogs. Dogs play a big part in our lives and it's a shame that people don't know very much about their behaviour.

Dogs communicate primarily by body language - tail, ears, eyes, posture, mouth - and we humans too easily misunderstand or just don't see these signs.

I'm always amazed when people feel the need for their dog to meet other dogs.

It isn't necessary. In fact, if you stop greeting other dogs your dog may thank you! Not all dogs like to meet, greet, and play with other dogs, especially unfamiliar ones.

Do you meet every person you see while walking or shopping? Do you let your child run up to every person she or he sees?

There are many reasons why dogs shouldn't be allowed to run up and greet a dog. That dog could be recovering from surgery, or have injuries or a painful physical condition. It could be intolerant of other animals, leash reactive, elderly or a dog that's in training.

These dogs need space and have every right to walk the streets or parks, using a standard leash, without interacting with strangers, human or canine. And yet they are hounded, day after day, by cheery, well-meaning dog owners who insist on meeting them. So, just what is leash reactivity?

A leashed dog is more likely to be reactive as they feel threatened. Dogs that feel threatened do not want a fight, but they do signal to the approaching dog to go away. We just miss those signs and the approaching dog with poor



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social skills doesn't understand, or doesn't care.

The leashed dog can also be frustrated when it sees other dogs. Frustrated dogs are extremely excited and their behaviour on leash can often look aggressive. It's easy for this excited greeting to turn bad very quickly.

The squeal of a frightened dog can cause a predatory reaction in the other dog. Owners of dogs need to be vigilant and aware of

their environment.. If another dog does approach create some distance, step between the dogs and do a sit-stay with eye contact.

Your goal is to remain calm while the other dog passes by. As an added protection from an approaching dog try carrying a quick opening umbrella that will act as a barrier.

For owners with 'friendly' dogs, please call your dog back. Especially if you see the above signals from another dog owner that clearly shows they do not feel the need for the dogs to interact.

Size doesn't matter. A small rude dog is likely to get away with poor behaviour but is more likely to get injured or killed. A large rude dog is more likely to cause the injury.

So, the next time you see a dog running free with the owner's yelling "It's ok, my dog is friendly" try saying these two simple words, "Mine's not!". Be your dog's advocate.

Rebecca Roper owns OK K9's Dog Training in Kerikeri.