

# How to Meet a Dog

*Written by Deb Colgan of [Riley's Place](#) published on October 24, 2008*

We've all either seen it or heard about it. You, your child, a friend ... name it ... goes to meet a dog who looks perfectly friendly and when you least expect it - **CHOMP!** and everything else that goes along with a dog bite, including labeling the dog vicious. The first thing most people think of and want to happen is to put the dog down because in their minds the dog bit someone and it's mean.

## Dogs ARE NOT Born Vicious

Dogs are not born vicious, people make them that way. Unless they've been abused or otherwise mistreated **by people**, they are normally quite happy to meet new 2-legged friends.

I got a news flash for ya, chances are when a bite happens it's **not** because the dog is vicious and **chances are the victim is the one that actually caused the bite to happen**. Yes, really! Now don't go stomping off without reading the rest of this. You might just learn something and when I'm done, you may change your mind just like I did after listening to some "dog sense," the common sense of [Cesar Millan](#), reading many books and talking with several dog-people is what changed my thinking. You might also consider being willing to stand up and take responsibility for your **own** actions. You can learn more about the human contribution as to why dog's bite in my article [Understanding Dog Behavior or Don't Blame the Dog When it Bites](#).

## Who Gets Bitten MOST OFTEN?

The biggest majority of dog bites happen to girls aged 10-16 and children under about 5-6 years old. The young teen girls want something to hug and hugging a stuffed animal (or a soft cuddly dog) is one of their favorite things to do. Small children get excited, they want to see the puppy. They're usually in an excited state of mind, they run toward the dog, perhaps they're screeching those high pitched screeches only children can do. Some people approach a dog looking at it's face or directly into the dog's eyes. Children under the age of about 8 by default are at a dog's eye level depending on the size of the dog and the child's height.

## NO-NO's When MEETING a DOG

All of these things are meet-a-dog-no-no's and have the potential for ending in a bite. Notice how everything I've mentioned is people-oriented and people-generated?

## HUGGING a Dog

Did you know that dogs don't hug? Well, they do, but what dogs consider hugging is something they do when making puppies (if you follow me). Hugging a dog is for the person, not the dog. Think about this, you see an adorable small child say in the shopping mall. Being that you don't know this child, are you going to run up to this little darling, screeching, giggling and all excited and give them a hug? I think not. Not only in this day and age do you risk a trip to jail, but it's just not appropriate behavior when meeting someone you don't know. So, then why would you do it to a dog you don't know? Some dogs handle it just fine, but you don't have a clue which dogs will and which won't and it doesn't matter what size or breed the dog. A dog you don't know

is a dog you don't know, and a protective breed dog, is even more a risk to approach inappropriately.

## Human to Dog DIRECT EYE CONTACT

I'm reminded of a day my Granddaughter and I were sitting and waiting for our lunch at a little hot dog stand. We sat on the bench chatting, she had Nissa and I had Riley. Both dogs were sitting quietly enjoying the day. Suddenly for what appeared to be no reason at all, Riley growled and lunged at a young man who was walking nearby headed towards the order window. I didn't see what happened, but my Granddaughter did. She told me that as he got closer, he looked Riley right in the eyes. To some dogs and **particularly protective breed dogs**, this is a confrontation and/or a threat and they **will** rise to the occasion, which is exactly what Riley did.

## RUNNING TOWARDS a Dog

Ever walk by a school with your dogs when the kids are on recess? They all come rushing to the fence and stick their hands through the holes in the chain links. How would you react if a group of people you don't know suddenly came running towards you all excited and wanted to put their hands on you? You might think about biting them, too! We have some rules that everyone must follow if they want to meet my dogs but these below are geared towards children inside a school fence. If they follow these three simple actions, I'm more than happy to let them meet my dogs and my dogs are happy to meet them.

1. Speak quietly and calmly to ME, no screeching or loud noises;

2. Walk slowly! - don't run towards the fence;
3. Do NOT look at the dog's face and particularly do NOT look the dog in the eyes;
4. Hands flat ON of the fence - NO fingers THROUGH the fence.

**The first three** apply to Cesar's "*No Touch, No Talk, No Eye Contact*" until the dog smells you, becomes comfortable with you and learns that you mean it and his family no harm. **The last one applies at all times!**

## ALWAYS ASK the Owner First!

When you approach a dog, first ask the owner if it's alright to meet their furkid and do this quietly from a distance. If the owner approves, let THEM approach YOU and do NOT look at the dog. The dog needs to smell you first, that's how a dog meets & greets. They learn to know you by your smell. While the dog is meeting you, you can meet the owner. Don't make any sudden movements, keep your voice calm and wait for the signal from the owner that it's ok for you to pet the dog.

## PETTING a Dog

When you do pet the dog, **pet under the chin**, do **not** aim for the top of the head. Some dogs may take you reaching towards the top of their head as a threat the same way you may not care for someone putting their hand in your head -- you are in the dog's space just which is no different than someone violating your personal space. In the dog's mind this approach may mean harm to them, they may think you're going to hit them. Don't put a dog in the position of feeling threatened by aiming for the top of their head. Petting gently

under the chin is not only safer, but it also helps instill confidence in a dog, particularly one that is on the shy side. **Pet gently**, no rough stuff or "dog thumping" as I call it. Dog thumping means to thump the dog roughly on its side. Do you like it when someone slaps you on the back? The slapper sometimes doesn't know their own strength and this type of contact can hurt whether it be happening to you or the dog. When someone comes to pat you on the head, you may duck away yourself! Just like people may not know your limits, you don't know the dog's limits.

## If a Dog JUMPS ON YOU

If a dog jumps up on you, quietly and calmly turn your back on it and gently cross your arms over your chest or in front of you. Remain calm, don't say anything to the dog. You might ask the owner to calm their dog if they're not already doing so. What you're doing is ignoring the dog. When a dog is ignored it most generally will stop any unwanted behavior. Reacting in this way should help calm the dog and at the same time, it removes most of your important bodily parts from any teeth action!

## Human EMOTIONS

If you are the least bit afraid or upset about anything, even something unrelated, don't even think about meeting a dog at that time. [Dogs smell fear](#) and other negative energy such as anger, from great distances and meeting a dog in any other frame of mind except a calm, relaxed energy is another reason people get bitten. Any negative energy will put the dog on guard and a tense dog can be a dangerous dog. When you're nervous or afraid, your body releases a smell that a dog can pick up from some distance. You don't even

know it's happening but the dog does. This to a dog, can also be a threat and if you are approaching the dog or the dog's owner, that dog just might move into protective mode immediately because in their mind, you are a threat to them or their owner. You cannot blame a dog for protecting himself or his family.

## Sharing a PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Here's a personal experience to share with you for a comparison of two different scenarios in approaching a dog or it's owner that resulted in two very different outcomes:

**Approach #1** -- My two furkids and I walked up to my place of employment one day to pick up my check. We was standing in the hall chatting with a co-worker when another co-worker approached us. Having had his own German Shepherds in the past, Mike's **approach was slow, gentle, relaxed and casual, keeping his eyes on ME not the dogs**. After a few sniff-sniff moments, Mike began stroking the dogs but remained standing. After another moment or two of simply **petting them from a standing position without looking at them** he got down to their level, bent at the knees, and the dogs and Mike had just that quickly and smoothly -- had very friendly conversation of their own going and both dogs were enjoying the attention.

**Approach #2** -- A short time later, Ryan came out of one of the offices, saw us and headed our way. Ryan was walking quickly and directly towards us. Riley was sitting calmly in front of me **between Ryan and me**. Still a few feet away, **Ryan looked down and directly into Riley's eyes**. About that same time he **extended his hand towards Riley's face** in a motion to pet him. That was all it took and faster than you can blink an eye, Riley morphed into

protection mode. He'd been **challenged by the direct eye contact** and **in his mind**, simply because of Ryan's approach, thought Ryan might hurt me. I popped his collar and he immediately sat down. Let's just say that at that point, Ryan was no longer interested in having a conversation with Riley!

## YOUR APPROACH Can Make a SAFE Difference

See how these two approaches had totally different results out of one dog in the span of just five minutes? Remember this the next time you go to meet a dog and you'll help keep yourself safe.

Want more information on how to be more safe around dogs and help yourself to not be bitten? Read my: [Understanding Dog Bite Behavior -- Don't Blame the Dog When it Bites!](#)

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