

A step-by-step guide to approaching dogs

The first thing to teach a child is that all dogs are different; some dogs are confident, happy and well socialised, whilst others can be scared, nervous and unpredictable. Some are happy and confident in some situations, yet scared and nervous in others. Therefore, each dog's response to being approached will be different.

Below you'll find a bullet pointed guide to teach children how to approach a dog. You should teach your child to follow each of these steps every time they approach a dog:

- **Never approach a dog that is not under its owners control** - This includes dogs that are off lead in the park, dogs that are tied up outside shops or schools or even your neighbours dog in the front garden.
- **Always ask the owners permission before approaching a dog** – Be calm and polite when asking permission. Do not excite the dog. A dog's owner will know how their dog reacts to being approached. If the owner says "No" you should thank the owner and walk away calmly.
- **Let the dog come to you** – If the owner agrees to being approached, gently offer a hand in the direction of the dog. If the dog wants to meet you it will come and sniff your hand. If the dog doesn't come to you it probably doesn't want to be petted, you should thank the owner and walk away calmly.
- **Read the dog's signals** – A dog cannot talk, but it can give very clear signals to tell you if it is comfortable with your approach. Before you start to pet the dog you should look for the following signals:
Positive (Good) Signals: Wagging tail, open mouthed, tongue out, rubbing against you, sitting or lying beside you, climbing up your leg.
Negative (Bad) Signals: Moving away from you, cowering or retracting from you, barking, showing their teeth, tail tucked between back legs, tail up and curved over like a scorpion's tail, fur along the ridge of back standing up.
If all you are receiving from the dog are positive signals you can move on to petting the dog. You should continue to monitor these signals throughout your interaction with the dog. If at any point you see any of the negative signals you should slowly step back from the dog, thank the owner and walk calmly away.
- **Petting the dog** – Dogs should be approached for stroking from the side. Gently stroke the fur on their back in a head to tail direction or in the area of the dog's chest between its collar and front legs. Never lean over the top of a dog. Never stroke the top of a dog's head. Never pull on or play with a dog's tail or ears. Never grab or hug a dog You should continue to read the dog's signals throughout your interaction. If at any point you see any of the negative signals you should slowly step back from the dog, thank the owner and walk calmly away.
- **Say "thank you"** – After petting the dog, thank the owner and the dog and walk away calmly.



The Way of the Dog is a dog training and behaviour modification consultancy based in Lancashire, England.

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