



STRANGER DANGER – How to introduce your dog to new people

As your adoption counselor discussed with you, your dog displayed Stranger Danger while in the shelter. This means that your dog may be more likely to be reactive towards new people than other dogs. These dogs have typically been under or over exposed to new people which means that either haven't learned the proper socialization skills, or coping mechanisms when it comes to meeting new people.

The Plan:

Slowly introduce your dog to new people **at their pace** using praise and or treats rather than flooding techniques in order to make positive associations.

The starting point of your dog's program will be dependant on the level of sociability seen at the shelter (and previous). It is important to remember that your dog may regress from the progress they've made at the shelter in your new home. Giving your dog time to adjust to their new family and new environment will be crucial to your bond and their continued success in your home.

Body Language is HUGE when it comes to interacting with all, but specifically stranger reactive dogs – your body language that is.

Always have your dog on a leash when introducing them to new people to ensure you always have control of the interaction.

The Practice:

Always ensure that strangers are ignoring your dog – no talking to, making eye contact or reaching toward your dog. Direct new people to stand with their side facing your dog rather than facing them full front, as the side approach is less intimidating.

Most people have often been taught to put their hand out for the new dog to sniff – **please stop this from happening**. The dog does not understand that the hand is coming for the dog to sniff, they may react to a hand coming towards them – regardless of it's intention.

Direct your stranger to stand still and allow the dog to sniff them. The dog is generally afraid of the touch so no, petting them won't make them feel better! **Verbally** praise your dog each time they are brave enough to investigate your stranger for the entire length of the investigation / greeting. Do not pet your dog during these times as the touch can be overstimulating and uncomfortable for your dog.

If your dog is readily approaching your stranger, give the stranger a treat to **toss** to your dog. This is another circumstance where your dog is fearful of the touch. It is very important that your stranger **DO NOT** attempt to hand feed or pet your dog after giving them a treat. Tossing a treat to your dog rather than asking them to

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549 Tenth Line, Collingwood ON, L9Y 0W1
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pass a barrier they're uncomfortable with, will make your dog much more comfortable and help them acclimatize much faster.

Your stranger should **never touch** your dog until you see their body language toward the new person replicate the relaxed / friendly body language you regularly see in your dog.

If your dog is seemingly more reactive to new people when they enter your house, try to avoid having your guest knock on the door / ring the door bell, and meet them at the end of your driveway. Removing the excitement of the door will help control your dog's excitement / reactivity level towards your guest.

If your 'stranger' is coming into your house, place your dog onto their bed or mat or blanket beside you where you will be sitting at a fair distance from your guest. Direct your guest to ignore your dog while on their mat as this is meant to be a safe spot for your dog to relax.

Your dog should remain on leash for the entirety of your visit. Your guest's motion (moving from one spot to another) may trigger your dog to react, this is a good time to have your dog on a leash for control. *If you are running into this issue please contact GTHS sooner than later as this is an issue that can be easily resolved.*

Support:

Our Behaviour Support Team can help to provide resources and tips if you experience concerns in the home environment. With your adoption the GTHS will provide an over the phone consultation in order to provide you with tips and resources to set your new dog up for success. In all cases of dog adoptions, the GTHS recommends hiring a professional dog training or behavioural consultant to ensure your relationship with your new dog starts off on the right paw! A list of local trainers is enclosed in your adoption package.

Our Behaviour Support Team can be reached at behaviour@gths.ca

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