



## Keeping your dog's boundaries

If you have a dog who does not like other dogs or people and you take him or her out in public, you might experience others still coming too close to say hi.

Unfortunately, you cannot assume that other people are knowledgeable enough to keep their dogs away from yours, or to stay away themselves. Many reactive dog owners struggle with the constant approaches from strangers or their dogs. This not only can really set you back in your training process if it pushes your dog over the threshold, but could actually be dangerous if you have a reactive dog that will snap at others if too stressed or cornered.

We really want to avoid having others come into our space like this.

So, let's discuss some strategies for keeping your dog's boundaries and keeping extroverted strangers and their dogs away.

First, there are certain leashes, collars and harnesses that have writings such as "Keep away" or "In training" or "I need my space". I also have a student who got such a vest for herself that says "My dog needs space!"

This equipment will work to some extent, but there probably will still be some people trying to approach you. They either don't think this message applies to them, or they just didn't read it.

There is also a movement that strives to promote awareness for dogs' need for space by using collars or leashes of different colors. Red means the dog needs space, orange means the dog is reactive towards dogs but not people, blue means the dog is in training and so on. This is a great idea, but I guarantee that any random stranger you come across will just look at your dog and go "oh, cool red leash" instead of knowing this color-coded system.

While having your dog wear equipment like this can be a part of the puzzle, you should not expect that it will 100% keep everyone out of your bubble.

Of course, there is always the option of moving away from strangers who are coming your way. People do take the hint that their company is not welcome if you turn away and go the other way. However, you escaping from annoying strangers can really mess with your



session setup - once you have found the perfect setup, with the perfect distance to the trigger, and you scattered treats, you do NOT want to up and leave if someone approaches.

The next thing to try - and this usually works if you are firm - is to tell others BEFORE they even get close "Sorry, we are training!" or "My dog doesn't want to say hi!" or "My dog needs some personal space, thank you for understanding!"

When I am training, I do this as soon as I notice someone making eye contact with me. It's important to be proactive. Ideally you want to let the people know when they are still quite a ways away.

When I used to train a lot with in-person clients, I was their "body guard" this way: I would of course always help them watch their surroundings (to make sure no unexpected surprises pushed their dog over the threshold) and if I noticed a person looking at us in an interested way, I'd let them know long before they came close "Sorry, we're training right now!" or "Our dog doesn't like strangers - we appreciate you not coming too close!"

If you do this proactively, you can very effectively clear out a good circle around you. It's just important to tell people before they "zone in" on you and are starting to confidently approach you.

If people are already approaching you confidently, you need to be more direct. Once a stranger has decided they or their dog WILL SAY HI to your dog, it can be really difficult to deter them.

Usually, the more polite and soft-spoken the dog owner is, the more likely the stranger is to just walz through any boundaries and realize their wish of saying hi (and setting the reactive dog off). If there is some sort of perceived social hierarchy, for example an adult approaching a teenager who's working with their dog, the intruder is also usually even more insistent.

So, in this case I think it's allowed to lie a little bit, for the safety and wellbeing of your dog and everyone else.

Making up some kind of contagious disease is the way to go.

Just tell them "My dog has intestinal parasites" or "My dog has an infectious skin condition" . Nobody wants to meet your dog so badly that they are ok catching diseases from it.



This tactic will work. Maybe you get some snide remark about taking your dog in public with this condition, but everyone will shy away and NOT try to pet your dog anymore.

So, these were some different ideas you can use to keep people away. Let me know what works best for you, and fingers crossed that other don't intrude your dog's boundaries anymore!