



Tips for Greeting Other Dogs on Leash

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You're out on a relaxing walk with your dog when you see another owner walking towards you with their dog. The owner says to you, "can our dogs say hello"? How do you decide whether allowing your dog to greet a strange dog on leash is a good idea? After all, some of these greetings go beautifully with both dogs and owners parting company with a smile. Other greetings with dogs on leash go horribly wrong with both dogs and owners leaving the scene upset with pulses racing. What went wrong?

If you're not sure how your dog will react to an unfamiliar dog on leash, my advice is simply don't do it. You owe it to your dog to be their advocate and enough scary encounters with other dogs can result in your dog developing negative associations with other dogs. That's something none of us wants to happen.

But what if your dog loves other dogs? How do you decide if that unknown dog will enjoy meeting your dog? After all, how many times have we said "yes" to the "can our dogs meet?" question and had the encounter go wrong? Here are some tips for making this dog/dog greeting decision and some tips on keeping the encounter a pleasant one.

How is the other dog looking at your dog? Is the other dog staring at your dog silently without looking away? Just say "no". Polite dogs look and then look away, look and look away, they don't stare.

Is the other dog avoiding looking at your dog completely? Just say "no." Some dogs won't look away from your dog because they are anxious or fearful and there could be other reasons they can't look away. Regardless, it's still a "just say no" response to a dog/dog.

Greeting.

Do you feel comfortable reading the other dog's body language? I won't go into a full blown description of dog body language here, but if the other dog seems uncertain (tail tucked, ears back, won't look at your dog) then that other dog is afraid and regardless of whether that owner is trying to "socialize" their dog on leash, for your dog's and the other dog's sake, just say "no."

Is your dog, the other dog, or both dogs dragging their humans toward one another? Some owners think this is a sign that their dogs will love meeting one another. This is a circumstance in which I always say “no.” Dogs are sensitive to barrier frustration (seeing another dog but not being able to get to them) and that combined with their oxygen supply being choked off if they’re on neck collars can cause the initial contact between the dogs to be too heated. Even if both dogs love other dogs, the level of excitement when they first meet can cause a scuffle between the dogs.

So, you see a dog on a loose leash coming towards you with relaxed body language, looking at your dog and looking away, ears up and rotated out. You decide to go for it and let your dog meet another dog on leash, now what? Keep it brief. All most dogs want by way of a greeting is a quick butt sniff. (Isn’t talking about dog behaviour fun?). If both dogs go nose to nose (how rude!) one should veer off for the butt sniff. If one dog’s head goes above the other dog’s head, either play will break out or a scuffle will break out. If you’re lucky and play breaks out, drop the dogs’ leashes (if it’s safe to do so.) When dogs get tangled up and feel their escape route cut off, they can get afraid and play can tip to a scuffle. Again, keep it brief, thank your playmate’s owner and enjoy the remainder of your walk!