

When Visitors Come to the House

A guide for dogs who bark, growl or feel uncomfortable around visitors

Many dogs feel worried, overwhelmed or uncomfortable when visitors enter their home. Barking, growling, lunging or hiding are often signs that a dog is struggling to cope rather than trying to be difficult. Our goal is not to force dogs to interact with visitors, but to help them feel safe, comfortable and in control whilst visitors are present.



THE VISITOR PROTOCOL

1. PREPARE BEFORE THE VISITOR ARRIVES



- If possible, ask visitors to phone or text when they arrive rather than knocking on the door.
- Before opening the door, place your dog in their safe area with a enjoyable treat/activity.

2. VISITOR ENTERS AND SETTLES



- Advise visitor to avoid eye contact, reaching towards the dog, calling the dog over or attempting to stroke them.
- The goal is for the visitor to become a predictable and non-threatening presence.

3. REINTRODUCE THE DOG GRADUALLY



- Once your dog is calm, relaxed and willing to take food, place them **on lead** and allow them to move around the house with you.
- Avoid walking directly towards the visitor. Instead, gradually move around the home, allowing your dog time to process the visitor's presence.

4. WATCH YOUR DOG'S BODY LANGUAGE



- If your dog remains calm, you may gradually move closer to the visitor.
- If your dog barks, lunges, growls or is uncomfortable, immediately increase distance.
- Bring your dog back to their safe area and allow them time to relax before trying again.

5. REWARD CALM BEHAVIOUR



- Pair the presence of the visitor with high-value food rewards delivered by the owner.
- This helps your dog learn that visitors predict positive outcomes rather than worry or uncertainty.

VISITOR RULES



- ✓ Remain calm and relaxed
- ✓ Allow the dog to approach if they choose
- ✓ Ignore the dog initially
- ✓ Let the owner guide the interaction
- ✗ Don't stare at the dog
- ✗ Don't reach towards the dog
- ✗ Don't call the dog over
- ✗ Don't force interaction

COMMON MISTAKES

- ✗ Taking the dog directly to the visitor
- ✗ Allowing visitors to make a fuss immediately
- ✗ Forcing interactions
- ✗ Punishing barking or growling
- ✗ Ignoring signs of stress
- ✗ Progressing too quickly

TOP TIPS

- ✓ Give your dog a safe area away from visitors
- ✓ Allow your dog to approach at their own pace
- ✓ Increase distance if your dog appears uncomfortable
- ✓ Pair visitors with high-value rewards
- ✓ NB barking and growling are forms of communication
- ✓ Prevent rehearsal of highly emotional reactions
- ✓ Seek professional support early if concerns persist

DELIVERY DRIVERS & POSTAL WORKERS



Consider using an external post box
Place your dog in another room **before** opening the door
Prevent access to hallways and entrances
Prioritise the safety of delivery workers and postal staff

KEY MESSAGE

The goal is not to make your dog interact with visitors

The goal is to help them feel safe, comfortable and able to cope whilst visitors are present.



NEED MORE HELP?

Behaviour concerns are often easier to address when support is sought **early**. Did you know most pet insurance companies cover the costs of clinical behaviourists?



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