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## The Battersea code

# Safety around dogs



Registered Charity No. 206394  
A member of the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes

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## General do's and don'ts

We often think dogs have the same feelings as us, which can lead to big misunderstandings in our relationships with them. They can't talk in the same way as us. For example, they can't tell us when they are hurt or frightened – they may snap or bark instead. We can think they are trying to say something completely different and in some cases, we would see their behaviour as being aggressive, which is not always the case.

Dogs may surprise us at times with their behaviour, but there is nearly always a warning and a reason for this behaviour. Dogs are just like us in this – sometimes we may get angry for no reason, but when we calm down and explain, there's always a reason behind it.

Remember dogs can't tell you about themselves and their own history, you won't be aware if they have ever been hurt or neglected and whether their trust in humans has been damaged. This would greatly affect the way they behave.

Most people are naturally drawn towards pets, particularly dogs, and our lives are often improved by having them around.

**In order for us to be safe around dogs, we should all be aware of how to minimise the risk of a dog being frightened by us or feel the need to protect themselves.**

### Do

- be gentle and quiet around dogs at all times
- have respect for dogs

#### Top tip

Treat dogs as you would your friends – with respect and kindness at all times.

### Don't

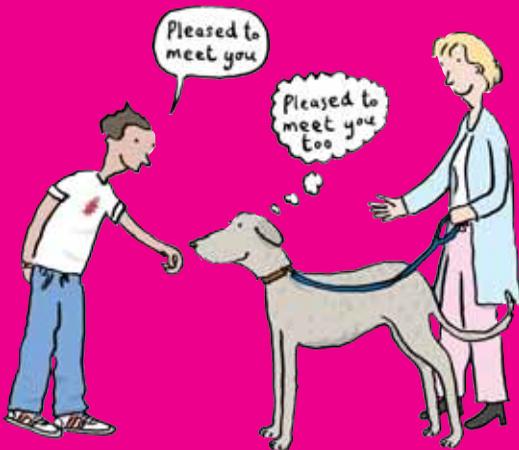
- sneak up on a dog – you may scare them
- tease a dog – it's not fair
- stare at a dog too long in the eye. Dogs can find this intimidating just like we do
- disturb a dog who is sleeping or eating as he may not want to play
- assume a dog will always want to play with you. Just like you, sometimes they may want to be left alone
- approach a dog who is tied up or without an owner as you won't know whether he is friendly or not

## How to approach a dog

As we are often much bigger in size than dogs, sometimes we can seem a little scary and daunting to them. Consider how you feel when you first meet someone – shy, nervous or worried perhaps? Remember this when approaching a dog. Follow these simple guidelines to help say “hello” to a dog in a friendly way.

### Top tip

**Never** approach a loose dog without its owner – the dog may not be friendly with children.



**1** Always ask the dog's owner if you can stroke the dog before you actually do. They will know whether their dog is friendly or not. This is the most important point to remember.

**2** Walk up to the dog calmly and quietly – don't shout or scream as you may frighten the dog.

**3** Curl your hand into a fist, and gently offer it to the dog to sniff first (this is a dog's way of saying hello to another dog).

**4** Stroke the dog under the chin, where he can see you (this will be less scary to the dog). Don't try and pat him from behind as you may startle him.

## What to do if you are frightened by a dog

Generally dogs running around in the park will be interested in you too, as you are having fun – particularly if you are perhaps playing with friends. This may make them want to come and join in – and sometimes they may rush over and jump up at you, scaring you. The best way to behave in this situation is listed below:

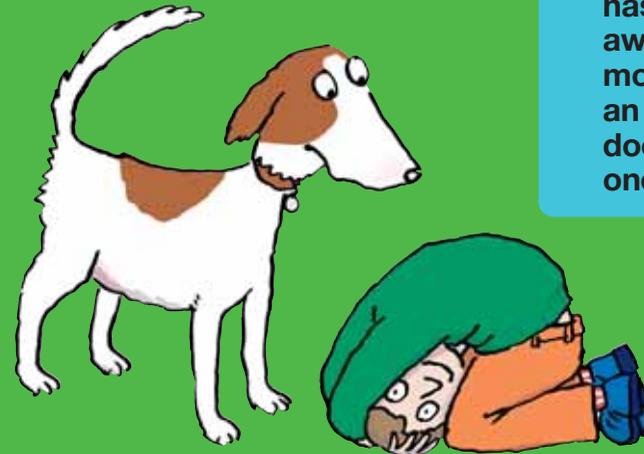
**1** Drop anything you are holding (this may have been what attracted the dog to you in the first place).

**2** Don't run away from the dog – he may think it's a game and run after you.

**3** Stand still, fold your arms and don't move. Don't make lots of noise, just act bored. Waving your arms around lots could scare the dog or attract his attention.

**4** If a dog knocks you over – roll into a ball, keeping your head and arms tucked in.

**5** Do not move until the dog has got bored and has gone away. You can then slowly move backwards – keeping an eye on the dog. If the dog does return, follow steps one to five again.



### Top tip

If the dog takes your toy, ask Mum or Dad, or the adult who came with you to try and help to get it back. Do **not** try yourself.

## Understanding a dog's body language



Dogs 'speak' using their own vocabulary (noises such as a bark or growl), body language and facial expressions. These signals, can easily be misread by humans. The more we can understand the system they use to communicate, the easier it is to understand their behaviour. Over the next few pages, let's consider the following...

# The playful dog

Most dogs enjoy playing with people, but there will be times when they may want to sleep instead or not be disturbed. Let's consider the body language of a playful dog so that the signs become clearer when a dog wants to play.

If a dog is showing these signs, it should be safe to play with him, but **only** if you ask the dog's owner first. If the owner is not there, do not play with the dog.



### Top tip

If a dog gets over excited when playing with you, you should simply stop playing with him. This will teach him better manners and he will know what is acceptable next time.

**1** His eyes are wide open (dilated).

**4** His tail is wagging furiously.

**2** His ears are relaxed.

**5** He is barking to try and attract your attention and get you to join in.

**3** The front end of his body is lowered to the floor and the rear end is up in the air. This is called a 'play-bow'.

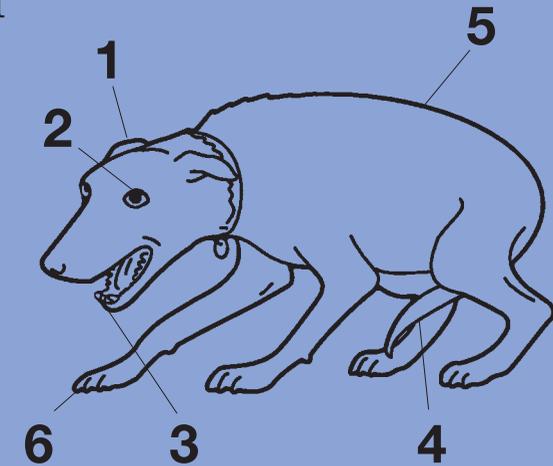
### Fantastic fact

Dogs have nearly 100 different facial expressions and they use these to help with communication.

# The scared dog

Dogs can find new situations and new people scary, in the same way as we can. Look at the signals this dog is giving and try to remember them just in case you ever meet a scared dog.

If you see a dog showing these signs, try and remember never to force him into a corner. The best thing you can do is walk away very slowly, watching the dog at all times (without staring as this can be intimidating). Go and tell an adult immediately.



### Top tip

Consider how you would feel in a scary situation and then think about the dog and how it could be feeling as you approach.

**1** His ears are low and flat on his head.

**4** His tail is tucked down tightly between his legs.

**2** His eyes will be very big and round (dilated).

**5** His body is trembling, shivering and drawn back into a cowering position with an arched back.

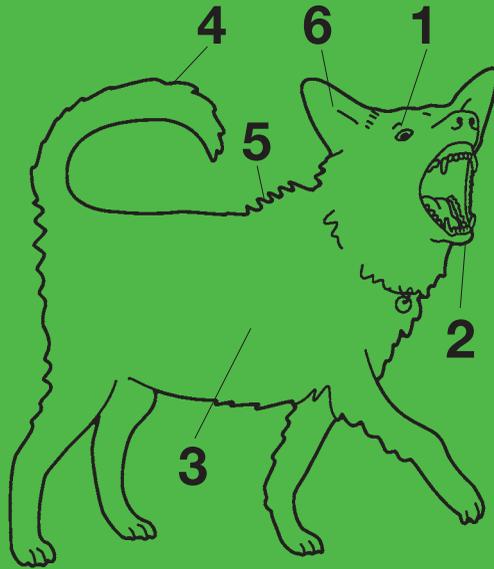
**3** He is panting and may bark, growl or snarl in fear.

**6** He is trying to back away from you.

# The angry dog

Dogs can get angry in all sorts of situations, just like people. Look at the signals this dog is giving to show he is not happy and try to remember them.

If you ever see a dog showing any of these signs, or are unsure if the dog is angry – do **not** approach him. He could be giving you a warning to leave him alone. Walk calmly away. Do not run, shout or scream even though you may be worried, remember the points below.



### Top tip

Find an adult to help you if you really need to disturb or move a dog.

**1** He is maintaining eye contact with you through narrow eyes.

**4** His tail is stiff, straight and slightly over his back.

**2** His mouth has lips apart, drawn back from the teeth – snarling and possibly growling.

**5** His hackles (hairs on the back of the neck) are standing up.

**3** His body is tense and stiff.

**6** His ears are alert and forward.

# Test your knowledge on safety around dogs

Below is a question from each section of this booklet. Select the correct answer from each section to test your knowledge on how to be safe around dogs.

### 1 How would you approach a dog? Would you:

- a shout and scream as you approach him
- b curl your hand into a fist and gently offer it to the dog to sniff first
- c approach him without his owner present

### 4 What signal would you look out for if a dog is scared?

- a his tail would be up and wagging
- b he would come towards you
- c his body would be trembling, shivering and drawn back into a cowering position

### 2 What would you do if you were frightened by a dog? Would you:

- a run away from the dog
- b wave your hands and attract his attention
- c stand still, fold your arms, act bored and don't move or make lots of noise

### 5 What signs would you look out for if a dog is angry:

- a his body would be relaxed
- b his mouth has lips apart, drawn back from the teeth – snarling and possibly growling
- c the hairs on the back of his neck are down

### 3 What body language would a dog give if he wants to play? Is it:

- a the front end of his body would be lowered to the floor and his rear end would be up in the air
- b his ears would be up
- c his tail would be still