



Read the dog before you reach.

Dogs read your height, angle and speed long before your face. This is how you read them back. Watch the **whole dog** — eyes, mouth, ears, body, tail — for 3–5 seconds. One signal is a clue. A cluster is a message.

GREEN**"I'm comfortable. Say hi."**

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|---|---|
| ☐ Soft, squinty or blinking eyes | ☐ Loose, wiggly body, weight even |
| ☐ Mouth relaxed, slightly open | ☐ Ears in their natural position |
| ☐ Tail at natural height, wide loose wag | ☐ Comes to you in a curve, leans in for more |

AMBER**"I'm not sure. Give me space."**

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|--|---|
| ☐ Lip licking or yawning when not tired | ☐ Whale eye — whites of the eyes showing |
| ☐ Turns head or body away from you | ☐ Ears pulled back, tight brow |
| ☐ Weight shifted back, a front paw lifted | ☐ Sudden sniffing, scratching or shake-off |
| ☐ Tail lowered, slow or stiff wag | ☐ Hides behind their person or furniture |

RED**"Stop. Back away calmly."**

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| ☐ Body freezes or goes stiff | ☐ Hard, fixed stare; mouth clamped shut |
| ☐ Lip curl or teeth showing | ☐ Growl, snarl or air snap |
| ☐ Tail tucked tight, or high and rigid | ☐ Hackles up with a stiff, forward stance |

Never punish a growl. It's your dog's warning system. Take the warning away and the next step is a bite.



An invitation, not an approach.

Your dog isn't rejecting you — they're rejecting the pressure. Leaning in and reaching over feels like love to you, and like a stranger looming to them. Take the pressure off and let them choose.

✓ Do this

Turn sideways. Side-on is polite in dog language. Face-on is a challenge.

Crouch or sit. Lower your height so you're not looming.

Look away. Soft, sideways glances — no staring.

Let them come to you. They choose the distance and the pace.

Scratch the chest, bum or under the chin — once they've come to you.

✗ Skip this

Leaning over them. Height plus angle reads as a threat.

Big toothy smile and eye contact. To a nervous dog, that's a stare.

The hand-sniff. A hand in a nervous dog's face is how bites happen.

Head pats. A hand coming over the head feels like a grab.

Hugs and fast movements. Restraint and speed raise the pressure.

The 3-second consent check

STEP 1

Scratch for 3 seconds, then stop and take your hand away.

YES

They lean in, nudge you or stay close — carry on.

NO

They move off, freeze, lick lips or shake off — respect it.