

Helping Your Dog Learn to Trust Other People

Simple ways to help an adult dog safely expand their circle of trust

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Your dog already trusts you—now you can help them discover that other people can be safe too. Patience, respect, and positive experiences build confidence and trust. 



1. DON'T FORCE FRIENDSHIP

Ignore your dog at first. Don't stare, reach, or call their name. Let them watch and adjust.



2. LET YOUR DOG MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

Allow your dog to approach, sniff, and retreat on their own terms. Choice builds confidence.



3. USE TREATS THE RIGHT WAY

Toss tasty treats near your dog. Over time, toss closer or offer from your hand if they're ready.



4. GIVE THEM AN ESCAPE ROUTE

Never surround or trap your dog. Make sure they can move away and feel in control.



5. PET GENTLY AND BRIEFLY

When your dog asks for attention, pet along the chest, shoulder or side—then stop. Let them decide if they want more.



6. WATCH THEIR BODY LANGUAGE

Look for signs of comfort—or concern. Listen to your dog and give them space if they're unsure.



7. BE YOUR DOG'S ADVOCATE

Speak up for your dog's needs. Protect their boundaries and help others understand what makes them feel safe.



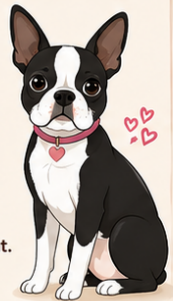
8. HELP OTHERS BE A SOURCE OF GOOD

Invite trusted people to give treats, play or enjoy favorite activities. Good things help build trust.

Trust grows one good experience at a time. 

A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR VISITORS

-  Ignore me at first.
-  Don't stare at me.
-  Don't reach for me.
-  Let me come to you.
-  Let me sniff you without immediately touching me.
-  Toss me something yummy.
-  Let me walk away whenever I want.
-  And please give me time.



Be patient. Be kind. Be consistent.

Our dogs aren't just learning about new people—they're learning that the world is a safe place. 

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Some dogs seem to love everyone they meet. Others choose their people much more carefully.

An adult dog may be completely loving, relaxed and trusting with one person while remaining cautious or uncomfortable around other members of the household, friends or visitors.

If your dog already trusts you, that's wonderful. It tells you something very important:

Your dog knows how to form a trusting relationship.

Now your job is to help your dog learn that you aren't the only safe person in their world.

And surprisingly, one of the most important parts of the process is not just training the dog.

It's teaching the people around your dog how to behave, too.

Don't Force Friendship

When people know a dog is unsure of them, their natural reaction is often to try harder.

They call the dog's name. They crouch down and reach out a hand. They stare at the dog while talking sweetly. They try to pet the dog to prove they're friendly.

To an uncertain dog, all that attention can feel like pressure.

Instead, ask new people to come into the dog's environment calmly and initially **ignore the dog**.

Don't stare. Don't reach. Don't lean over the dog. Don't repeatedly call the dog's name. And don't insist that the dog come over and say hello.

Give your dog the opportunity to watch this new person without being expected to do anything.

Let Your Dog Make the First Move

Eventually, curiosity may take over. Your dog may move closer or come over to sniff the person.

That's excellent - but it still doesn't necessarily mean:

"Please pet me."

It may simply mean:

"I want to know more about you."

Ask the person to remain relaxed and allow the dog to sniff without immediately reaching toward them.

Your dog should always be free to approach and then move away again.

This teaches an important lesson:

"I can investigate this person and nothing bad happens."

Those little experiences can become the building blocks of trust.

Let Treats Help Make Introductions Pleasant

Food can be a wonderful way to create positive associations with people.

But there's a difference between using a treat as a reward and using food to lure a nervous dog into a situation that makes them uncomfortable.

Initially, have the person gently toss a favorite treat toward the dog. The dog doesn't have to approach the person to get it.

As the dog becomes increasingly relaxed, treats can gradually be tossed closer. Eventually, your dog may decide to approach and take one from the person's hand.

There's no deadline. You're simply helping your dog make a very pleasant connection:

“Good things happen when this person is around.”

Give Your Dog an Escape Route

A dog who is uncertain about people should never feel trapped.

Avoid surrounding the dog with several people or allowing someone to corner them in an attempt to make friends.

Your dog should always have somewhere to go - a bed, crate if they already enjoy one, another part of the room, or simply back to you.

Interestingly, knowing that escape is possible can make a dog more willing to stay.

Choice helps build confidence.

Teach People How to Touch Your Dog

When your dog begins actively seeking attention from another person, keep those first physical interactions gentle and brief.

Rather than immediately reaching over the dog's head, the person can offer a gentle stroke on the chest, shoulder or side. Then stop.

What does the dog do? If your dog remains close, leans toward the person or asks for more attention, that's a good indication they're comfortable continuing.

If your dog walks away, let them.

Walking away should always be an acceptable answer.

The dog learns that interacting with people doesn't mean surrendering control over what happens to their body.

Learn to Recognize “I'm Uncomfortable”

Dogs communicate with us constantly, but some of their signals can be easy to miss.

A dog who turns away, backs up, repeatedly licks their lips, becomes suddenly still, lowers their body, avoids eye contact or attempts to leave may be telling you that the situation has become uncomfortable.

Listen to those quieter signals.

And if a dog growls, don't punish the growl. A growl is valuable communication. Your dog is telling you that something has become too much.

Create some distance and determine what caused the discomfort.

Punishing a warning doesn't necessarily change how the dog feels. It can simply discourage the dog from giving that warning in the future.

You Are Your Dog's Advocate

If you're the person your dog trusts, one of the most important things you can do is speak for your dog.

Don't be embarrassed to tell someone:

**"Please ignore her for a little while."
"Let her come to you."
"Please don't reach for her yet."
"She's just sniffing you. Give her a minute."
"Let her walk away if she wants to."**

You know your dog better than your visitors do.

Protecting your dog's boundaries doesn't prevent socialization. It helps create the kind of successful experiences that can make future social interactions easier.

Help Other People Become a Source of Good Things

Once your dog is becoming comfortable with another person, begin allowing that person to participate in some of the things your dog already enjoys.

Maybe that person occasionally gives a favorite treat, puts down the dinner bowl, tosses the favorite ball, plays with a treasured toy, opens the door for a walk, participates in a familiar game, or sits quietly nearby while the dog relaxes.

The goal isn't to replace the dog's special relationship with you. It's simply to expand their understanding of who can be trusted.

Over time, the dog's thinking can begin to change from:

"My person is safe."

to:

"My person is safe, and I'm beginning to feel comfortable with this person too."

Don't Measure Success by Petting

This may be one of the most important things to remember.

A successful introduction doesn't have to end with someone petting your dog.

Success might be your dog remaining peacefully in the same room with a visitor. It might be choosing to lie down instead of watching the person nervously. It might be walking over for a sniff and calmly walking away. It might be accepting a tossed treat.

Later, it may be bringing that person a toy or choosing to sit beside them.

Trust often grows through very small moments.

Pay attention to those moments. They matter.

Your Dog Doesn't Have to Love Everyone

The goal isn't necessarily to create a dog who enthusiastically greets every person they meet.

Dogs have individual personalities just as people do. Some are naturally outgoing. Others are more reserved and selective about relationships.

A dog can be well-adjusted without wanting affection from every visitor.

What we're working toward is a dog who can feel **safe and comfortable around other people** and who gradually learns that their trusted circle can become a little larger.

A Simple Guide for Visitors

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Don't reach for me.
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Let me sniff you without immediately touching me.
Toss me something yummy.
Let me walk away whenever I want.
And please give me time.

Trust Grows One Good Experience at a Time

If your adult dog already has one person they deeply trust, you have a wonderful place to begin.

You don't have to force your dog to become everyone's friend.

Instead, use the security of the relationship you already have to help your dog experience other people in positive, predictable and respectful ways.

Be patient. Protect your dog's boundaries. Teach the humans around your dog what to do - and sometimes, more importantly, what **not** to do.

Then allow your dog to take those little steps.

A sniff.
A treat.
A relaxed body.
A nap while someone else is in the room.
A toy dropped at someone's feet.
A request for that very first scratch.

One positive experience leads to another.

And that's how a dog's circle of trust begins to grow.

When to Seek Professional Help

Some hesitation around unfamiliar people can be worked through gradually at home. However, if your dog has bitten or attempted to bite someone, regularly lunges or snaps, becomes increasingly fearful, or seems unable to relax around people despite careful introductions, seek professional help.

Your veterinarian is a good place to start. They can also help rule out pain or another medical problem that could be contributing to a sudden change in behavior and can direct you to an appropriately qualified behavior

professional.

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