

# “DON’T WORRY, HE’S FRIENDLY!”

*Who cares? He’s also annoying!*

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Maybe you’ve been there: walking along in a public space, minding your own business, when suddenly your reverie is broken by the sound of approaching footsteps and heavy breathing. Before you have a chance to protect yourself, your assailant has made physical contact, body slamming you and covering your exposed skin with slobbering kisses. As you push him away, the Golden Retriever’s owner comes jogging up, waving a dog cookie and a designer leash, shouting the universal battle cry of *Canis-Ownerus Ignoramus*: “Don’t worry, he’s friendly!”

And you, not wanting to cause a problem or to look like a jerk, meekly acquiesce: “That’s OK, I love dogs.” The Ignoramus collects his dog and continues on his way, most likely to intercept another innocent passerby with his soi-disant goodwill ambassador for all dogdom, and you continue on yours: perhaps with a tear in your t-shirt, but at least with a few dirty paw prints and the lingering aroma of LivaSnaps on your person.

What is it about dogs that makes their owners assume a sense of social immunity? After all, if someone’s six-year old child hurled himself at a total stranger, that someone would be mortified and would probably have a long talk with the exuberant youngster about personal space issues and the potential consequences of interacting with people against their will. With this in mind, it’s puzzling that the modern American dog owner thinks of her dog as her “fur kid” and herself as his “pet parent” but allows the dog to take liberties she’d never tolerate from her human offspring. As a dog trainer, I’m embarrassed by the behavior of my fellow “dog lovers”, who seem to think that the world owes them and their unmannerly best friends a free pass when it comes to rude behavior.

Are you getting a little hot under the collar as you read this? Does my description of the hapless dog owner chasing her out of control “furkid” ring an unpleasant bell? Are *you* that person and is that dog *your* dog? Sorry, dear reader, to have to break the news to you: not everyone loves Bonzo or Tinkerbelle as much as you think they do. Especially if they are prying his or her determined forelegs off of their torso. Would you like to improve the dog/human relations in your part of the world? Here are some suggestions:

**1. TRAIN YOUR DOG.** And I mean really *train* him. Go to a proven, results-oriented professional to get a solid recall (come when called) and heel (walk on a slack leash no matter what distractions

come along) along with all of the other important basics that give your dog the direction he needs. And once you start training, *don't stop*. Practice all the time, especially in the places where your pup is most likely to act up. The more you do this in the beginning, the sooner your dog will enjoy freedom that he's *earned* rather than suffer the consequences of the scattershot liberty he's been given as charity.

**2. LOSE THE RETRACTABLE LEASH.** Retractable leashes are great on a dog who is well behaved and obedient under distraction. But for anything less than that, they are a disaster waiting to happen. Think a 65 pound animal hauling butt at the end of a twenty-six foot piece of flesh-burning nylon cord is "under control"? I bet you drive better after you've had a couple, too.

Stick to a leash that makes you think about it: anything from a six foot nylon or leather lead up to a generous fifteen foot longline will do. Shorter or longer than that and you will be fighting physics until your dog is trained.

**3. HAVE SOME EMPATHY.** While you would be rightfully horrified if someone ran up to your dog and kicked him in the ribs, be equally horrified when your dog trespasses on one of your fellow humans. Think how you would feel if you were wearing a Chanel suit while walking through the park to work or a lunch date and you got ambushed and covered in dirt; or your child was knocked hard to the ground by a "friendly" playmate; or if you fell off your bike or wrecked on your rollerblades because someone carelessly ran into your path. Just because the culprit in these scenarios is a dog doesn't make them any more acceptable. One can say that the dog "doesn't know any better". But he should. And until he does, YOU should. But remember, all of the empathy in the world is useless if you don't do something about it. See Suggestion #1.

Have you noticed how dogs are welcome in fewer places than ever? Do you wonder why there have to be dog parks and special areas designated for dogs? Do you think that it's a positive development? I don't. The more isolated we become from the general public, the more dogs will be seen as a nuisance and a liability. Do your neighbors, your dog and other dog people in general a service: show up in public with a polite pooch at your side, not a drooling cruise-missile with a built-in set of excuses trailing behind him. Then people really *will* be happy to meet both of you.

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