



Preparing for visitors

Someone arriving at the door can turn your home from a quiet, relaxed haven into a frenzy of activity. By preparing your dog for visitors you can help to make things calmer and safer. You can teach your dog to go to their bed and quietly wait there until your visitors are settled.

Teach your dog **not to react to the door**

Feelings of excitement or anxiety can start the moment there is a knock on the door. This is why you need to teach your dog to feel calm when they hear this noise. Firstly, you should get them used to the sounds in a positive way.

- Quietly knock on a hard surface and see how your dog responds.
- If your dog barks or rushes to the door, then make the knock quieter. The aim is for your dog to stay calm when they hear the noise.
- Gradually increase the volume and frequency. Do this until your dog is ignoring reasonably loud knocks.
- Then, repeat the process with the noise of a doorbell. You could try using a doorbell sound on your phone.



Once you and your dog have mastered this stage, try knocking on your actual door.

- Ask someone to go outside (while you stay with your dog), approach and knock quietly on the front door once.
- Again, see how your dog responds, and give them a treat if they are calm.
- You could offer your dog an enjoyable activity such as a food-releasing toy or snuffle mat. This will encourage them to settle and remain calm for longer periods.
- Gradually increase the number and volume of the knocks.
- Then, repeat the process with your doorbell (if you have one).
- The noise will eventually become meaningless to your dog as it isn't resulting in anyone coming in.

Top tip

Put a sign on your front door asking people not to knock or ring the doorbell while you are doing the training. Otherwise, this may get confusing for your pooch and could slow down their progress.

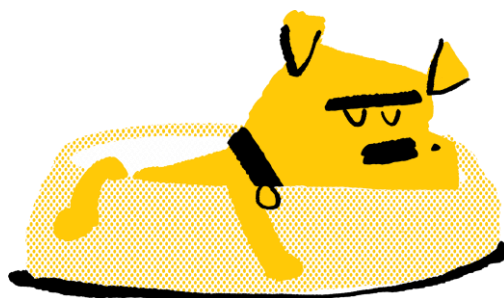
At first, you want your dog to learn that a knock doesn't result in anything happening. Therefore, you don't want people turning up unexpectedly and disrupting the training!

Teach your dog to go to their bed

Once your dog is used to the sound of knocking or the doorbell ringing, you can teach your dog to go to their bed. This will encourage them to settle there while visitors enter your home.

- Make sure your dog has a comfy bed of their own, ideally in a quiet room that visitors won't go into.
- Start by encouraging your dog to go on their bed by dropping some treats on it.
- Then practise pointing towards the bed and throwing a treat on it.

- Once your dog has the hang of this, you can introduce an instruction word (verbal cue). Say the word “bed” and point to it, then reward your dog once they get there.
- Repeat this - gradually increasing the distance between you and your dog’s bed, one step at a time.
- Slowly build up the amount of time your dog can be on the bed. Reward them there, then take a few steps back, and if your dog remains on the bed, go closer and reward them again.
- All rewards should be delivered on the bed, so always return to reward them there!
- Once your dog is reliably going to their bed on your cue, you can introduce the doorbell or knock.
- Ask someone to knock on your front door or ring the doorbell. Then give your cue and once your dog is in their bed, reward them with a treat.
- Spend a session (around 10 minutes) repeating this.
- Over time and sessions, your dog should start heading to their bed when they hear the knock or doorbell.
- You could offer them a long-lasting chew there and gently close the door or child-gate for short periods. This will help prepare them for when real visitors come round!



If you want to ask your dog to come off the bed, you can say “OK” or “off”, so you keep things very clear.

If at any point your dog is struggling, go back a step and progress more slowly.

Remember that training should always be positive. We want our dogs to see their bed as a really great and safe place to be! The bed should never be used negatively or as a punishment. Avoid telling your dog off as this may worry or confuse them.

Welcoming **real** guests

Your dog has now learnt that a knock on the door means they go to their bed. When your visitor arrives, offer your dog a long-lasting treat and gently close the door or child-gate. While your dog is enjoying their treat, you can invite your guests in and let them settle down. Your dog should feel calm so, if your visitors are happy to meet them, you can bring your dog in.

Teach your dog to greet people calmly and reward them for keeping all four paws on the floor. Our **Jumping Up** handout has tips on how to do this.

Top tip

Keep a long-lasting treat close-by. That way, you can follow the same routine with visitors that you aren't expecting, as well as with the ones that you are.



How your **visitors** can help

Ask your visitors to remain calm, keeping their voices and movements relaxed, deliberate and gentle, as this is likely to have a positive effect on your dog.

Whether your dog is behind a barrier or not, ask your visitors not to approach your dog when they're in their bed/den area, nor reach out to touch your dog. They may acknowledge your dog by saying "hello", but appearing otherwise engaged and ready to talk to you will help demonstrate to your dog there's no cause for undue excitement and they can relax.

If you're allowing your dog and visitors to interact, letting your dog choose whether to do so or not can help them feel more secure and settled. If your dog retreats and hides away just let them, as forcing an interaction, however well-intended, might unnecessarily intensify the way they're already feeling.

Be ready to reward behaviour you're happy with as it happens, whether with treats or praise, or a fuss if your dog enjoys this from you. It's always beneficial to encourage your dog to settle with an enjoyable activity of their own, such as a food-releasing toy or snuffle mat.

Managing dogs around visitors

Every dog is an individual, and while some might be able to happily relax in the same or a separate room while visitors are present, others might struggle.

Feeling safe is very important for dogs, and knowing what's going to happen, and when, can help them feel secure. Some dogs might be worried about unfamiliar people because they can't predict what they're going to do, or there might be too many guests for them to keep an eye on all at once. Some dogs might try to hide away and should be allowed to make that choice if they wish.

Sometimes dogs might show behaviours such as jumping up and barking when visitors arrive. This could be excitement but could also be a sign that they feel anxious about the visitors. You know your dog best – giving them space to work it out will help them feel like they have a choice over whether they want to interact with the visitors or not.

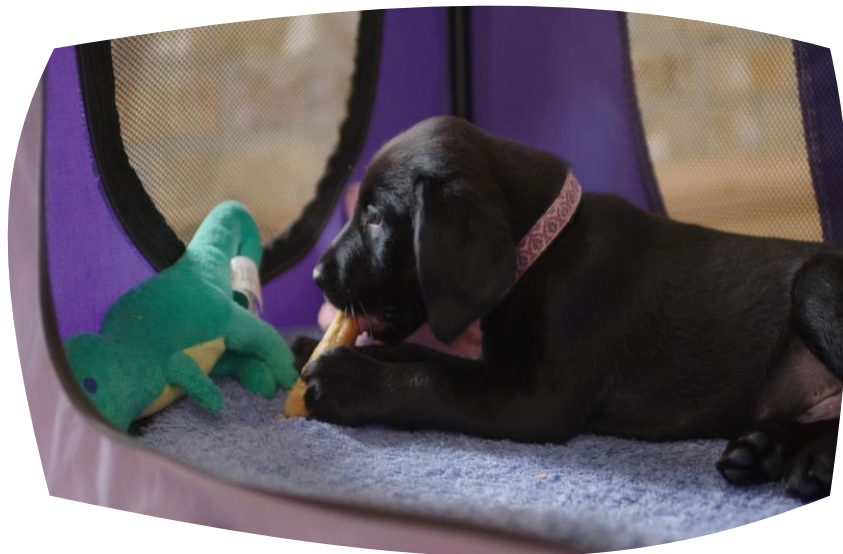
Whatever your dog is feeling, being able to safely manage their behaviour will help everybody share the home environment in safe and appropriate ways.



Providing your dog with a secure area of their own means they always have somewhere they feel safe to retreat to if they wish. Our **Crate Training** handout advises how to introduce a crate so that your dog always enjoys being in there, no matter what else is happening around them.



Teaching your dog to feel relaxed on their own will prepare them for times when they'll be apart from you. Our **Coping Alone** handout provides advice for teaching your dog this valuable skill.





Teaching your dog to remain behind a barrier, such as an indoor kennel/crate, pen or child-gate, can help everyone feel safe in different allocated areas within the home. Child-gates can provide portable ways of creating a barrier through which a dog may still feel involved in family life but kept physically apart from any visitors. You can practise this by popping your dog behind the gate with some scattered treats to enjoy while you go to the door, open it, have a pretend conversation with someone just outside, then come back in and reward your dog for calmness.

Putting your dog on-lead when you answer the door might feel as though you're better able to control where they go or how they behave. However, being on-lead doesn't prevent, and might add to, feelings of either worry or frustration that they can't behave as they'd like. Instead, consider teaching your dog to wait behind a barrier such as a child-gate while you respond to the door – this gives you both less to contend with.

If your dog is struggling

If your dog finds it difficult to have visitors to the home, or you find it difficult to manage your dog's behaviour during this time, an accredited behaviourist will be able to help you.

You can find out how to source an accredited behaviourist here:

dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/behaviour/finding-behaviour-and-training-support

Contacts for further support

We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your **Dogs Trust dog** please email:

postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk

Everyone else can access support by emailing our training and behaviour helpline:

behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:

dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.

A dog is for life ®

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