

Managing Your Dog with Guests in the House (fearful or aggressive dogs)

Your dog may never learn to be calm when strangers enter the house. However, you can use the following steps to help them get used to new people more quickly. The idea behind these steps is to give them guidance in calming down and to associate positive things with the presence of people in the house.

Make sure your guests don't use gestures and body language that will put your dog on the defensive and fearful. Guests should avoid:

- Direct eye contact
- Leaning over him
- Coming at him directly – instead they should avert their gaze, approach him sideways. Ideally they should avoid approaching him at all until he's feeling comfortable with them.
- Reaching over the top of his head or patting his head
- Coming up behind him without warning
- Hugging or restraining him
- Reaching into his "safe" space (bed, crate)
- Sudden hand movements or loud noises

Keep in mind that kids may not be able to comply with these restrictions. If kids coming to your house they tend to react to a dog with shrieking and flailing, it might be better to go straight to



Additional Resources

Behavior modification of fearful or aggressive dogs can be difficult to do without the help of a professional and can cause the behavior to get worse.

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

See also the sections on Aggression and Fearful Dogs at

www.spca.org/pettips.

putting your dog behind a baby gate as described below. The same is true for any guests who can't follow the protocol.

- Once your dog calms down, he can come out from behind the baby gate, ask your dog to sit or hand target ("touch") and give him a treat when he complies. Make sure to NOT treat your dog when he's barking or behaving anxiously.
- If your dog is too revved up to respond and is not calming down, put him back behind the baby gate and have everyone ignore him until he calms down.
- Another option is to distract him away from his defensive/barking behavior by calling him to you and giving him a long lasting chew item behind a baby gate. This allows him to be safely separated from guests while also pairing the separation and guests with a high value food item.
- For dogs that are fearful or aggressive towards people, consider training your dog to wear a basket muzzle. Basket muzzles still allow your dog to eat, drink, receive treats, bark, and pant normally while protecting him and others from any aggression. Read our handout on [Muzzle Training](#).