

My Dog is Friendly! A Public Service Announcement

There is epidemic happening across the country and no one is safe. It's occurring on crowded city sidewalks and spacious country walking trails. It doesn't discriminate based on race, age, or economic status.

Innocent dogs and their owners are being terrorized, chased down the street, pinned into corners by...other dog owners.

But, you ask, don't all dogs like to meet, greet, and play with other dogs, even unfamiliar ones? How rude of them not to greet me and my dog! Not so, kind hearted dog lovers, not so at all.

In every city, town, and suburb, loving, law abiding families share their lives with dogs that, for a variety of reasons, cannot or would rather not, socialize with other dogs.

Today I call on all dog lovers to take a stand on behalf of dogs that walk in public while they simultaneously cope with one or more of the following:

- contagious diseases
- leash reactivity
- service or working dogs
- injuries and painful physical conditions
- intolerance of other animals
- recovery from surgery
- fearful of unfamiliar or rowdy dogs
- aging and elderly
- learning self control around other dogs
- are owned by people that want to be left alone

To keep it simple, these dogs and their owners shall be known as Dogs in Need of Space (DINOS)[™]

These DINOS have every right to walk the streets, using a standard 4-6 foot leash, without interacting with strangers, human or canine. And yet...they are hounded, day after day, by cheery, well meaning dog owners who insist on meeting them.

Despite frantic efforts to cross the street or hiding between parked cars, DINOS are chased down by other people walking dogs, who refuse to believe that there is someone out there that do not want to meet them.

How do you spot these terrorists? You can recognize these people by their battle cry, "My dog is friendly!" Henceforth known as My Dog is Friendly (MDIF)[™]

Pick any corner of any town in America and you're likely to see a scene similar to this one:

A DINOS is working on his manners, let's say it's leash reactivity. He has some issues with strange dogs, but is in training so that he can learn to stay calm in their presence. DINOS spots another dog coming and, like their trainer instructed them, they create some distance and do a sit-stay with eye contact. The goal: to keep cool while the other dog passes.

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But they didn't realize they were being stalked by an eager MDIF. Look! There's one now, crossing the street, speed walking in a beeline right towards the seated DINOS, their own dog straining at the collar.

The DINOS steps further away, trying again to create distance. Any anthropologists (or kindergartner) can read the clear body language in play from DINOS. Observe: no eye contact or smiling, they are facing away from MDIF, perhaps glancing frantically around themselves, looking for an escape.

MDIF is impervious to body language and insists on coming closer. The DINOS signals become escalated, and like a dog losing its patience with a rude puppy, DINOS issues a quiet, but firm warning, "My dog doesn't like other dogs."

Unable to understand their native language, MDIF continues their advances until DINOS is trapped and begins to lose his ability to stay cool. See: lunging and barking, coupled with awkward struggles to get away. Now, like a dog that's being humped relentlessly by a teenage dog with no manners, DINO snaps, so the message is clear, "Stop! Don't come any closer!"

And, without fail, MDIF calls out their cheerful, pleading battle cry, "My dog is friendly!" Usually this is received by the back of the DINOS as they jog away.

Then, often followed by a hurt look, the MDIF mutters, "What's your dog's problem?"

The DINO, shaken, wonders why they are working so hard on improving their dog's manners when the humans around them have the social skills of, well, a dog with no social skills.

A brief interlude from the author:

Quickly, let's turn to the similar epidemic of off leash dogs that are not under voice control. It's the law: Put your dog on a leash. No one but ME gets to decide who my dog interacts with. Not you, with the "friendly" dog who just wants to say "hi" or you, with the dog who "knows" not to leave your property, but charges me up my porch steps. I, and I alone, will decide if my dog will be interacting with your dog and when you let your dog run loose you are ROBBING ME of my right to choose whether or not we want to interact with your dog. Not cool.

And now back to our Public Service Announcement:

Dogs In Need Of Space are good dogs. They may not want to socialize with your dog, but they have the right to walk with their owners, on leash, without harassment from strangers who insist on a forced greeting. Their owners do not want to cause a scene or yell, in a panic, at strangers. They don't want their dog to act inappropriately, get hurt, backslide on their training, or frighten anyone. Please, dog lovers of the world, allow these dogs and their people some space and, if they are walking or turning away from you, keep your dog close by and pass them without comment.

All they want is to walk their dogs in peace, without having to hide under a park bench in order to escape the relentless pursuit of dogs owners who call out... "My dog is friendly!"

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