

Advocating for Your Dog

Clients ask me how to deal with approaching on-leash dogs or humans or off-leash charging dogs you feel is an unwanted or dangerous situation. And they or their dog does not want to be approached or say hello to a dog. In those situations, you will need to step up and advocate for your dogs and forget about the judgments of others. This can be challenging for some, but it is a critical skill for anyone who cares about their dog.

Advocating for your dogs might mean positioning yourself between the person and your dog, sticking your hand way out directly in front of them, and speaking up, telling people either "sorry," "no," "stop," "do not go near my dog," "do not pet my dog," or "that's enough for them, thanks," etc. And if needed, recall your dog or just keep moving. If you want your dog to trust you as their advocate, you must start putting your dog before the feelings of strangers, even if it feels rude.

For the most part, the same advocating applies to dogs that you do not want to approach your dog by posturing yourself between the charging dog and yours, yelling to the owner (if near) to get their dog or move their dog away. All the while yelling at that dog, "Go, getaway," and if needed, with your hands flailing or feet kicking to stop that dog—doing whatever it takes.

Whatever form it takes, it involves putting your dog's needs before the expectations of others. Most people you meet will know nothing about dog behavior and cannot recognize when a dog is struggling, anxious, or reactive/aggressive.

Instead of walking your dog towards that oncoming train, create the environment they need to feel safe, even if you feel uncomfortable doing that.

People may approach you with their dogs and say, "It's okay. They're friendly." Your response is, "Mine isn't, and recall your dog."

Another way to avoid unnecessary pressure on your dog and give them an "out" is when walking past an approaching dog on the sidewalk. Switch your dog to your opposite side and continue walking past the distraction. Then get your dog back in its usual position.

Remember to advocate for your dog, showing you have their back and will take charge so they don't have to. They'll begin to look at you not as a litter mate but as a pack leader.