

# Family Dog Cheat Sheet 16-Panel Laminated Pocket Guide (Opens to 16.75" x 18.25")




Colleen Pelar  
DVM, CDBC  
About Dogs  
to Know  
Really Need  
What You

Family Dog  
CHEAT SHEET

Everything you need to know about dogs in your pocket guide! This is the only guide you can read with dogs. You'll learn:

- Three straightforward ways of categorizing behavior that take the guesswork out of understanding dogs.
- Seven easy-to-identify stress signals that point out when a dog needs your help.
- Three simple steps for meeting a dog that help you start a good relationship.
- One crucial behavior that shows most aggressive dogs.
- And many other insider facts that help you to better understand the dogs you love.

Also check out these great resources:



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PO Box 4377 Woodbury, NJ 07095  
www.dreamdogproductions.com



## Be A Tree

To cause less stress with a dog, move slowly and calmly. Avoid direct contact and do not make any loud noises or eye movements.

If you are too close to the dog to move away without causing additional stress, stand in the "be a tree" pose with your feet planted for stability, your hands cupped in front of your body, and your eyes looking down toward the ground. Remain still until the dog moves far enough away that you can safely—and slowly—move away as well.

## Growls Are Important

It's very important not to punish a dog for giving warnings. Warnings are good! While we prefer a dog not feel the need growl, it's far better that the dog warn when there is a problem rather than simply bite. If the dog is punished for giving warnings, his growling is kept quiet, but his anxiety about the situation remains. His communication tool is lost. It's quite common to hear about dogs who bite "without warning." In most cases, the dog's warning signals were punished and eliminated when people chastised them for "being bad."




## Lack of Behavior

Lack of behavior is often seen as good behavior, but there's a much deeper difference. We have all seen dogs who seem almost like robots: obedient and devoid of personality. These dogs impress most people, but they may be incredibly sad.

People (and/or) choose to love dogs in their lives because they love dogs and because they enjoy their company. Few love to love "good" dogs who still have natural issues, such as occasional barking, peeing, digging, or jumping on people. Now and then, you'll encounter a dog who doesn't seem to offer much at all in terms of behavior. Watch carefully. In most cases, the dog's behaviors are suppressed.

Suppression can have a variety of causes, but the most common one is fear. When a dog is afraid (of a person's reaction, or an electric shock, or something in the environment), you may notice "lack of behavior." The dog won't show offensive behaviors, such as growling, wiggly behavior or seeking out social contact, nor will he have an excess of canine emotions, such as jumping on you or actively sniffing your pant leg. (Behaviors like "Dig Woofers" on National Geographic with the sound turned off? That's one strong example of suppression.)

A dog's behavior may be suppressed overall or only in certain contexts. Often the owner won't notice the lack of behavior (or will be relieved that the dog is being so "good"). It is our job—as caretakers of this dog and all dogs—to point out the stress signals to the owner before an owner can say that the dog is not "fun" in any circumstances, changes can be made to help the dog feel safe, more relaxed, and free to show what he's thinking and feeling. This return will increase the dog's value.



## Dealing with Dog Bites

Dogs grow into — or out of — aggression. Most of our dog bites come from dogs between 3 and 5 years old. Pay particular attention to dogs who are walk, barkless and showing signs of stress.

In most dog bite incidents, the dog and the person know each other well. If it's not the person's own dog, it's likely to be a dog owned by a friend or neighbor. Random attacks by loose dogs are extremely uncommon.

Children are bitten more often than adults; the ages of 5 to 6 are the biggest risk periods. Boys are bitten more often than girls, and boys are bitten more often than women. According to the CDC, 77% of dog bites to children are on the face.

Dog bites occur when dogs feel threatened, frightened, or defensive. Since a injury isn't to dogs. When they feel cornered (e.g., in a dog bed, against a wall), they are more likely to bite.

Understanding dog body language is the single best tool for eliminating dog bites. The perception is sometimes that a dog "bit" without warning, but the reality is usually that the people did not understand the dog's warning or take the necessary measures to resolve the situation peacefully.



Many people don't know how to evaluate the severity of an aggressive incident. Some will refer to a punishing bite as a "nip" or describe an "attack" that was simply a threat display. Having a standardized assessment tool is helpful to measure consistency.

A dog bites with exactly the intensity he intends—from a warning snarl that doesn't make contact to a punishing bite that causes pain or injury. Dogs who deliver level 3 or 2 bites usually respond well to behavior modification. Level 3 is the big caregiver in regard to fear to:

### Dr. Ian Dunbar's Bite Level Assessment

**LEVEL 1:** Growl or aggressive behavior, but no skin contact by teeth.

**LEVEL 2:** Skin contact by teeth, but no skin puncturing. However, there may be skin bites (not deep) and slight bleeding caused by forward or lateral movement of teeth against skin, but no wound sustained.

**LEVEL 3:** One or two punctures from a single bite with an average depth less than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May be associated in a single direction, caused by rotating head away, never pulling the body, or pulling (e.g., like dog jaws, tugs, and drops to face).

**LEVEL 4:** One or two punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. May also have deep bruising around the wound (dog hair will be a normal color, less dense) or associated with a fracture (dog will not stand on that leg for 24 hours).

**LEVEL 5:** Multiple bite wounds with at least two level 4 bites.

**LEVEL 6:** Risk sustained or bitten dead.



## Teaching Kids the Three Steps for Meeting a Dog

### STEP 1: Ask the Owner

It's very important to teach kids how to interact with dogs they are interested in. Children's excitement could be interpreted as a threat by impressionable dogs.

Teach kids not to rush toward a dog, encourage them to step about 5 feet away and ask the owner, "May I pet your dog?" Sometimes the answer will be no. Many dogs don't like kids and are not comfortable with them. So if the dog's owner says no, that's okay. Remind kids that there are lots of other dogs who would love to be petted by them.

If the owner says yes, then the children must ask the dog.

### STEP 2: Ask the Dog

Do Not Skip This Step! Tell kids that dogs don't see words but instead rely on body language. Factors in a dog's body language include posture, such as ears, tail, and excitement to show the kids that they use body language too.

Have the children make a fist with the palm pointed down. Then they can slowly extend their arm for the dog to sniff their hand. Teaching the kids to curl their fingers minimizes the risk of a dog nipping their fingers.

### STEP 3: Pet the Dog

If the owner said yes and the dog said yes, the kids can pet the dog. Tell the kids that they must be careful of dog's sensitive eyes and ears. Most dogs don't like to be petted on top of their heads, but nearly all people pet dogs this way—if it's a flash of human behavior. There's a blind spot on top of a dog's head. If he sees a child's hand moving toward that area, the natural inclination is for him to lift his head up and watch where the hand is going. Now the child's hand is reaching right over the dog's teeth—into a very good place for that hand to be.

Suggest that the children stroke the side of the dog's neck, rub under his chin, scratch his chest, or pet along his back. Most dogs prefer slow, gentle strokes to rapid petting-outting.





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**GO** **Enjoyment.**  
Things are going well, continue interacting, but there is no need to intervene at this very moment.

**?** **Tolerance.**  
Things are a bit tense. See what you can do to improve the situation. You may need to end the interaction.

**STOP** **Enough Already!**  
This category includes not only aggression, but also escape behavior and extreme stress. Intervene immediately. Give the dog some downtime.

Dog educators could divide canine behavior into many different categories. These three are the most useful for evaluating the behavior of a family dog in stress situations.

**Good Intentions Aren't Enough**

We often make the mistake of evaluating whether an interaction is good or bad based on intentions rather than results. For example, many parents encourage their children to hug and kiss dogs—a common sign of human affection. However, few dogs enjoy these hugs and kisses. Similarly, many dogs are overwhelmed by excitement dogs' exuberant reactions to play.

When evaluating whether an interaction is good or bad, look at both sides of the equation and take action whenever you see signs that someone—human or canine—is overly riled up by the situation.



**Not Good Dog/Bad Dog, Good Moment/Bad Moment**

Many people believe that "good dogs" don't bite under any circumstances. This view puts most of the responsibility for handling a stressful situation on the dog and very little on the owner. Rather than looking at things in terms of "good dog" or "bad dog," it's far more useful to consider whether this is a "good moment" or a "bad moment."

All good dogs have bad moments, and good owners help their dogs through those moments to the best of their ability. People need to act as advocates for their dogs to ensure safe, comfortable interactions rather than simply expect the dog to make the best of a bad situation.

**Good Moment** **Bad Moment**






**GO** **Enjoyment.**



**Stress Signals**  
*What to Look For and When to Intervene*

Although people are told to supervise their dog around children and in new situations, it's rare for them to be taught to look for specific body-language signs. These stress signals are vital to action.

Look for these signals at the dog park, at the pet store, when guests visit, during active play sessions, when meeting new dogs, and when children are near the dog. When you see these signs, take steps to make the situation more comfortable for the dog.



Closed mouth—both dogs are looking at the same thing, but the dog on the bottom is more nervous about it.

**?** **Tolerance.**



**Stress Signals**

Half-moon eye is the result of facial tension.

Yawning is a way of releasing stress.

Lip licking is a self-soothing behavior, the canine equivalent of thumb sucking.





**STOP** **Enough Already!**



**Stress Signals**

Turning away is a polite attempt to defuse a situation.

Shaking off is like rebooting a computer. Reset!

Breathing changes, such as panting or holding breath, indicate stress.



