

## Space Invaders

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*Looming, leaning, reaching, showing teeth and staring - that's how most humans greet dogs.*

A dog may show his discomfort at a child's greeting by lowering his head, flattening his ears, licking his lips, squinting his eyes, tucking his tail and lifting a paw. These are appeasement signals, not aggressive signals, but he is clearly saying to the child, "I'm really not enjoying this."

### **Too much, too fast, too close.**

If the same child had turned sideways, squatted to the dog's level and invited the dog into her own space, the dog's response to the child would have probably been quite different.

Humans show their teeth when they're friendly! We lean forward and make direct eye contact, which in dog language is a challenge. We kiss dogs on the face. How strange they must think we are!

### **Leaning over and looming is a threatening posture - even if you don't mean it to be.**

This can cause dogs distress, which results in displays of calming signals to diffuse your perceived aggression. Lowered head and ears, lip licking and averted squinting eyes. In dog-to-dog body language, standing over and putting paws on shoulders is a very assertive, space invasive challenge. A dog might show appeasement, or a frightened/defensive dog might respond by freezing, growling, lunging, snapping or biting.

### **Most dogs don't like hugs.**

Dogs can learn to tolerate hugs and even welcome them from people they know and trust – and many dogs learn to enjoy it so much they may elicit hugs from their owners. But this doesn't mean they will welcome the same from all family members and certainly not from strangers – any more than you would want a stranger in an elevator to crowd you into a corner and get in your face!

Wrapping your arms around a dog's neck is dangerous, not only because it is usually viewed as an unwelcome and threatening behavior when it comes from a stranger, but because it puts your face right near the dog's pointy teeth! Another common and dangerous behavior of children: laying on a dog – this gives the dog no avenue for escape. "My daughter was just trying to hug the dog and he BIT her! It was totally unprovoked!" Perhaps from the child's point of view, but certainly not the dog's!



### **It's actually a tribute to dogs that they humor us – and that more of them don't use their teeth to ward away our human advances.**

Parents should instill a "no hugging any dog" rule for their children. If you make sure children respect all dogs' personal space, including their own family pet's, they will be less likely to be bitten as the dogs they interact with won't need to correct them.



A dog may be quite comfortable with the intimate advances of his own person. But the same dog could bite a stranger for the same overly friendly behavior – to which some owners might exclaim, "He's never done that before! I kiss him all the time!"

For some reason we humans have a hard time remembering that even we have rules of intimacy. Why is it so difficult to imagine that our dogs would feel the same? Most bites to children occur on the face simply because their face was closest when going in for a hug.

**This is how a dog prefers to be greeted:**

Turned sideways, body language soft and relaxed, shoulders and head slightly lowered, weight shifted away, not towards, with soft squinty eye contact. These actions are inviting and non-threatening. Once a comfortable and trusting relationship has been built, a dog may love a hug!

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,  
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Visit our website at [www.sdhumane.org](http://www.sdhumane.org) to view our behavior and training options,  
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.