

Working in a home with pets

A simple guide for aged care workers.



**Pet Friendly
Aged Care**
Companion Animal Network
Australia

Pet-Friendly Aged Care Guide

For many older Australians, pets are an important part of home and family. A dog, cat or other pet can provide friendship, comfort, routine and connection.



A calm start makes a safer visit

If you provide care in someone's home, you may meet their pet too. A few simple steps can help you feel confident and comfortable.



Ask | **Stay Calm**
Give Space | **Let the Pet Choose**

Before the visit find out if there is a pet

It's important to know if there is a pet in the home before the visit. This will allow you to prepare for a safe and comfortable first meeting.

Let the pet come to you

You don't have to touch a pet. Simply being calm is enough. When meeting a pet for the first time:

- Leave any large bags or equipment outside, where practical, and remove sunglasses and hats.
- Allow the pet to approach you.
- Move slowly and speak calmly.
- Avoid staring directly into their eyes.
- Don't reach over their head or try to pick them up.
- Let them sniff you if they want to.
- If they move away, let them go.
- Offer treats to dogs only if permitted.

Ask your client

A few practical questions can remove uncertainty and help everyone feel more comfortable.

- What kind of pet do you have?
- What's your pet's name?
- Is [insert pet's name] comfortable with visitors?
- Is there anything I should know about them?
- What does [insert pet's name] usually do when someone comes to the door or enters the house?
- Can [insert pet's name] have treats? Are there any dietary considerations?
- Would you mind putting [insert pet's name] in a separate room or outdoors for the visit? This can help if you feel uncomfortable or nervous.



A calm start makes a safer visit

Animals communicate through their body language. Learning a few simple signs can make interactions much easier.

Relaxed: loose body, soft eyes, natural posture and relaxed ears or tail.

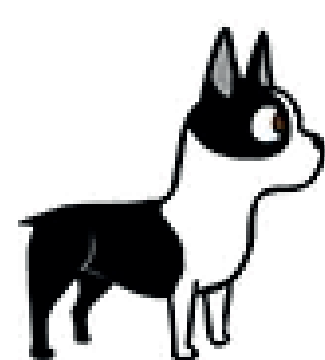
Worried: moving away, hiding, licking their lips, yawning, flattening their ears or tucking their tail.

Very frightened or stressed: freezing, growling, hissing, barking, showing teeth or trying to escape.

If you see signs that a pet is worried, frightened or stressed,
give them space and let your client know.

DOGGIE LANGUAGE

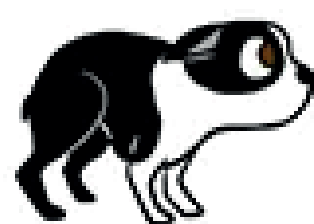
starring Boogie the Boston Terrier



ALERT



SUSPICIOUS



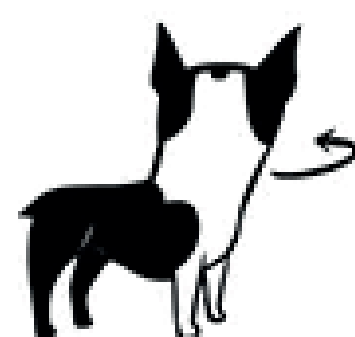
ANXIOUS



THREATENED



ANGRY



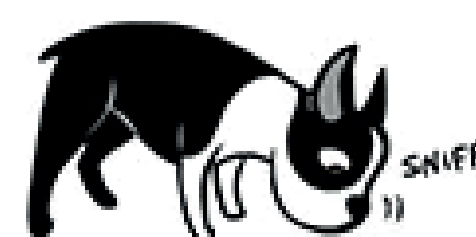
"PEACE!"
look away/head turn



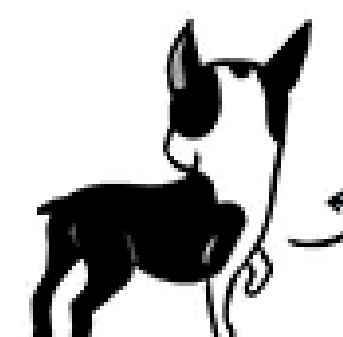
STRESSED
yawn



STRESSED
nose lick



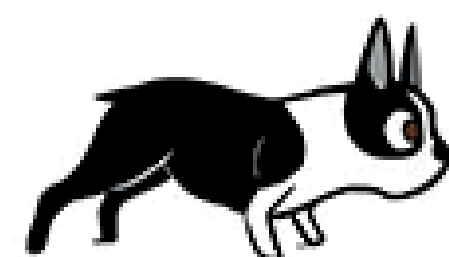
"PEACE!"
sniff ground



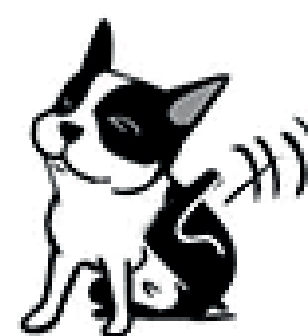
"RESPECT!"
turn & walk away



"NEED SPACE"
whale eye



STALKING



STRESSED
scratching



STRESS RELEASE
shake off



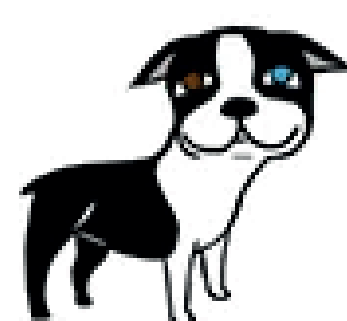
RELAXED
soft ears, blinky eyes



"RESPECT!"
offer his back



FRIENDLY & POLITE
curved body



FRIENDLY



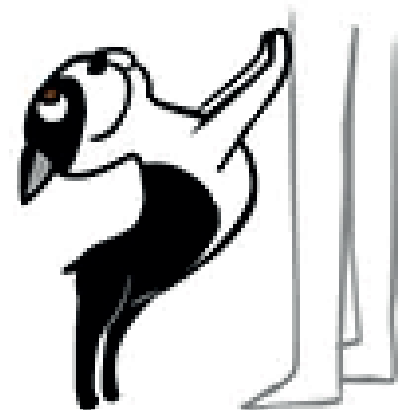
"PRETTY PLEASE"
round puppy face



"I'M YOUR LOVEBUG"
belly-rub pose



"HELLO I LOVE YOU!"
greeting stretch



"I'M FRIENDLY!"
play bow



"READY!"
prey bow



"YOU WILL FEED ME"



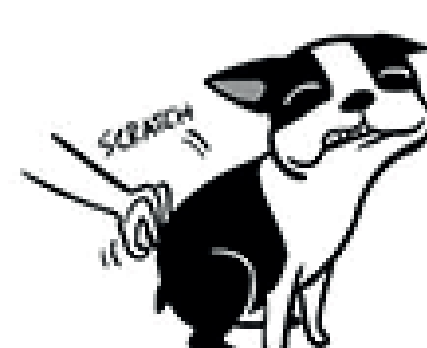
CURIOUS
head tilt



HAPPY
(or hot)



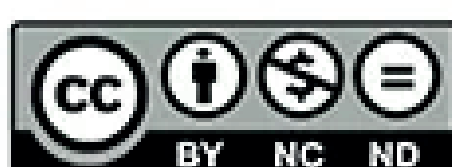
OVERJOYED
wiggly



"MMMM...."



"I LOVE YOU,
DON'T STOP"



What if...?

What if I'm nervous around animals?

That's completely okay. Talk with the person you support about how they would like you to interact with the pet and if they need any assistance specifically for the pet. They may be happy to keep their pet in another room while you are there.

What if a dog jumps up?

Stay calm, turn slightly away, you may want to cross your arms on your chest. Do not push or grab the dog. Ask the owner to help settle their dog. Avoid looking at or saying anything to the dog, as that can inadvertently reinforce the attention seeking behaviour.

What if a cat hides?

Leave them alone. Hiding is often how cats cope when they feel uncertain. You haven't done anything wrong.

What if a pet growls, hisses or seems frightened?

Stop what you are doing, give the animal space and tell the owner. Never try to force an interaction. If you are vacuuming or mopping, some dogs may try to 'attack' the vacuum so ask the owner to put it in another room or outside during those activities. Do not punish the animal, nor should the owner. A dog is usually acting out of fear.



What if the pet gets in my way?

Ask the owner to move the pet to a safe place.

What if I'm worried by a pet's behaviour?

Talk to the person you support and your supervisor so the situation can be handled safely.

Remember

Ask. Give space. Stay calm. Let the pet choose.

You don't have to be a "pet person" to work comfortably in a home with animals. But pets can help you build a connection with the person you support. Ask about their pet. Learn their name. Listen to their stories. Sometimes that pet is their best friend.



For many older people, their pet is an important part of who they are and what makes their house feel like home.

Three things to remember

1. The owner knows their pet best.

Ask questions and follow their advice.

2. You don't have to touch a pet.

Respecting an animal's space is a positive interaction.

3. Calm and respectful interactions are always the best approach.

Give the animal time, avoid sudden movements and let them choose whether they want to interact.

Always pat your leg to initiate any interaction, rather than putting your hand out or patting them on the head.

If they do choose to interact, a gentle tickle under the chin is better than coming in over the top of them.

Optional tip

Adaptil Transport Spray is designed to promote serenity and comfort for dogs in stressful situations.

A few sprays of Adaptil on your legs before a home visit can promote a calm and less stressful first meeting.