

# The Visitor Playbook

This **Guest Readiness & Home Safety Checklist** is designed to help you manage your environment when people visit. Whether your dog is a "Velcro dog" who gets over-excited or a "Wallflower" who is nervous around strangers, proactive management is the key to a safe, successful visit.

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## 1. Pre-Visit Preparation (The Setup)

- **Burn Off Energy:** Ensure your dog is prepared for success by engaging them in physical activity followed by a "sniffari" (a scent-focused walk). This sequence helps lower adrenaline levels and regulates their emotional state before guests arrive.
- **Set Up a "Safe Zone":** This is particularly vital for dogs who may feel anxious about new people entering their territory. Ensure your dog has access to a quiet room, crate, or x-pen away from the front door.
  - **The Ideal Setup:** Provide an area where the dog can observe guests from a distance without feeling pressured to interact.
  - **Comfort Tools:** Equip this area with a white noise machine, calming music, or a familiar bed to help muffle the sounds of arrival. To provide your dog with additional support you can equip this area with a lickmat or a frozen stuffed toy can help them self-soothe.
- **Visual Barriers:** If your dog reacts to seeing people through windows or the front door, use temporary visual barriers like frosted window film or closed blinds to prevent alert barking before the guest enters.

## 2. Managing the Arrival

- **No Door Greetings:** Ask your guests to ignore the dog upon entry. High-pitched greetings or immediate physical contact can overwhelm a nervous dog or over-stimulate an excited one.
- **Controlled Entry:** For dogs that struggle with door-darting or jumping, keep them on a leash or behind a baby gate during the initial greeting. Once the "newness" of the guest has worn off and the dog is calm, you can transition to a more relaxed interaction. If the dog struggles with jumping you can use a "treat scatter" to direct their attention to the ground, this can also help calm the dog as this elicits sniffing behaviors.

- **Stationing (The "Place" Cue):** Direct your dog to their "place" (a bed or mat) as guests enter. Reward them frequently for remaining on their station, which gives them a specific job to focus on during a high-arousal moment.

### 3. During the Visit (Active Monitoring)

- **The "3-Second Consent Test":** If a guest wants to pet your dog, ensure they follow the [3-Second Rule](#). If the dog moves away or shows any subtle signs of stress the guest must stop petting.
- **Monitor "Trigger Stacking":** Watch for subtle stress signs (yawning, lip licking, panting). If you see these, it's time for the dog to take a 15-minute break in their safe zone. (Refer to Ladder of Canine Communication at the end of this handout).
- **Long-Lasting Enrichment:** Provide your dog with a high-value chew, a frozen Kong, or a Lickimat in their safe zone. This encourages a "calm-down" response through repetitive licking or chewing and associates the presence of guests with positive experiences.
- **Manage the Food:** If your dog is a "counter-surfer" or has food guarding tendencies, keep them behind a gate or in a play pen while humans are eating to prevent tension around the table.

### 4. Special Considerations for Groups/Children

- **Designate a "Dog Advocate":** Supervision is mandatory, never leave a dog unattended with guests, especially children. Even the most tolerant dog has a threshold; active supervision allows you to intervene before the dog feels the need to communicate discomfort through growling or snapping.
- **Ground Rules for Kids:** Ensure children understand that the dog's crate, bed, or safe zone is an "Off-Limits Area." If the dog goes there, they are "invisible" and cannot be touched.

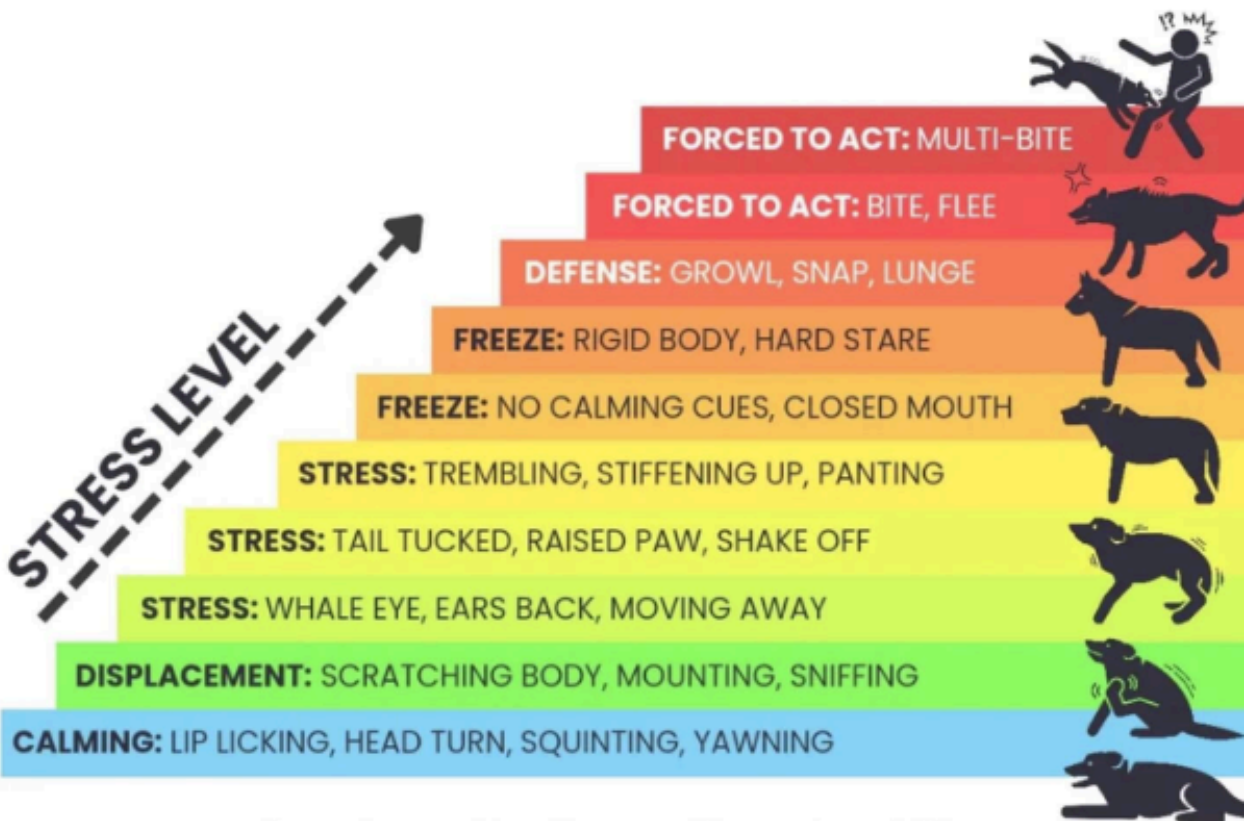
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### Emergency "Red Flag" Reminders

- **Stiffening/Freezing:** If your dog becomes "still as a statue," immediately and calmly lead them to another room.
- **The Growl:** Never scold a growl. It is your dog's way of saying, *"I'm uncomfortable and I'm trying to be polite about it."* Simply increase the distance between the dog and the guest. Move your dog to their safe zone if needed.

- Refer to “The Ladder of Canine Communication”

# The Ladder of Canine Communication



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