

# WELCOMING VISITORS WITH YOUR DOG

E-BOOK

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# INTRODUCTION

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In this e-book we are going to talk about welcoming visitors with your dog at home. Welcoming people at your home is of course a very nice thing to do, but not every dog deals with this in a calm and relaxed way. And that, of course, is a shame.

In this e-book we will go deeper into how this can cause problems and especially: how you can help your dog. I wish you many nice visits from friends and family, where your dog can stay completely relaxed. Let's do this!

This e-book is based on a webinar, which is why you'll find at the back some of the questions the audience asked me during the webinar.

Is your pressing question not among them? Then send me a DM on Instagram (@lizwolting) or an email at [liz@animalsfaith.nl](mailto:liz@animalsfaith.nl) and I'll happily help you along.

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# A LITTLE ABOUT ME

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My name is Liz, I am the founder of Animal's Faith, a training center for dogs with severe behavioral problems and with euthanasia advice. I also run Animal's Faith Foundation, where we shelter and rehabilitate dogs and then reintegrate them back into society, including dogs that are no longer allowed in other shelters.

Some background on my past: I have been working with dogs since a young age. At the age of eight I started working with veterinarians and behaviorists, which I found fantastic.

Later I started studying veterinary medicine, for three years in Ghent. Unfortunately, I found this study too technical and mostly a lot of paper work, whereas I wanted to work practically and help animals. It felt like animals were seen more as objects to make money with, which didn't fit with my vision of animals. That's why I switched to agro-biotechnology and eventually headed toward psychology.

I studied a lot of psychology, including solution-focused therapy. During these studies, I discovered a lot about myself. As a child, I often felt misunderstood by my parents. Although they tried their best, I was the outcast and had different needs than my siblings, which was difficult for my parents. As a result, I grew up with anxiety and stress and had many behavioral problems, although these did not come out strongly because I was a quiet child. This caused me to suffer a lot by myself to myself.

I ended up enrolling in coaching because I wanted to live a more enjoyable life, and that turned out to be the best move ever. Since then, I've learned a lot about myself. I was already working a lot with dogs by then and had already founded Animal's Faith, but through that self-development I can now help both dogs and people even better. I believe that if you have gone through a process yourself, you can better guide others as well. Let's get started!



# COMMON PROBLEMS WITH RECEIVING VISITORS

The most common problem with receiving visitors is dogs that are too busy or too enthusiastic, as people like to call it. For the dog itself, however, that enthusiasm has little to do with true happiness; rather, it is an expression of a higher stress level. We often think it looks and sounds fun, but it can be very dangerous. I remember one time I had to pick up a dog who didn't handle visitors well. He stormed at me like crazy. I didn't like that, so I blocked him in advance. Unfortunately, this resulted in a blood lip for his owner as the dog became frustrated. That kind of moment, of course, is not nice.

That so-called enthusiasm can also be a precursor to offensive or defensive behavior, such as biting or barking. Often it starts with barking. When barking is no longer effective, you see dogs taking one step further and further toward the visitor.

There are also dogs that are incredibly afraid and hide. Although the visit is less bothered by this, it is of course very annoying for the dog himself if he is so scared that he does not know where to look.

What is important now? All of these behaviors are always based on fear. Whether it is jumping up, biting or hiding, the underlying emotion is always fear. When we understand that, we can deal with it better. With a dog shivering in a corner, it's pretty obvious he's afraid. But when a dog barks or bites, we humans often associate the emotion "aggression" with it. I am strongly against that.




Why. Aggression is not an isolated emotion. In psychology, they sometimes try to disprove this, but they never succeed. Aggression is always an overcompensation of fear. You cannot be angry without being afraid. If you are angry and want to hit someone (which I hope you don't do often), then underneath that anger you are probably just afraid. Maybe you're afraid that person will want to do something to you, or you feel unheard. You are always afraid of loss – loss of safety, loss of well-being. This is very important to understand.

Also, a dog that jumps up and is very enthusiastic is actually afraid. He does not know quite what to do with visitors, probably because he has never learned properly what the intention is when visitors come. Receiving visitors is something very strange for dogs. In nature, it doesn't happen. Normally in nature you have a pack of dogs – father, mother and children. When a strange dog enters the pack, it is usually bad news. That other dog doesn't come to drink coffee, but probably to fight. That's not a good sign.

So it is important that we always name the basic emotion correctly. If we react with the wrong emotion, especially with aggression, people often feel a lot of resistance and become harsher in their energy themselves.

The harder you are against your dog, the more afraid he becomes and the more difficult it becomes to receive visitors. That's exactly what we want to avoid.



*Aggression is not an isolated emotion.*

*Aggression is always an overcompensation of fear.*

# WHY SHOULD YOU CHANGE THIS BEHAVIOR?

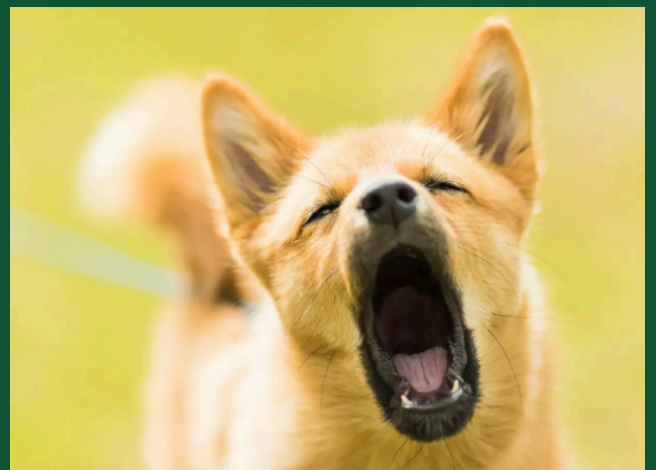
First, **safety**. When your dog knocks people over or bites them, it is not a safe situation for bystanders. In the Netherlands, dogs already have little leeway; they are allowed few mistakes before they're punished. Therefore, safety is important for your visitors and your dog.

In addition, your dog's busy behavior is a sign of **increased stress levels**, which is not pleasant. When a dog is stressed, it produces many stress pheromones very similar to those of humans. What happens next? The dog exhales these pheromones, which linger in the air, causing humans to experience stress as well. This leads to a vicious cycle of stress for everyone, making the situation worse and making no one happier.

In addition, this behavior, the stress involved, can cause other behavioral problems. **The inability to receive visits is rarely an isolated problem.** It usually indicates an underlying imbalance. We must look at the root of the problem.

Often you see a progression in this behavior. No dog is born with a tendency to lash out at visitors. This behavior develops gradually. It often begins because we humans unconsciously give the dog too much responsibility. When this happens, you often see the dog start reacting to visitors in prepuberty or adolescence. This can start with busy and happy behavior, but sometimes this phase is skipped or is very short, after which the behavior turns into biting or biting. All unwanted behavior, in other words.

**Too much responsibility → reacting to visitors → biting**



**A vicious cycle develops when your dog often reacts violently to visitors.** If you only get visitors once every six years, it's not too bad, but in that case you probably are not reading this because it doesn't bother you much. However, if your dog regularly reacts to visits, it means his stress level is often high. When stress is high, the dog's basic stress level increases, causing him to sleep less well and less. This is similar to humans: after a stressful day, your head keeps buzzing and you have trouble falling asleep.

Lack of sleep or poor sleep quality makes life more difficult. As a result, both humans and dogs exhibit more **controlling behavior, which is related to insecurity.** You try to control more things. Dogs do exactly the same thing, increasingly wanting to be around everything, reacting to everything, staring out the window and following you around all day. These are all forms of controlling behavior.

For a dog in the human world, this behavior will always lead to moments of failure. An example is chasing away visitors, which is a form of control behavior. The dog is trying to ensure its own safety and possibly yours by chasing the visit away. But if we keep inviting new visitors, the dog fails each time in his attempt, causing him to experience even more stress. The more unsafe he feels, the more violently he will react to visitors.

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# WHERE DO YOU START?

## CONSISTENCY, BOTH INDOORS AND OUTDOORS

It is very important to be consistent with your dog. This is often overlooked in a lot of training. There is a lot of talk in the dog world about being consequent, but not as much about being consistent. Personally, I think being consequent is less important. I myself am not always consequent. For example, if I ask my dog to sit and he communicates that he has a good reason for not doing so, I don't require him to sit. That may not be very consequent, but it is very consistent. What is very important to me is that I always listen to what my dogs are saying and what they need at that moment. That communication between me and my dogs is crucial, and I want to teach you this too.

It means that when I tell my dogs that I will keep them safe and protect them, I must show this in all my actions. I would never say, "Figure it out yourself" or "I see you need help, but I'm busy for a while, so I won't help you." That would be very inconsistent and could **lead to a major breach of trust.**

Many people are unaware of this. A dog's sense of safety is equal to that of a small child. A two-year-old child needs his parents very much, and it is the same for dogs. They need us to feel safe, especially living in a busy world like the Netherlands, which is totally against their own nature.

We can only ensure our dogs' sense of safety if we also feel safe in this world ourselves. **We need to know that we can stand up for ourselves and help and defend ourselves and our dogs when necessary.** This doesn't always have to be physical; it can also be verbal by giving clear instructions and making sure others follow them. For example, if you have visitors and you ask them to ignore the dog as they enter, it is important that they comply. To be inconsistent in this would be to the detriment of the dog's safety.

I am a big believer in consistency. If someone at my house does not follow my rules, I send that person out of my house. I am very clear about that: it is my house, and you are welcome, but according to my rules, which my dog needs and I need.

Just as I don't want anyone jumping on my couch, I don't want anyone petting my dog without permission. If someone can't respect that, we'll just meet somewhere else. We can have lunch together or drinks, but not at my house. My house, my rules. There is little room for discussion here.

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## **SUFFICIENT SLEEP, 19 HOURS A DAY**

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It is incredibly important that dogs get adequate sleep. In dogs that respond to visitors and have high baseline stress levels, you often see that they sleep significantly too little or their sleep quality is minimal.

Even if you have a dog with a low energy level, that doesn't mean he is actually sleeping. When a dog is not sleeping well, his stress hormones, especially cortisol, are not broken down properly. Cortisol can linger in the blood for up to four days, provided your dog sleeps well. If he doesn't sleep well, it often lingers even longer. For example, if you have visitors twice a week and your dog can't bring his cortisol level down to a healthy level, it rises each time there is a visit. This causes the baseline stress level to become too high over time, leading to a dog under chronic stress.

This is similar to people in the Netherlands, where everyone is rushed and stressed.

Our basic stress level is high, much higher than in other countries. This leads to more behavioral problems in us and in our dogs. So sleep is also very important for us. Many people have trouble getting enough sleep. Some rescues or shelters even promote that you shouldn't have a dog if you work full-time. Yet you see that dogs of people who work full-time outside the home often have fewer behavior problems than dogs of people who work part-time or use a dog walker.

There has been a shift in dog land over the past 20 years, where we suddenly decided a dog can not be alone for too long. However it is actually easier for a dog to sleep when he is left alone undisturbed. Just as it is easier for humans to sleep without disturbances, it is the same for dogs.

Increasing the number of hours of sleep and the quality of sleep is often the first step in preventing and resolving reactivity. Lack of sleep also impairs learning ability. Try sleeping four hours a night for a week yourself and then learning something new. That is almost impossible to do, because your brain is unable to learn new things when sleep deprived. This is no different with dogs.

So 19 hours of sleep a day is really important. How do you achieve it? Start by giving your dog a safe space. Most dogs have few rules in the home, and while I'm not saying you should have many rules, dogs do need boundaries. Dogs normally stay with their parents for up to 2.5 years, which is about 18 years with humans. During that time, their parents teach them what is and is not right. We often bring a dog into our home very early to bond, but often forget that we need to fulfill that parental role.

This also means putting your dog to bed on time. Many dogs do not learn this and do not know that they can sleep during the day.

This makes it harder for people and dogs to live together. So when your dog responds to visitors, first look at his sleeping pattern and what you can improve.

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## GUIDANCE AND PRACTICE

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If a dog already can't sit quietly in his spot when nothing is happening or when you yourself come in, it certainly won't succeed when something as exciting as visitors come in. It is therefore important that you teach your dog the right things step by step, so that he knows what is meant. We cannot say, "Just do something" and hope it goes well. So guidance and practice are essential and that's what you have to focus on.

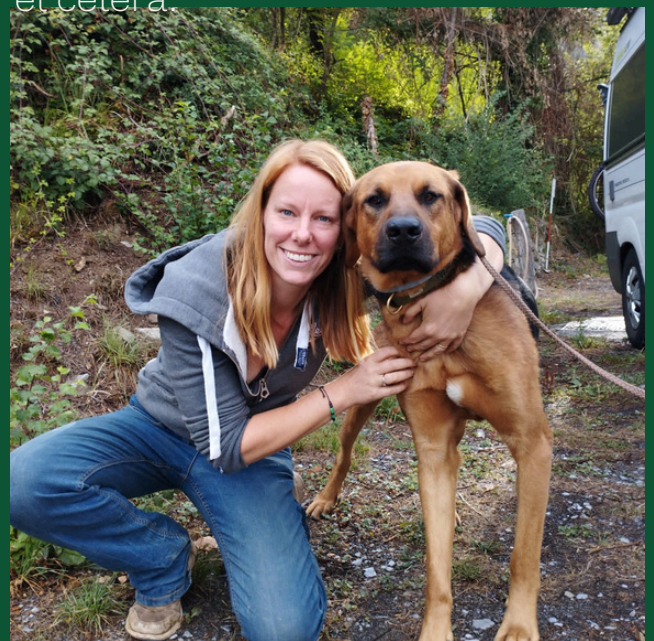
To practice this, **first teach your dog a fixed spot** when nothing is going on in the house. Let him stay quietly in his spot. Then add more and more movement and sound, i.e. more stimuli, to see if he can stay in his spot. If he can't, you need to teach him that first.

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## CLARITY IN THE HOME

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Clarity is also very important. If we are not clear in what we want and do not communicate clearly to the dog, it becomes much more difficult. It is also important that we are consistent. For example, if I say that the dog is allowed to jump up at one person and not at another, I need to be able to communicate that very clearly through my energy. In the beginning, however, I would not recommend that. If your dog still has to learn everything, be clear and say, "You are not allowed to jump up at anyone." Not at you, not at visitors, et cetera.



Once he masters that, you can possibly indicate that it is allowed with some people and not with others.

Many people say that their dog thinks black and white: either it is allowed or it is not allowed. That's true, but the dog does not base that on individuals, but on energy. Every human has its own energy, so if you're not aware of that, you can't really adjust it.

For example, if I were to say to my dog, "You can jump up when I'm wearing jeans and my Animal's Faith vest, because I get dirty every day anyway, but not when I'm wearing a dress", I can regulate that by emitting a different energy when I'm wearing a dress. So it is possible, but you have to be very aware of your own energy and be able to control it well.



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## CALMNESS AT ALL TIMES

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Calmness, of course, is incredibly important. What you often see, as mentioned earlier, is that when visitors arrive, most dogs produce stress pheromones. This increases their energy levels and makes them more active. We humans breathe in those pheromones and then go along with the dog's energy. However, it is important to always stay in balance with your dog, with both at an equal energy level. When your dog goes high in his energy, the idea is for us to stay just calm, low in energy. When your dog gets anxious and his energy is low, we humans want to go just a little higher in energy.

But most of the time, the opposite happens: the bell rings, the dog gets hyper and we join him in the height. We yell things like "Stop!", "Quiet!", "No!", which only excites the dog more. The dog then thinks you are confirming his behavior and that you are his backup, which is not the intention.

If you want your dog to stay calm when visitors come, you must be the first to set a good example. You cannot teach another what you cannot teach yourself. If you can't stay calm when visitors arrive, you can't teach your dog either. That is the first step.

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## OWN ENERGY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

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It is important that you learn to regulate your own energy and build self-confidence. This goes step by step. It is not that you will master everything immediately after reading this e-book. Your dog and you too have to learn and train. That takes time and that's fine. Don't be too hard on yourself. Many people in the Netherlands are perfectionists and want everything now and perfect. But that often leads to failure and demotivation.

So start small. First, make sure your dog can stay in his spot when there's no distraction. Then ask someone you know to come in, without ringing the bell, because the bell is often a big trigger. First go for a walk with the visitor and then teach your dog to stay on his spot. Build this up step by step. **Don't set the bar too high**, as that will only make it harder.

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## POSITIVE THINKING AND EXPERIENCE

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A positive mindset is very important. If you think "it won't work out anyway," then you've already lost. Instead, think, "This may not have gone perfectly, but we'll try again." Thinking positively and not seeing problems as insurmountable is crucial.

And that's hard, isn't it? Looking at myself, I used to be really super pessimistic. I hated people who could see the positive in everything. That made me absolutely nauseous, because I thought "that's not realistic at all". And that's right, pessimists are right more often than not. Absolutely. They just have a much less fun life.

I have now become someone who really sees the positive in everything. Sometimes I think, "Where are you getting this from?" From mega pessimistic I'm now someone who thinks, "Oh yeah, I'm getting bitten. Well, at least I know where a working point lies." That makes my life and the lives of everyone around me much more enjoyable, except perhaps for the mega-pessimists who find me very irritating.

It also makes everyone's lives much more enjoyable. If a dog bites me, from a client for example, I can think, "Goddamn, stupid dog, this isn't going to be anything." That doesn't help that dog, that doesn't help me, and that doesn't help the client at all. If I say, "Can happen, better bite me than someone else," then we are immediately being helpful. The dog doesn't feel burdened, I don't make a drama out of it, the people don't feel burdened, and we can get on with life.

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## SELF-REFLECTION

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And then, of course, there is the self-reflection piece. If you want to be good with dogs, this is the all-important thing: you really have to dare to look at yourself and be honest with yourself. Where are my issues? Why are they there? Can I do something about it? Of course you can do something about it. Do I want to do something about it?

Working on your issues, of course, is just outside your comfort zone. Those issues are in your comfort zone. They are not necessarily fine, but they are familiar. And known is nice. When we say we want to get rid of certain behaviors or moods, it starts with first recognizing that you have them, and then having the will to do something about them.

If you have that will, you can do a lot with it. But being honest with ourselves is exciting for many people, but absolutely worth it. So take up the challenge, if you dare, and of course I will help you with that with love if you want.

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# BEHAVIORS INSIDE THAT CAUSE REACTIVITY TO VISITORS

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What are the behaviors that can happen throughout the day, week or month that reinforce a response to visits?

First, **jumping up**. When your dog continuously jumps up against you, visitors or even things, such as a table or chair, it always happens with high energy and high adrenaline levels. A dog has to create some adrenaline to make that jump. Jumping up is not necessarily meant to be nice to dogs, especially if it is done with a little violence. It is important to regulate your dog's energy and reduce adrenaline levels by not allowing jumping up anymore, and certainly not motivating it.

Many people say, "I don't want my dog to jump up," but then when the dog does jump up to them, they think it's cute and respond enthusiastically.

By doing this, you are adding a lot of energy and being inconsistent. Either you want it or you don't. It's fine if you say, "I just want him to jump up," but don't say you don't want it and then reward it anyway. This is inconsistent and your dog doesn't understand that.

Second, **demanding attention**. Many dogs that react to visitors are often quite present dogs. Imagine you're sitting with coffee and a book on Sunday morning, and just as you're about to take a sip of coffee, a nose gets under your elbow and throws coffee across your lap. Your Sunday morning is suddenly a lot less relaxed. With dogs who are used to attention-seeking behavior, you often see that when your attention goes completely to something else, such as a cup of coffee, the television or a book, they demand attention and petting. Dogs are very intelligent and can read people really well.

Basically, dogs produce adrenaline and cortisol, i.e. stress hormones, the moment we pet it. **Petting is not necessarily pleasant for dogs**; you have to teach them to enjoy it. Especially if the petting is somewhat wild, dogs often don't like it.

So why do they still ask to be petted? This stems from their **controlling behavior**. Dogs know that we humans produce endorphins when we pet a dog. We calm down and relax because we are working with our hands. Whether we are petting a dog or working in the garden, our bodies produce endorphins, which relax us. A dog knows this and sometimes wants to influence our moods. He does this not consciously, but to see if he can exert control over the situation. This is especially important for dogs in adolescence, just as teens often give their parents a hard time to see how much control they can exert over their environment. This is important for the development, so it is allowed to be there, but we need to be aware of it.

So, imagine you are relaxed on Sunday morning with your coffee and your dog throws your coffee all over your pants, suddenly you are less relaxed. In that moment, he can affect your state of mind. Suppose you're working and in the middle of a Zoom call, and you're feeling stressed by deadlines, your dog will often stop by.

Subconsciously, we start petting because it relaxes us. That's not a disaster; in fact, it's nice and a reason why people and dogs love living together. But do know that your dog is not doing it because he necessarily wants to be petted. This bit of awareness is important.

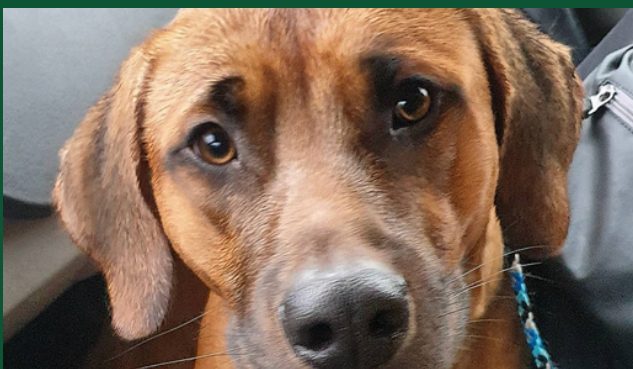
Dogs produce dopamine when they take the initiative and give the command, "Pet me." When we do that, they get a dopamine hit because **they are in control of the situation**. This is similar to the dopamine hits we get when people like our Facebook or Instagram posts. But you don't want too many of these dopamine hits, because at some point you become dopamine intolerant. Then you need more and more hits to experience that feeling of happiness, and we need to avoid that.

Then there is **chasing or following you around**, which you also see very often. Especially with dogs that react to visitors, they often do this already with their owners and then also with the visitor. Chasing is a sign of **restlessness**. It has nothing to do with the fact that the dog loves you so much. The dog is actually concerned and constantly saying, "Hey, where are you going? I need to keep an eye on you, because I don't think you can do it alone." In doing so, he puts a lot of tasks on his own shoulders.



We humans, of course, are primates and only need sleep about 30% of the time, about 8 hours a day. If your dog runs after you all day, he cannot sleep. Constantly following you around is always one in the same with not enough sleep. That's why it's important to teach the dog, "I can do this. You don't have to worry, let me do my thing. You lay down and sleep. If I need you, I'll call you" This is how you prevent the dog from taking on tasks he really shouldn't have.

**Barking** a lot is a problem you often see in dogs with high stress levels, and it also contributes to high stress levels. Dogs that are constantly at the window and start barking at every passerby exhibit this behavior because they are defending their territory. They think, "Hey, this is my house, get lost." This behavior seems successful because those people were planning to walk on anyway, but your dog doesn't know that. Then when someone does come in, the dog panics and barks even louder, thinking he has failed at chasing them away. This immediately raises his stress level significantly.



Dogs that are reactive to visitors often also become busy when leashed and show more excitement outside. Many people think their dog is happy when he reacts enthusiastically when walking. They say, "Oh, he's so happy." But a happy dog is similar to a happy human: there is a calmness, relaxed muscles and no hyperactivity. In children you sometimes see hyperactivity, but it is important to teach them to stay calm, or they will get sick of stress. This also applies to dogs, only in them it takes a little longer before they get sick of stress.

If I tell children, "We're going to a theme park tomorrow," and they start bouncing with excitement, I have to intervene and say, "Calm down." If I don't, they can't go to the park the next day because they've gotten sick of all their stress. With dogs, this is just as important. A dog who gets hyperactive when you leash him does not do so because he is happy. He is probably nervous and tense, and doesn't quite know how to deal with it. His adrenaline levels are high, making him hyperactive and stressed.

Many dogs that react to visitors often **lie in passageways or control areas**. Nowadays with corner sofas, this is even easier for dogs. They can lie high and in a corner, or preferably on the piece that extends to the center of the room.

That way they can look out the window from the middle of the room to the front and watch the whole living room. This is a mega control spot, as is lying under the table or in a doorway. Your dog is lying there not because it is comfortable, but because he thinks he has to watch you at all times. This is a task you do not want to assign to your dog, because this creates the idea that he has to do something with visitors.

**Getting attention first**, such as when you get up or come home and immediately go to your dog, means that the one who gets attention first in a new situation has the most to say about that situation. This often happens subconsciously in people. Suppose the king arrives somewhere, many people go to where he comes. The king also usually enters on a podium and is announced. When the doors open and the king steps out, everyone looks at him and gives him attention, confirming his status. This is good for his ego.

We humans do this unconsciously. People who are very confident often have a distinct appearance that automatically attracts more attention. People who are very insecure but overcompensate with a lot of bravado also attract attention, but with the wrong motive. Most dogs resemble the latter type of people. They exhibit a lot of bravado, not because they have a lot of self-confidence, but because they overcompensate.

They act tougher than they actually feel and live constantly with a mask on. This is annoying because it prevents you from getting to your core so we need to help our dog understand that overcompensation is not necessary.

**Getting hyper** when owners come home is also important. If your dog is very hyper, it is difficult to ignore him, and of course that is his intention. The moment he immediately manages to attract attention to himself, he feels he has more control over the situation. He doesn't necessarily want that control, but thinks he has to. So you also want to bring calmness to this situation.

Then, of course, you have **visitors who immediately react to the dog**, despite your asking not to do so. You need to do prevent that, because this too creates problems for your dog.

Many dogs **respond strongly to the doorbell or knocking**, if you don't have a bell. This is because we unconsciously teach them that. What happens when the bell rings? We gasp. For example, if it is the mailman, we rush to the door because the mailman has little time. This hasty reaction to the bell gets adopted by the dog, making him nervous at the sound of the bell as well.

If you have a chance and use a modern bell with customizable sounds, consider customizing the sound and changing your own response. Upon hearing the bell, think calmly "Ah, the bell. Nice." You can place a note on the front door with "Dog in training, may take a little longer for me to open" or "Feel free to put the package at the door" to help yourself unwind at the sound of the bell.

If you do not have a modern doorbell and always hear the same sound, it may help to **desensitize** the bell. This means pressing the bell at random times or letting others use the bell without anything happening. For example, when going outside, returning from a walk or errands, press the bell. Ask your neighbor to send you a message when he passes by and presses the bell so you don't have to respond. This way your dog will learn that the sound of the bell does not always mean someone is coming in.

Your **own reaction to visitors** is also very important. People often get tense when they know they are going to have visitors. Especially if you have a dog that is reactive, you may be tempted to say things like, "Remember, soon the visitor will come and I want you to behave." By doing so, you are already giving a lot of charge to the day, which increases your dog's stress level and makes it more difficult.

Your **own thoughts and wording** are also important. If you don't think positively and expect that it won't work out, then it everything becomes very difficult. If you refer to your dog as "not very nice to visitors," you also make it difficult. It's better to say, "My dog is a little afraid of visitors" or "My dog doesn't know how to react very well when visitors come, I'm practicing with him." This way you leave your dog in his right mind. Labeling it as aggressive or unreliable only makes changing the behavior more difficult, because then you're basically saying there's little you can do about it. And we don't want that.

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*If you don't think positively and expect that it won't work out, then it already becomes very difficult.*

# BEHAVIORS OUTSIDE THAT CAUSE REACTIVITY TO VISITORS

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Well, then of course you also have outside behavior, which eventually makes receiving visitors more difficult and causes more reactivity. You often see that dogs get hyper as soon as they are leashed and **want to be the first through the door**. This is a form of control behavior. People used to say that you had to be the first through the door to be more dominant, but fortunately this dominance theory is not true. However, it is important to be first through the door to ensure your dog's safety. Imagine a dog is running loose and not social, you want to be the first one outside to check that the area is safe. You never know what could happen. It's just like with children; you also don't let your toddler be the first to go outside to make sure it's safe.

Often you'll see these dogs then **pull on their leash**. Dogs never pull on the leash because they are happy. Pulling on the leash is always uncomfortable for dogs, whether they are wearing a collar, harness or something else. It's also not natural behavior. Dogs normally walk together as a pack, off leash, and feel safe with each other. A dog pulling on a leash usually shows that he **does not feel safe** and wants to run away from the situation, but is stopped by the leash.

Also, these dogs often **want to go up to everyone**. Especially if you have a dog that jumps up and becomes hyperactive with visitors, you will see that he wants to go to every person outside. This is also a form of controlling behavior. It is important to adjust this for consistency.

**Having the dog choose where and how the walk goes** is all the hype these days. This in itself is not bad if you have a stable, confident dog who can make the right choices. But a stable, confident dog does not react to visitors. When we allow the dog to determine our walk, we are actually saying we are depending on the dog. If your dog already has a compromised sense of security, this is the last thing he wants. Especially for dogs who find life challenging, you want to provide more **structure** and keep them close to you. When your dog is confident enough and knows what to do in all circumstances, you can give him more and more freedom.

This is similar to people. In the beginning, you give children a lot of structure and tell them what to do and what not to do. When they master that, step by step you give them more freedom. This is a logical structure. But with dogs, we often do the opposite. We first give them a lot of freedom, let them run loose or pull the leash, and only when the behavior goes from bad to worse do we start adjusting. And that's kind of crazy.

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*Dogs never pull on the leash because they are happy or enthusiastic.*

**Not listening** is also a red flag behavior. If your dog finds it difficult to listen inside, for example if you say "go to your place" and he doesn't, he is less likely to listen outside, and vice versa. It is important to practice this both inside and outside so that the behavior improves.

Dogs that walk **erratically or "all over the place,"** fast and slow, or zigzagging from side to side, also indicate that they need help. You want to adjust this by giving your dog more help and structure.



**Excessive sniffing** is something we often see too. People often think that a dog has to walk with his nose on the ground. And yes, smelling is obviously very important to dogs because it is their primary sense. Where we use our eyes, they use their noses to explore the world. But if your dog is sniffing with his nose on the ground all the time, it's the same as if we would look at everything very closely. Instead when walking, you want to have an overview to anticipate your surroundings. If you only look at the sidewalk, or as I used to do when I was shy, at the ground with my hair in front of my eyes, you only have a small view of world. This lack of overview erodes your self-confidence.

A dog who is comfortable outside does sniff, but with his nose in the air. He has his nose turned 'on' all the time, but his head is off the ground, because the nose is strong enough to be able to smell everything in the air. This way he can survey everything well, which makes him a lot calmer.

**Hyperactivity outside** is the same red flag behavior as inside. If your dog gets hyperactive quickly, he will do the same at home as on walks. This is something you should also pay attention to and say, "Okay, you shouldn't get too hyperactive, that's not good for you."

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*A dog who is comfortable outside does sniff, but with his nose in the air. He has his nose on all the time, but his head is off the ground.*



# HOW DO WE SOLVE ALL THIS?

First, **enough sleep and rest**. Make sure your dog gets those 19 hours of sleep and rest in a 24-hour period. That's really very important. If he can't do that, the rest doesn't make much sense, because his learning ability doesn't function properly if he doesn't get enough sleep.

How can you do that? Put him on its cushion all the time, just like a small child you put to bed, or use a crate, which is the same principle for dogs as a crib for children. You tell your dog, "You are not yet old and wise enough to stay in your bed by yourself. I can't spend all day with you because I have things to do too. So, I'll just put you in your bed." That works fine for children and also for dogs.

Is it a good solution to put the dog in the crate when visitors are at your home? No, short and sweet. If you never teach your dog to develop impulse control and then put him in the crate with visitors because you find him annoying, it feels to your dog like he is being put away. It's like putting a child in the closet when you have visitors and so it doesn't learn how to behave. That doesn't work.

A crate is a safe place and should be seen as a bedroom for a dog. But he should always sleep there whether there are visitors or not. Otherwise, you are not being consistent and are only using the crate to put your dog away.

That sleep is the most important thing. After that, **impulse control** is important. If your dog immediately goes sky high in his energy at everything (for example, ducks) and runs away of everything, life becomes difficult. If he already reacts startled to a pen falling on the ground, that is of course a minimal stimulus compared to when visitors come in. So it is very important that your dog can already deal with small impulses before he can deal with something big like visitors.

Also consider your **own self-confidence**, of course. If you are insecure in a situation, it becomes difficult for your dog to be confident. This is a big area where many people can gain. I always say, if a dog seems to be hyperactive and enthusiastic, from now on just call that behavior stressed, then it will be easier to control it.

If my dog gets very stressed, I say, "Okay, push the pause button." We don't do anything more, we stay in the situation until he calms down and only then do we press play again and get on with life. That's how the dog learns to stay calm.

I always tell people that my dogs are really allowed anything. I am not someone who is very strict with my dogs, they can do anything as long as they ask nicely and don't force it or act ugly. The moment you indicate something to me with **calm energy**, you can achieve a lot with me. But if you start forcing and demanding, then I set rules, because I don't like that state of mind.

With dogs, it is always much more important to steer them by reacting to their moods than their actions. Most people try steering by actions but not by moods, and there is a big difference in that.

Teach your dog that **he can rely on you**. This is really incredibly important. Feeling safe and confident that your dog knows that no matter what happens, his owner will always take into account how he perceives the situation, makes the bond between you so much stronger and nicer. This makes life a lot more fun for everyone.

**Desensitize the bell**, as we discussed earlier. This is a really important exercise. Again, you are steering based on their moods. You don't want your dog to get hyper and you don't want to get hyper yourself when the bell rings. Desensitize the bell so he stays calm. This doesn't necessarily mean just sending your dog to its place. That can be an easy intermediate step, but sending him to the crate is an action, not a change of mood. Many dogs go to their place easily, but remain tense and jump back up at the slightest sound. Their state of mind has not changed; they suppress their stress instead of expressing it by barking or jumping. This causes them to twitch and only makes things harder. **You want to change their state of mind to calm**. Actions don't matter, even if your dog goes upside down when visitors come, as long as they do it quietly and no one is bothered.

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*Teach your dog that he always can rely on you. This is really incredibly important.*



**Practice with and without visitors.** Don't just wait for visitors, especially if you only get visits once a month. If you say you want to tackle this now, but you only get visitors once a month, build in a two-month training phase where you invite some more people to practice. You don't have to offer them coffee and cake right away. They should come in, and once your dog is calm, they can leave again. If you're not that social, keep it short.

**Communicate clearly with your visitor.** Explain step by step what you want and, most importantly, why you want it. If you communicate briefly and people don't know why, they won't do it. And if there are no consequences for not following your instructions, they won't do what you want either. So always say what you want, why you want it and what the consequences are if they don't do it. This also helps build self-confidence to set boundaries.



# COMMON (UNCONSCIOUS) MISTAKES

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First, **rushing by the doorbell**. We just talked about how hearing the bell often triggers a startle response where you gasp for air. The first thing to do the moment you hear the bell is to **exhale**. By exhaling, you stop the production of adrenaline and get into a much more relaxed state of mind.

**Being rushed when visits are scheduled**. I don't know about you, but I used to be like that. If I knew someone was coming, suddenly I had to clean my house. Imagine, people will think something of me! I'm someone who works well on deadlines. So then when I thought, "Oh god, they're coming in an hour and a half and I still have to do everything," I would go through the house like a spear. Within no time I had everything on the side. Super convenient, but my stress level was very high and so was the dogs. One thing: your visitors are not interested in how your house looks. If they do, then you don't have the right friends.

Don't let judgemental people in your house, that is not a nice state of mind. You are you. Work on yourself if you feel it is necessary or if your dog feels it is necessary. But you don't have to pretend to be different for others. Make sure you are relaxed when visitors come, because the more relaxed you are, the more relaxed your dog will be.

**Going into a visit unprepared** when you know your dog already has problems is the other extreme. Humans are always of the extremes, like all mammals. We are either totally in the mode of perfection, or we let go of everything and do nothing. Both extremes are not good. You want to find a middle ground. If you know your dog is excited, prepare. This doesn't mean you have to clean your house, but make sure you are calm. Teach your dog a safe place, instruct your visitors well. These are the preparations you can make to make it as pleasant as possible for your dog.

**Swearing** is always a no-go.

Swearing is a super unstable energy and comes from fear, just like falling out in dogs. It's fear of losing control. When we are afraid of losing control, life gets a lot harder. The dog then no longer dares to rely on us. He thinks, "This is no use to me." The other extreme is giving up: "He doesn't listen anyway, let it be." Your dog also doesn't feel safe with someone who gives up. Find the middle ground. It's normal to shoot from one extreme to the other, but practice ending up nice and in the middle. It will never be perfectly stable, but you want to avoid the extremes.

Then, **working without a leash.**

Especially with dogs that are very hyper, but also with dogs that hide, I like to use a leash. It is similar to little children who find it stressy when visitors come, as I used to do for example when my grandfather came over, I was terrified and always crawled under the table and sat down to cry, like a frightened little dog crawling in a corner. If your dog is under the table, there's not much you can do. Or you have to grab him by his neck skin, which hurts and can cause him to bite out of fright, and you don't want that.

With little kids, it's easy. My parents just grabbed my little hand and pulled me out from under the table. Then I had to sit in the room with my grandfather anyway. Eventually he turned out not to want to kill me at all, so that went pretty well. It was an imagined fear.

If we put a leash on a dog, we can control it before it runs away. It would have been better if my parents had grabbed my hand first and then let my grandfather in, then I wouldn't have been able to flee. You want that with dogs, too. If you have a dog that flees, you want him on a leash with you so he can't run away and that first wave of fear is not possible.

If you have a dog that jumps up and is very busy, a leash will also help. If he is loose and you put him neatly in his spot, but the visitor comes in and he runs off his spot and jumps up, he can, for example, knock someone's glasses off their nose. That's not ideal either. With a leash you can take the speed out of it. If you have a dog that wants to bite the visitor's ankles, ditto. The moment he has a leash on and he can't reach the ankles of the visitor because you can steer him, you prevent a lot of hassle. So working with a leash is much more pleasant for dogs and for yourself as well. I always recommend that in the beginning.

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*If you have a dog that flees, you want him on a leash with you so he can't run away and that first wave of fear is not possible.*

**Getting angry or irritated at visitors** is something we also see quite often. "Yes, I told you to ignore the dog, but you don't." In doing so, you create an unpleasant state of mind. It's not helpful and your visitors won't be happy about it either. If your visitors don't do as you say, your boundaries have not been clear enough. That's not the visitor's fault, that's your fault. That's nice to know, even though we often don't like to hear it. But if something is our fault, we can do something about it. If it were the visitor's fault, we can't influence or direct those people. **But we can adjust our own behavior.**

If you are thinking, "Hey, I imposed these boundaries and my visit is not listening to them," then obviously your boundaries were not clear. Then ask your visitor, "Hey, I told you this and this and that was very important to me, yet you choose not to respond to it. How could I have put it differently or better so that you would have done what I asked?" You'll probably learn a lot of interesting things from that. So don't blame your visitors, but dare to ask openly, "How could I have done this differently?" You really learn a lot from that. And so will your dog.

The dog's **lack of a safe place** is also a problem. So teaching a safe place is super important, a lot of people forget that. That's something you need to start soon, so your dog can go to sleep too.

**Handling out of panic** for example when unexpected visitors arrive, causes us to go all over the place instead of first taking a breath and acting from calmness.

In addition, it's important to instruct your visitor well and not think, "Oh god, that's going to go wrong again, I'm sure." You don't want that either. Practicing only with visitors and not changing anything else in your handling with your dog leads to little progress. Consistency is important. A negative expectation pattern, where you already think things will go wrong, creates problems.

And finally, don't let **visitors overrule you** either. Set clear boundaries. For example, if you say "We're about to go into the living room and I'd like you to ignore my dog because he finds it exciting and I'm teaching him that," and your visitors respond with: "Oh well, let him be, I don't mind if he jumps up," then be clear. Say, "I love that you don't mind. Adopt a dog, Animal's Faith Foundation has lots of nice ones. But I don't want it with my dog. I don't care if you mind, that wasn't my question. It was a command: ignore my dog. Can't you do that? Then I'll say goodbye to you now. Or I'll grab my coat and we'll go around the corner for a drink."

**DON'T LET YOURSELF BE  
OVERRULED.  
YOUR BOUNDARIES ARE  
YOUR BOUNDARIES.  
AND YOUR DOG'S ARE  
YOUR DOG'S.**

Whether people like it or not doesn't matter that much. Your dog doesn't care about that. Sometimes you have to educate your visitors, too. That's not a bad thing, that doesn't make you bad.

# QUESTIONS FROM THE WEBINAR

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**I have a general question about sleep. Because our dog is still in the crate quite a lot, mainly to let him sleep. What is a normal sleeping pattern for a dog? Does he really need to be knocked out for hours straight? Or are there still some short naps in a row? Can you give some insight in that?**

In nature, dogs sleep 19 hours at once. So if you want to follow a natural sleeping pattern, that means letting a dog sleep all day and he is only awake at dusk. But in the Netherlands this is often more difficult, because we ourselves are simply more restless. It is then more difficult for a dog to sleep for a long time in a row. For example, after a walk, a dog often needs up to eight hours of sleep to process that walk. If he then only does little naps, it becomes a lot harder. That's why I'm always an advocate of teaching dogs to sleep long stretches in a row.

**The longer the better.** With my dogs, for example, I see that. I have one working dog, Sam, my Cocker Spaniel. He obviously has more trouble sleeping through than my other dogs because there is that working dog blood in there and he is by nature a more restless dog. So I have to keep helping him with that all his life. Whereas my Podenco, who is only two, I can put in her bed in the morning and I don't hear her until the evening. So long continuous sleep is really best for them. That's the goal, though.

Of course you want to see for each dog what he can handle and what he can't. Especially if he only does naps. Why does he do that? What is he waking up from? Am I disturbing his sleep? What is going on? What does he need? If you can respond to that, you can improve a lot. For example, a dog I helped had joint problems and woke up often because of that. When we gave him an orthopedic bed, he was suddenly able to sleep whole stretches in a row because he felt more physically comfortable.



**I mainly had a question about the state of mind and the calmness you need to exude. My dogs react very strongly to the doorbell and bark a lot when people come in. You say that with this hyperactivity, you should stop yourself for a moment and then only continue when they're calm. But should you then just stand still and do nothing at all? Or do you also want to give some more guidance?**

Most importantly, if you want to calm your dog, you have to be calm yourself first. If we go along with the stress, we will struggle to calm the dogs down. It is indeed important to first think for yourself, "Okay, I'll breathe for a moment." If you start acting panicky and quickly yell, "Get in your place," things won't get better.

But if you take a breather first, especially if you have more than one dog, you'll be better able to oversee the situation. With dogs, as with humans, there is always a certain hierarchy. It's never all at once. There is always one instigator, the others follow. So focus on the instigator first.

From a place of calmness you then say, "Okay, you go to your place now." Or if that is difficult, you take that dog with you on a leash so you can give it clear structure. The moment you take out the troublemaker, who creates the most stress pheromones, you can often steer the others much better with body energy and language or purely verbally. The others usually just join in as followers.

By the way, often the calmest dog is the one who gives the trigger to react to the others, the instigator. Often the one who is the most hyper and irritating is the one who does so at the instructions of the other. Of course, dogs always listen to each other faster than to humans. So it is important to always address or help the right one of the two.



**What to do if my dog remains very agitated with visitors?  
Often we'll put him in the crate anyway because the  
situation remains very unsafe and tense**

Do you put him in the crate when the visitors are already inside? **Yes.**

Yes, see, so then you don't take his fear into account beforehand. The moment you go from a large space to smaller one, it's super difficult for dogs. You always want to go from small to big. Just like with people: little freedom at first and if that goes well, more and more freedom.

I would put your dog in the crate before visitors arrive. Suppose you get visitors tonight at 7 o'clock, if he finds it very exciting, make sure he is in the crate at least three quarters of an hour beforehand. So at a quarter past six, or preferably at six.

At this time you're using the crate as a means of punishment by saying, "You're not doing well, so I'll just put you away." But you want to say, "Hey, this is your safe place, lay down here." Then visitors can come in peacefully.

He may still bark in the crate if he finds it very stressy, but ignore that a little bit and keep breathing deeply and calmly yourself. Ask your visitors to ignore the dog and just let them sit down. If he really finds it very exciting, make sure the first few weeks he doesn't have to do anything at all with visitors and doesn't have to come out of the crate.

If you see that at some point he will lie down quietly while the visitor is there, you can open the door, leash him and walk around the visitor. That's all it takes. Then he can go back into his crate, his safe place, so he can make only positive associations with the visitor. If he makes the mistake first and only then gets your help, he thinks, "Oh, I have to behave badly first or they won't help me."





**I also sometimes have people come into our house with their dogs. I try to watch out for that because my dog really doesn't like it. I already heard that I can put my dog in the crate and let the other dog walk around, but so that is only possible if he is already in the crate?**

Yes, indeed, he should already be in the crate. And I myself would not let the other dog just run loose in my own house, but also give him rules, so that your dog feels safe at all times.

Imagine sitting in your house and suddenly someone comes in and you have to stay put while that person walks through your house and touches all your stuff, that feels unpleasant. It's different when someone comes in, sits down nicely and leaves your stuff alone.

So I would say to your visitors: fine, it's okay to come in with your dog but keep him on a leash and put him next to your chair.

# FINAL WORD

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You have come to the end of this e-book. Hopefully you've learned a lot about your dog's behavior when receiving visitors.

If you need additional help with your specific challenges, send me a DM on Instagram ([@lizwolting](https://www.instagram.com/lizwolting)) or an email to [liz@animalsfaith.nl](mailto:liz@animalsfaith.nl). I'll be happy to help you further.

More lectures and e-books are **available on my website [lizwolting.com](https://lizwolting.com)**. I also regularly organize new courses and coaching. Be sure to take a look if you are interested!

I wish you the best of luck.

Greetings,