



EVEN FRIENDLY DOGS NEED A LEASH

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Imagine yourself... You love your dog. She wakes you up every morning by sniffing your closed eyes with her snuffly beagle nose, she tilts her head in the most adorable way when you ask her a question, and she seeks out the neighbour's kids for a game of fetch. She has gentle, roly-poly wrestling matches with the cat and just about falls over herself with joy when your grandpa comes to visit. She's just about perfect, but like all of us there are some things that she doesn't enjoy. Other dogs running up to her is one of those things. But that's okay because you know she gets joy out of so many other things in life and there's no need to go to the dog park and no need to meet other dogs. Your dog lives a fully enriched life with her human and feline companions.

Now picture this... You are hiking along a gorgeous wooded trail with your dog. She's thrilled to have a bit of time in the woods and has her nose glued to the ground. You hear a crash in the woods up ahead. In the distance you hear shouting, "Frankie! FRANKIE! FRANKIE COME! NO! FRANKIE COME!" As your heart starts racing, a husky comes streaming out of the woods, ready for a head-on collision. The last thing you hear from the owner before the husky makes

contact with your beagle is, "DON'T WORRY! HE'S FRIENDLY!"

The question is not whether the husky is friendly. The question is why has he not gone back to his owner when called and why is he not on leash? It doesn't matter how friendly the husky is, an aggressive reaction on the part of the beagle does not put her at fault or make her a bad dog. The beagle's owner takes precautions daily to prevent her beagle from being stressed by other dogs. Maybe the owner is even working with a trainer, and the beagle is simply not ready for this sort of uncontrolled interaction with another dog. Most frustratingly, the thoughtlessness of the husky's owner could put the beagle's training back weeks or even months – costing the owner immense stress, time, and money for additional training sessions.

No one wants to believe that their friendly dog could have this impact on another dog or person, but it happens daily. Owners of reactive dogs walk at 5 a.m., they reroute their walk to avoid off-leash dogs, they avoid all the nice (on-leash) parks for fear of loose dogs, and they may even stop walking their dogs altogether. Once they master these strategies, they seem to disappear from view. You may not even know when an incident with your off-leash dog has been narrowly avoided because the other owner was so vigilant in avoiding your dog. There's a lot at stake when an off-leash dog charges at a reactive dog, and it's a sinking, hopeless feeling for the owner when it's about to happen.

Many dogs are fearful, reactive, or aggressive, but it's not only these dogs who are affected by off-leash dogs on the street or in the park. Some dogs have just had surgery or are elderly. They may have a contagious illness, such as kennel cough, or they may be service dogs. There are countless

legitimate reasons why a wonderful family pet does not want to greet another dog, including your friendly dog. Until you have a "special needs" dog, it is impossible to describe the impact of an unleashed dog running at large.

It is critical that our culture adopts a better etiquette among dog owners; an etiquette based on the most basic respect for dogs and their owners. A better understanding of dog behaviour would drive home the fact that not all dogs are social butterflies, nor should they be forced into situations where they have to be. A better understanding of each other will demonstrate the fact that off-leash dogs are not only a risk to other dogs but also a major stress for the owners of these dogs. The feelings of sadness, guilt, and desperation when an owner sees a beloved pet regress after an uncontrolled encounter with a "friendly" dog are deep and lasting.

Be a good neighbour – always keep your dog on leash when you aren't in a designated off-leash area!

