THE CONSENT TEST FOR TOUCH

The question is not 'Can I pat your dog?"
It's 'Would your dog like to be patted?" Two very different questions.

DO NOT

These can be uncomfortable or overwhelming for dogs.

- Stick out your hand or fist into the face to sniff.
- Rush towards them or come in weirdly slow.
- Pat them on the head.
- Loom over them.

1 Stand still

Let the dog come into your space and sniff. It will then indicate if it wants to say hello.

2 Crouch down

Crouch down showing body language that invites them in (side on, relaxed and non-threatening).

3 3 second touch

If the dog chooses to come closer, you can gently touch their chest for up to 3 seconds then remove your hand.

4 Observe

Let the dog indicate what happens next.
If they stay close, lean in or seek more touch, you can continue. If they move away, stop and give them space.



YES

They would like touch! You can continue.



- Moves closer
- Leans in or stays close
- Paws for more
- Nudges closer
- Stays soft and relaxed
- Happy, open expression


Leans in and enjoys it


Paws for more


Nudges closer

NO

They are not comfortable. Please stop.



- Turns head away or moves off
- Goes still or stiff
- Avoids touch
- Shows stress signals (e.g. lip licking, whale eye, yawning)

Turns away


Lip licking (stress signal)


Moves off


Whale eye (looks away)


Crouches or tries to make smaller


Ears back, tense body

Important

Consent can change from moment to moment. A dog may enjoy touch one second and not want it the next. The goal is to notice, pause, and let the dog choose.
When in doubt, pause and ask with your hands off.