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Yellow means needing space

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Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a way to tell if the dog you see ahead of you on the trail is likely to welcome you approaching it? Well, there is a movement afoot that will help us all know ahead of time. It is called 'The Yellow Dog Project' and it has already proven highly successful elsewhere in Canada and in nearly fifty countries worldwide. This project has a huge potential to reduce the incidence of dog bites.

It works like this. Any dog who needs its space sports a yellow ribbon on its collar or leash. This is a signal to everyone around – to children, to adults, to other dog walkers with their dogs – to use caution in approaching the dog. The yellow ribbon asks you to maintain your distance, to ask before approaching it, or to give the dog and her/his person time to move out of your way.

There are many reasons why a dog might need this extra space. Some dogs may be recovering from an injury or illness and naturally feel anxious and defensive. Others may be older dogs with health issues that make them less tolerant of interactions with humans or dogs. Others are in training. And a few dogs will have come from abusive situations and are still being socialized. Any such dogs can feel uncomfortable or even threatened, especially when startled or approached unannounced.

Bowen Veterinary Services is leading the initiative to launch this project on Bowen Island. This week, vet tech Marla Brillinger has met with pre-school children to educate them how to behave when they see a dog with a yellow ribbon on its collar or leash. This is a great start. Marla also hopes that it will be possible to display information posters on the trails to inform people what the yellow ribbon means.

To make this work, dog owners need to think about their dog's temperaments as honestly as possible. Some dogs might not need to sport the yellow ribbon all the time. Others will.

My 13-year-old Spitz, Toby, will certainly wear one all the time. He is a wonderful, clever, loving dog who is great with all adult humans and older kids, but because he was tormented by little kids when he was young, he bears a lifelong grudge against toddlers. He gets on well with nearly all dogs too, except for unfixed males that are larger than him, especially labradors and retrievers. It will be a comfort to me to have him wear the ribbon on his leash, just so people will give him the space he needs.

The yellow ribbons will soon be available at Bowen Vet Services and other local businesses. For more information, see theyellowdogproject.com or check out the Bowen Veterinary Services Facebook page. Remember: yellow is not always mellow.

SUSANNA BRAUND



A yellow ribbon means that a dog needs space. *Debra Stringfellow*

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