A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR BUSINESSES

The Best Bark Dog Friendly Business Guide

Practical guidance for welcoming dogs safely, confidently and responsibly

More businesses are choosing to welcome dogs, but putting a water bowl outside the door and adding “dog friendly” to Instagram is only the beginning.

A good dog friendly policy gives owners clear expectations, gives staff the confidence to deal with problems and makes the experience comfortable for customers who do not have dogs too.

Best Bark has created this guidance to help hospitality and tourism businesses build a dog policy that works for their premises.

Every business is different. A small café, hotel, pub, visitor attraction and large restaurant will not necessarily need the same rules.

The aim is simple: decide what works for your business, communicate it clearly and make sure your team knows how to manage it.

01 / SET YOUR POLICY

Decide what dog friendly means for your business

Being dogfriendly does nothave to meanallowingdogs everywhere.

Before advertising your business as dog friendly, decide exactly where dogs are welcome and what restrictions you need.

That could mean dogs are welcome throughout your customer areas. It could mean particular tables, one section of a restaurant, the bar rather than the dining room, selected hotel bedrooms or an outdoor terrace.

Consider:

- ✓ Where dogs can and cannot go
- ✓ The layout and size of your premises
- ✓ Busy walkways and service areas
- ✓ Where a dog can comfortably settle
- ✓ Whether dogs are allowed on furniture
- ✓ How many dogs you can reasonably accommodate
- ✓ Whether particular areas should remain dog free
- ✓ Any restrictions that need to apply at particularly busy times
- ✓ How your policy works alongside assistance dog access requirements

There is no prize for having the most permissive dog policy.

A clear, manageable policy that your staff and customers understand is far better than allowing dogs everywhere and dealing with problems afterwards.

02 / HOUSE RULES

Make expectations clear

Dog owners shouldknow whatis expected ofthembefore there is aproblem.

Your house rules should be easy to find on your website, booking information or at the premises.

A simple policy could read:

Dogs are welcome here

We love welcoming dogs and ask owners to help us keep the experience enjoyable for everyone.

Dogs should remain under control while visiting and should not block walkways, entrances or service areas.

Please do not allow your dog onto furniture unless our policy specifically permits it.

Give other dogs and customers space and never assume another dog wants to interact.

If your dog becomes distressed, persistently disruptive or behaves in a way that could put another customer, member of staff or dog at risk, our team may ask you to move, settle or remove your dog.

Please clean up after your dog immediately and let a member of staff know if you need help.

Thank you for helping us keep this a place where dogs can continue to be welcome.

Businesses should adapt this wording to their premises rather than copying rules that do not make sense for them.

03 + 04 / SPACE AND CONTROL

Room to settle. Space for everyone.

03 Think about where dogs will settle

One of the easiest ways to prevent problems is to think about dogs when planning the space.

Dogs should be able to settle without creating unnecessary hazards or disrupting staff and other customers.

Where possible, consider seating customers with dogs somewhere that avoids narrow walkways, busy service routes, entrances and emergency exits.

For some venues, perimeter tables, booths or quieter sections work particularly well.

You may also choose to keep particular sections dog free.

That does not make a business less dog friendly. Customers may have allergies, phobias,

cultural preferences or simply prefer not to sit beside a dog.

A well managed dog friendly business should work for them too.

04 Dogs should remain under control

Best Bark recommends businesses establish a clear lead policy.

For many hospitality environments, asking owners to keep dogs on a short lead and close to their table is a simple way to reduce unexpected interactions.

Retractable leads stretched across a café floor are a trip hazard waiting to happen.

Dogs should not be allowed to wander around the premises, approach other tables without invitation or interfere with staff carrying food and drinks.

Owners should also be responsible for managing interactions between dogs.

Dog friendly does not mean dog social.

Some perfectly suitable dogs do not want another dog approaching them while they are lying underneath a table.

05 / YOUR TEAM

Give staff permission to intervene

This is one of the mostimportant partsofadogpolicy.

Rules are little use if staff do not feel comfortable enforcing them.

Your team should know that welcoming dogs does not mean accepting behaviour that is disruptive, unsafe or seriously affecting other customers.

- ✓ What behaviour requires staff intervention
- ✓ What staff should say to an owner
- ✓ When a manager should become involved
- ✓ Who can make the decision to ask an owner to remove a dog
- ✓ What happens following a serious incident
- ✓ How accidents and fouling should be handled

Staff should never be expected to physically handle or restrain a customer's dog.

Give staff a simple script

Amemberofstaffshouldnothavetoinventthewording during an uncomfortable situation.

“We love having dogs here, but we do need all dogs to remain settled and under control. Could you please help settle them? If it continues, we may need to ask you to take them outside.”

If the behaviour presents an immediate safety concern, staff should follow the business's normal safety and incident procedures rather than attempting to manage the dog themselves.

06 / CLEAR BOUNDARIES

Define unacceptable behaviour

Avoid relying solely onphrasessuch as “well behaveddogsonly”.

People have very different definitions of well behaved.

Your policy should give staff and owners clearer boundaries. A

business may intervene where a dog is:

- Persistently barking or causing significant disruption
- Repeatedly approaching other customers or dogs despite being asked not to
- Jumping at customers or staff
- Blocking service areas or walkways
- Showing threatening or aggressive behaviour
- Becoming increasingly distressed or unable to settle
- Damaging property
- Fouling indoors

Context matters. One bark does not make a dog badly behaved, and a nervous dog briefly struggling to settle does not automatically need to leave.

The purpose of a policy is to give staff sensible boundaries, not turn them into dog behaviour judges.

07 + 08 / CARE AND HYGIENE

Plan for accidents. Look after dogs too.

07Haveahygieneproceduребeforeyou need one

Dog friendly businesses should decide in advance how dog related hygiene incidents will be managed.

If a dog urinates, vomits or fouls inside the premises, staff should know who deals with it, how the area is temporarily kept clear and what cleaning and hygiene procedure should be followed.

Do not wait until an accident happens to work this out.

Staff should also avoid handling customers' dogs while working where possible.

If staff do touch a dog, appropriate hand hygiene should be followed before returning to food handling or other work where clean hands are required.

Food businesses in Northern Ireland remain responsible for meeting applicable food hygiene requirements. Food safety officers assess areas including hygienic food handling, the cleanliness and condition of facilities, and how the business manages food safety. nidirect

If you are unsure how allowing dogs affects your particular premises, speak to the Environmental Health team at your local council before changing your policy.

08 Remember the dog's welfare too

A venue being willing to accept dogs does not automatically make every environment appropriate for every dog.

Busy restaurants, loud bars, crowded events and unfamiliar hotels can be difficult environments for some dogs.

Owners should consider whether their individual dog is comfortable before bringing them.

Businesses should be alert to obvious signs that an animal is struggling and can ask an owner to take their dog somewhere quieter where appropriate.

Northern Ireland animal welfare guidance says dogs need a suitable environment, must be able to avoid things that frighten them and should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. nidirect

09 + 10 / COVER AND COMMUNICATION

Check your cover. Explain your policy.

09 Check your insurance

Before introducing or significantly changing a dog friendly policy, businesses should tell their insurer that dogs are permitted on the premises and confirm that their existing cover is appropriate.

Do not assume that another dog friendly business's insurance arrangements apply to yours. Keep a written copy of your dog policy and make sure staff understand it.

For significant incidents involving injury or property damage, follow your insurer's reporting requirements and your normal incident procedure.

10 Make your policy easy to find

One of the most frustrating things for dog owners is seeing that somewhere is “dog friendly” without knowing what that actually means.

Can dogs go indoors?

Only outside?

Can they stay overnight?

Are there designated rooms?

Can they sit in the restaurant?

Are there restrictions?

Tell people before they arrive.

Your dog policy can appear on your website, booking confirmation, Best Bark listing, menu or signage at the premises.

Clear information helps owners decide whether your business is suitable for their dog and reduces awkward conversations when they arrive.

FOR EVERYONE VISITING WITH A DOG

The Best Bark Responsible Dog Owner Code

Businesses haveresponsibilitieswhenthey welcomedogs.Dog ownersdo too.

Every poorly managed visit makes it harder to persuade another business to become dog friendly.

When visiting a dog friendly business, Best Bark asks owners to:

- ✓ **Keep your dog under control.** Follow the venue's lead policy and keep your dog close enough that they are not interfering with staff, customers or other dogs.
- ✓ **Respect the business's rules.** Dog friendly businesses are entitled to decide where dogs are permitted and set reasonable boundaries.
- ✓ **Never assume dogs should meet.** Ask another owner before allowing your dog to approach theirs.
- ✓ **Keep walkways clear.** Leads, dogs and belongings should not create unnecessary trip hazards.
- ✓ **Do not assume furniture is dog friendly.** Keep dogs on the floor unless the business explicitly says otherwise.
- ✓ **Clean up immediately.** If an accident happens, tell staff rather than hoping nobody noticed.
- ✓ **Know when your dog has had enough.** If your dog is frightened, overwhelmed or unable to settle, taking them somewhere quieter is responsible ownership.
- ✓ **Respect other customers.** A dog friendly business still needs to be comfortable for people who do not own dogs.

Northern Ireland guidance also makes clear that owners should clean up after their dogs in public places and that owners have responsibilities for keeping dogs under control. nidirect

A POLICY THAT LASTS

Dog friendly does not mean dogs everywhere

Best Bark wantsto seemorebusinessesconfidently welcoming dogs.

That does not mean every business needs to allow dogs in every part of its premises.

For one café, a fully dog friendly indoor policy may work brilliantly. Another restaurant may choose a designated section. A hotel might welcome dogs in selected bedrooms and its bar but keep another restaurant dog free.

All of those can be sensible dog friendly policies.

What matters is that businesses understand what they can comfortably offer, set clear boundaries and communicate them properly.

A sustainable dog friendly destination needs businesses to enjoy welcoming dog owners too.

If businesses repeatedly experience fouling, uncontrolled dogs, complaints or staff struggling to deal with difficult situations, they are less likely to continue welcoming dogs.

Responsible dog ownership protects dog friendly access.

WORK WITH BEST BARK

A stronger dog friendly offer for your destination

BestBark workswith businesses and tourismorganisationstomakedogfriendly tourism easier to understand, manage and promote.

We can help with dog friendly policy guidance, house rules, staff guidance, communicating policies to customers, identifying suitable dog friendly areas and responsible ownership campaigns.

We also help dog owners find genuinely dog friendly places by giving businesses space to explain exactly where dogs are welcome and what owners should know before visiting.

For destination partners, this means dog friendly tourism can go beyond producing a list of places that already accept dogs.

We can help more businesses understand how they could welcome dogs confidently, while helping visitors understand the standards expected of them in return.

That creates a stronger dog friendly offer for the whole destination.

Want help making your business more dog friendly?

Best Bark can help you think through your dog policy and communicate it clearly to customers.
hello@bestbark.co / **bestbark.co**

Or, if you already welcome dogs, add or update your Best Bark listing so owners can see exactly what your dog friendly policy is before they visit.

Important: This guide provides general practical guidance for businesses and is not legal, insurance, food safety or veterinary advice. Requirements can vary depending on your premises and activities. Businesses should seek advice from their local council Environmental Health team, insurer and other relevant professionals where appropriate. Assistance dogs are subject to separate legal protections and should not be treated as pets under a general dog policy.