



## On-Leash Reactivity

Dogs can be reactive (barking, growling, lunging) on leash to a variety of stimuli (people, dogs, small animals, etc.) for a variety of reasons including fear, insecurity, stress, excitement, practiced/learned behavior, and more. Often, humans fuel the fire by accidentally rewarding undesirable behaviors. The following tips can help you change this.

### How can you help your dog?

Working through a dog's reactivity takes practice and patience. You will need to:

- Manage Behavior until training plan starts
- Set your dog up with the appropriate training equipment (walking tools) for that individual dog
- Ensure your dog doesn't have any more negative experiences.
- Reward your dog for appropriate behaviors.
- Set your dog up in a way that encourages appropriate behavior.

### Management

If it is a new dog or training, it is helpful to identify the distance away from the trigger where the dog will begin to react. Try to keep the dog under the reaction threshold by avoiding the trigger (other dogs/animals, people or objects) until the dog has mastered the obedience. The goal is to get the dog to stop practicing the reactive behavior by creating distance; crossing the street, changing direction, or hiding behind a parked car are possible strategies. Walking on quiet streets during low traffic times makes this easier to achieve.

### Equipment

Always fill pockets or treat bags with tiny, high value treats (ex: cheese, chicken, hot dog, lunch meat, peanut butter) before every walk, lure (attract) the dog's attention away from the trigger this can be done using your voice or a high value reward. Remember, if the dog is allowed to practice reactive behavior, reactivity will become more frequent and intense. The strategy is to keep the dog under threshold, so it has no reason to feel unsafe.

The right equipment is very important for safety and success. Make sure the leash is in good condition and is no longer than 6 feet. Front clip harnesses can work well for some dogs such as the Easy Walk Harness, Balance Harness by Blue K9 or Freedom Harness. Head halters such as The K9lifeline Sidekick Leash, Gentle Leader, or Halti are also appropriate as they give good control by allowing you to control the dog's head which can frequently reduce reactivity by itself with proper conditioning. As always, every dog is an individual and no tool is ever a one size fits all approach so when in doubt, consult a dog trainer.

**Always approach training with a positive attitude, if you are feeling frustrated, stop the training and take a break.**

1. Choose an environment to practice where you have distance from frequently reactive stimuli (dogs, people etc.). Distance will be key to success. Consider going for walks when it is less busy, or in quieter neighborhoods during the training process.
2. Come armed with exciting treats (think high value) or a favorite toy.
3. Think about exercising the dog first. Allowing the dog to play fetch or run around the yard before you practice will help burn off some steam.



4. When you get the dog out to practice, reward **ALL** good behavior. Make sure you have a clear list in your head of acceptable behaviors; these can include looking at you, quietly looking at the other dog (then looking back to you), sitting, moving on a loose leash, relaxed body language, etc.
  - a. Pick a marker word “Yes” “Good” or use a clicker to mark the positive behavior and reward it with food, treats, toys or affection.
5. Watch your dog’s body language, so you can recognize the signs that your dog is getting overstimulated. We want to work with our dog when they are noticing the other dog, but they aren’t pulling, lunging, or are overly aroused. This distance might be further than you expect it to be.
6. Increase distance when your dog is struggling. Dogs have different thresholds; learn what that distance is for your dog.
7. Keep the training session short (15 minutes approximately) and try to always end on a good note.
8. Condition to your dog to a head halter (see teaching your dog to wear a head halter) to make more manageable

#### **Tips for success:**

- Once your dog is barking and lunging at something, your best plan of action is to remove them calmly and quickly from the situation. At that moment, the emotional overload he is experiencing will prevent learning or following directions. Back up get the dog to engage and then reward the dog for positive behavior.
- Don’t worry about trying to pass another dog on the same side of the street or getting closer to other dogs in general. It is much more important to work at a distance where your dog can be calm, to lay a solid foundation for the training.
- Consider other alternatives to physical exercise. Don’t discount mental exertion! Use puzzle toys or food dispensing toys, spend time training and teaching them new tricks, or even create your own at-home agility course to combine physical and mental stimulation. Daily enrichment is necessary for our dogs!
- As always if you feel you are struggling with your training or need additional help reach out to a certified professional for guidance.