

REACTIVITY

Dog reactivity refers to a dog's tendency to engage in reactive displays towards other dogs or stimuli in their environment. This behavior can range from barking, lunging, or growling to more intense reactions. Some reactivity is frustration based, an inability to interact with another dog or person. Other reactivity is fear based. They bark and lunge to create distance from scary triggers. It is important to address dog reactivity promptly to ensure the safety of the dog and others. Here are three easy ways to work with dog reactivity:

1. **Management:** It is essential to implement strategies to prevent your dog from rehearsing undesired off and on leash behaviors. Putting visual barriers up along fence lines or windows in the home and car can minimize ongoing reactivity. Avoiding areas on walks that are high traffic or with known triggers your dog reacts can be helpful while you work to improve your dog's behavior.
2. **Positive Reinforcement Training:** Using positive reinforcement techniques can be highly effective in managing and modifying dog reactivity. Keeping a treat pouch full of high value goodies or preferred toy with you on all walks helps to sweeten up the deal for them when passing other dogs at a distance. Reward your dog with treats, praise, or play whenever they exhibit calm and non-reactive behavior in the presence of other dogs or triggers. By associating positive experiences with these situations, your dog will gradually learn to remain calm and relaxed. The videos below show different training games you can play with your dog to improve their behavior on walks. Start playing these games in a low distraction environment, like inside your home. You can gradually move to busier areas as your dog gets the hang of the game!
 - **U-Turn:** If a trigger suddenly appears and there is a need to create distance quickly, a "U-Turn" behavior can be very effective
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eo-L2qtD7MQ>
 - **Engage/Disengage:** This game teaches your dog to check back with you for a reward instead of overreacting to triggers:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVwA-htFcO4>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhN0bcftz7k>
 - **Find It:** This is a relatively easy, but useful game that can also encourage engagement in the environment while building a positive association with the outside world and the scary triggers that come with it. The following video walks you through how to get your pup solid on playing the "find it" game.
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=27&v=rwyRCH4n7ro&feature=emb_logo

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3. **Controlled Exposure:** Controlled exposure involves gradually exposing your dog to triggers or other dogs in a controlled and safe manner. Start at a distance where your dog can remain calm and focused, and gradually decrease the distance over time. If you find your dog reacting when over threshold on a walk or during training, create the distance necessary to bring them back to baseline. This approach helps desensitize your dog to the triggers, allowing them to develop positive associations and reduce reactivity. It's important to move at your dog's pace and not rush the process.
4. **Seek Professional Help:** If your dog's reactivity is severe or persistent, it is advisable to seek guidance from a professional dog trainer or behaviorist. They can assess your dog's behavior, create a tailored training plan, and provide guidance throughout the process. A professional will have the knowledge and experience to address specific triggers and develop a comprehensive training program to help your dog overcome reactivity. Please see our trainer referral list for vetted area trainers with a focus on dog reactivity.

Remember, working with dog reactivity requires patience, consistency, and understanding. Each dog is unique, and progress may vary. With time, proper training, and a supportive environment, you can help your dog become more confident and comfortable in social situations.

Check out this FREE Reactivity Training Course!

<https://onlineschool.instinctdogtraining.com/course/training-leash-reactive-dog>

