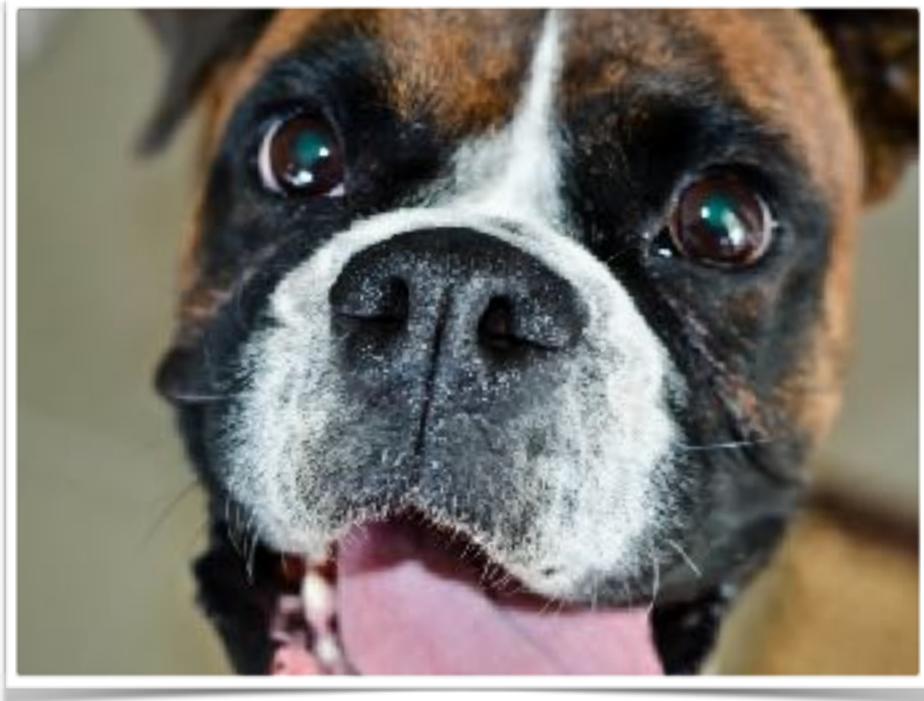


From Frantic To Focused:

How to Decrease Your Dog's Reactivity to Other Dogs - 7 Skills Your Dog Needs To Know



Reactive Dogs

The struggle...

All you want to do is take your dog for a walk and both be able to enjoy it. But you have a reactive dog.

While some people seem to be able to have a glorious relaxed walk through a field of daisies with a dog that only has eyes for them, you get the dog that is sweet at home but an embarrassing, hard to handle monster when they even see another dog on a walk.

Focus on you? Forget it.

This is unfair. It sucks. It's frustrating and can be an emotional roller coaster.

Let's fix it.

This is your roadmap to the steps you need to take to get it sorted.

Just like with our dogs, we need to break the training program down into steps. In this document, I'm going to outline all the steps you need to teach your dog the foundations of the program.

Before commencing training with a reactive dog it's important to have a training plan. The program I use to treat reactive dogs involves some crucial foundation work before training with another dog begins.

As dog to dog reactivity is the most common issue I see, I will be referring to other dogs as the trigger for your dog's reactivity but

please know that this training program also applies to dogs that are reactive to other triggers such as strangers, cars, skateboards etc.

By teaching these foundation skills to a reliable level before adding in training around another dog, you are setting your dog up to be successful a lot more easily than if you just jump right into an environment with other dogs around. It's important to always work with your dog at a level that he can succeed and be rewarded for.

The skills to teach your dog for this program are:

- Yield to leash pressure
- Loose lead walking
- Leave it command
- Place training
- Recall (come when called)
- Automatic focus
- Sit stay and auto sit on stopping

You should also have your foundations in place at home which are:

- Nothing in life is free principle around the home
- Relationship and bond - spend quality time together
- Leash manners
- Self control / impulse control

- Exercise and mental stimulation

Additionally your dog should be on a fresh natural diet, such as a raw natural diet.

Let's go into a little more detail on each of these exercises and how they assist with reactivity.

Yield to Leash Pressure

A tense leash creates a tense dog and a tense dog is ready to react. Yet, it is in a dog's nature to resist tension on the leash which is why so many dogs struggle with pulling on the leash. By teaching a dog to give in straight away to gentle leash pressure, we teach them to realise that it is a benefit to them to turn this pressure off and follow us instead of pulling ahead. By coming towards leash pressure each time they feel it, they are also learning to be more in tune with us and following us rather than doing whatever they want at the end of the leash.

Loose Lead Walking

Fitting in with yielding to leash pressure is a nice loose lead walk. Once you have taught your dog to give to gentle pressure, teach them to avoid pressure coming on altogether by following you by your side without any tension in the leash.

Leave It Command

The leave it command should be said in a normal voice like any other command, not yelled like a reprimand. When the dog hears this command they should stop what they are doing and give focus back to the handler immediately. This handy command can be used for anything you wish your dog to stop doing or leave alone such as things on the footpath you don't want them to touch, food scraps they can't have and of course, other dogs they are starting to stare at. It is

also helpful to interrupt your dog as soon as they start staring with tension in their face rather than trying to get through to a dog that is already lunging and in a frenzied state.

It's important to note that when teaching the leave it command, the dog never gets what they are being told to leave, even in training when you are telling them to leave food. We want the dog to learn that they can't have it, not that they can have it later on.

Place Training

Teaching your dog to stay on place (a bed or mat) is a very useful skill in many areas, especially around the home. When it comes to using it for reactivity, you obviously aren't going to haul around a dog bed wherever you go on your walks, but you can use the skill in your foundational training for a couple of different benefits.

The first benefit is the effect it has on the dog's learning of the stay command. Staying on a target like a raised bed is easier to understand for the dog in my experience. It's giving them a very clear job to do: stay on this thing, don't get off no matter what.

Secondly, it gives your dog an easy and enjoyable task to do with you. So the dog can concentrate on doing this thing and not worry about what else is going on. Team work encourages focus and engagement, and focus and engagement are underrated skills that can't be overdone.

We teach place training with a lot of rewards and make sure the dog is loving it. When they love it and it's easy for them to do, it's a great alternative behaviour to use in other training. They may not know yet not to lunge at other dogs but they know to stay on the bed and to do so calmly. When another dog is introduced later on, your dog can concentrate on staying on the bed and not worry about the other dog.

They can look at the other dog and take it all in but they aren't allowed to get off the bed or show any reactive behaviours towards the other dog.

Recall (Coming When Called)

A solid recall is one of the most important commands for any dog to know. We want the dog to know this one so well, and find it so worth it, that they will immediately stop what they are doing and come running to you as soon as they hear the command, including if there is another dog around.

When it comes to training a solid recall, it does take time. Practice on leash first, then on a long line. When it comes to dealing with dog reactivity, you at least want an instant response on lead, no matter what.

Of course you will keep working on your dog's recall but if you can get an instant on lead response, you can work up to the level of having other dogs around and getting an instant on lead response in that situation.

Automatic Focus

It's great to have focus on command, but even better when a dog knows that offering focus willingly without being asked is good idea. That's why automatic focus is so useful to teach. We want your dog to see value in offering you focus, in checking in with you and looking at your face (and not your hand with treats in it).

You can teach this by capturing and rewarding any focus that your dog offers willingly and on his own. Of course, always start in an environment that your dog can succeed in before making it harder, just like with all of these commands and skills.

Auto Sit On Stop

As part of a loose lead walk, your dog should know to pay attention to where you are going and what you are doing. When you stop, have your dog sit each time. You can encourage your dog to be looking out for these stop and sit opportunities by rewarding the sit each time you stop. With practice the stop will become a cue for the sit without needing to give the command every time.

Sit Stay

As mentioned earlier, you can't always carry around your dog's place bed and so your dog needs to learn to also stay without a target. I find that place training helps with the concept of the stay for both dog and owner. A sit stay can be used both as another alternative task you can do together on the walk and as a way to show your dog that no matter what is going on, you still need to follow the rules and be accountable.

A stay also develops trust in you. Your dog needs to see that if you've told them to stay, you're going to keep them safe and nothing bad is going to happen.

Yes AND No

It's important that your dog understands clearly what is desirable and acceptable behaviour AND what is not. Too many people leave out the no and only give their dog a yes all the time. I also believe that this is one reason that dog reactivity is on the rise and people are struggling to find solutions that work.

While we always want our training to be fun and heavily based in rewards, the dog must also understand when something is not acceptable to understand the full picture.

Teach your dog all of the foundation skills so that they are thoroughly understood by your dog. Once you know that your dog understands the command or skill you can add in corrections fairly but firmly to also communicate clearly to the dog what is NOT acceptable.

When you can check all of these off, you're ready to work with another dog at a distance.

So what's the first step that people often miss, but makes ALL the difference? It has to do with a loose lead walk and the way you start it...

The Way You Start The Walk...

The way you get ready and leave the house sets the tone for your walk. So if you put leads on in an excited frenzy before being hauled through the door, expect the rest of the walk to be just as relaxing.

When a dog learns the process I am about to explain to you, they learn to look to you for guidance as they know you are in control of what happens. It's simple, yet powerful stuff.

This is your step by step guide to a calm departure which makes a big difference to your walk.

Remember - dog training takes patience - be more patient than your dog!

Step One - Pick Up The Collar / Lead

And then put it back down again. That's if your dog got excited, which most dogs do.

Repeat this until you can pick up the collar / lead without your dog going nuts.

If you set aside half an hour for a walk and this takes up the whole time, that's fine. Your walk time is now training time.



Step Two - Putting On The Leash

Repeat the same process with putting on the leash - insist your dog holds a calm sit position before you will proceed with

It's important to stay calm and collected during this process. Dogs don't follow frantic leaders - frantic leaders create frantic dogs. I'm reminding you this because I know this process can test your patience!

Step Three - Approaching the Door

Start towards the door. The INSTANT your dog forges ahead to pull you towards the door, turn abruptly and go back to where you started.

Don't look at or say anything to your dog. Your dog has to learn to follow what you are doing. This is your walk and your rules.

Repeat until you are at the door way.

Step Four - Going Through The Door

This is the big one. The most important step to this process.

With one hand on the leash, use your other hand on the door. Start to open the door.

The millisecond your dog forges to go through the door, shut the door immediately. You want your dog to think that every time they try to rush through the door, the door shuts, and the access to the outside world suddenly disappears.

While we're not aiming to hit your dog with the door, don't panic if you do by accident. Keep going as if that's what was meant to happen.

Your Next Step

Obviously there is a lot more you'll need to do to fix reactivity issues with your dog, but this process is the first step. I encourage you to focus on that for now - one step at a time.

So what's next?

You can go through the skills outlined at the beginning of this document and work through mastering them with your dog, one at a time. After your dog can do ALL of those things, you are ready to start slowly working around other dogs.

I would like to guide you further through this. You CAN solve dog reactivity.

Stay tuned for emails where I send out more tips on this process.