

On-leash “reactivity” to other dogs is not an uncommon problem. The dog’s behavior can be embarrassing and causes anxiety for people and dogs alike. The subtle signs typically start off with stiffening, whining or walking high on the dog’s toes when they see another dog. The subtle signs can eventually turn into a problematic behavior consisting of lunging, barking, or growling, as the dog’s behavior escalates over time.

Barking and lunging at other dogs when on lead are not necessarily “aggressive” behaviors. These behaviors can be signs of excitement, arousal, fear, and/or frustration. The dog’s frustration can increase over time when they cannot say hello to dogs or when they have an inability to flee from dogs that frighten them. Overtime, the dog responds inappropriately at the sight of the dog in an exaggerated, offensive, or overly “aroused” manner.

If the dog is permitted to continue to repeat these undesirable behaviors while on leash, the frustration will continue to grow, and the intensity and frequency of the unwanted behaviors may increase.

Managing and Modifying Your Dog’s Behavior

There are techniques and pieces of equipment that you can utilize to help with the rehabilitation process of your “reactive” dog.

- **Equipment.** There are two pieces of equipment that work best for dogs that are difficult to control on leash. A front-clip harness (www.freedomenopullharness.com) or a head halter (we recommend a Snoot Loop: www.dogswithissues.com) Dogs typically acclimate to front clip harnesses quicker than a head halter but you will have better control with your dog’s lunging and/or barking if you use a halter.
- **Controlling Your Dog’s Reactivity.** Proximity to other dogs is an important variable when attempting to work with your dog. In other words, at what distance can your dog see another dog and still be comfortable before becoming overly aroused or aggressive on a leash? Further, some dogs can remain calm around a small dog, a quiet dog or one that ignores them but may become more “reactive” when a dog picks up speed or gets too close.

You should be looking for are subtle changes in your dog's body language that switches them from calm to tense. These changes might be in facial expression, vocalization, posture, or more general communication.

Comfortable body language	Stressed or reactive body language
• Soft, open mouth • Relaxed walk • Relaxed, neutral, sweeping tail • Relaxed ears • Quiet • Steady or no panting	• Closed or tense mouth • Hard, direct stare • High on toes or stiff crouch • High, stiff, curled tail • Sniffing at ground or looking away • Raised hackles • Lying down or looking smaller • Pinned or flat ears • Whining, growling, or barking • Panting that starts or stops abruptly • Lip-licking or yawning

The methods listed below should be worked on when your dog appears to be able to respond to you, easily take treats and is calm enough to function without seeing the changes listed above.

Changing Your Dog's Emotion Response

Your goal should be to first change your dog's emotional response when they see another dog from negative to positive. While we really don't know much about a dog's emotional response without using a heart monitor, we can make educated guesses by observing and reading the dog's body language. When changing your dog's emotional response, you first need to take a few factors into account:

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- In what context can your dog be comfortable or neutral when he sees a dog (i.e., distance from the neutral dog, type of dog, behavior of the other dog, size of the dog, specific breed or type of dog)?
- Why is your dog reacting in a negative way when he sees another dog (i.e., fearful, excitement, threatening)?
- Does your dog do fine off the leash but not on the leash?

Once your dog's comfort level has been established, you will give your dog something wonderful each and every time your dog looks at another dog. This can be delicious treats, a favorite tug toy, Frisbee or ball. The dog need not do anything to earn the treat. You are simply making a positive association at the sight of the neutral dog. Good things happen to your dog when they see another dog. This can take a lot of time, patience, preparation, and repeated trials. You've done your job when your dog looks at a neutral dog and looks to you for the treat or toy.

Teaching an Incompatible Behavior

Once you have changed your dog's emotional response to the sight of a dog, you will work on rewarding an incompatible behavior to barking and lunging. Choose a reinforcer (also known as a reward) that your dog seems to love and never gets at other times.

You will now teach your dog an incompatible behavior to barking or lunging. Teach your dog to look into your eyes when you say their name. Start by reinforcing each and every time your dog looks into your eyes. Say, "yes" and follow it with a treat.

Once they are giving you lots of eye contact, say their name just prior to them looking at you. The more you reinforce this behavior, the better. Your dog should begin to look at you when they see a dog in hopes of getting a treat for looking to you for guidance. Once you have the dog's focus and attention, you should be able to ask them to sit down or come.



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