

WHEN DOGS (over) REACT



Does your otherwise great pup, lose his or her mind when they see a dog, skateboarder or delivery truck? If so, you have a reactive dog. Often these dogs lose out on activities with their people because they can be so difficult to manage, but it doesn't have to be this way.

Reactive dogs can be fixed, but it takes focused effort. Trying to fix a behavior at the end of the day when you're exhausted, distracted or focused on other things doesn't work. Ideally, set up time to work on this when you're in the training frame of mind, a Saturday morning for example. Work in short intervals; 5-10 minutes in areas with lots of triggers.

And until you have the problem resolved, when you don't feel like training, walk in places where you don't see the thing that triggers your pup (dogs, delivery trucks, etc). If this isn't possible, walk with a Gentle Leader Head Halter so you can control your dog's mouth and not have a bad situation.

First Move Past the Trigger

- Focus on your dog and the environment - all the time
- Place yourself between your dog and the trigger
- Get distance between your dog and the trigger - enough distance that your dog is able to keep their cool
- Distract your dog -
 - Leave it (tells them what you want them to do)
 - Look exercise (works great for dogs with anxiety)

Repeat this activity over and over again, each time tracking your dog's comfort level. The number of repetitions you'll need to do depends on the severity of the issue and your dog's personality.

*If dog knows you
have their back
they don't have to
react*

*Prove to them
that you do by
seeing and
reacting to their
triggers*

then Stationary while trigger passes

This is tougher since there's nothing for the dogs to do with their excitement and anxiety. So it really helps to give them something to do with that building energy. The steps are the same as above, almost:

- Get enough distance and place yourself between your dog and the trigger
- Have your dog sit then step on their leash (at a point where they can sit and lay down but not jump up)*
- Distract your dog -
 - Leave it (tells them what you want them to do)
 - Push-up's - Touch - Paw - Salute, etc (don't push for look here)

*This can be tricky so if you need to, use something secure like the leg of a bench, sign post or tree.

The goal is to support while continuing to increase the challenges.

If you're struggling, you're too close, get enough distance to make this easy

Did they chill for 30 sec?? Celebrate!!

Puppy Pacifiers

Have a new pup? Or a highly energetic dog? If so, try the following homemade puppy pacifiers to engage them in a short activity on their own.

DIY ideas:

Frozen buckets – pick up a small bucket (the kind kids use for sand is perfect but any size will do) add inside some dog food, a hard bone, a rope toy, some treats, whatever you're comfortable feeding or giving your pup. (I typically put a few ice cubes so it freezes fast as well) then add water and put in the freezer overnight.

Bring it up a notch: Add a leash to the mixture before it freezes (be sure half of it is extended out of the bucket) then hang it from something in your yard to give them a tether ball or piñata type treat.

Toilet paper rolls – paper towel rolls – pizza boxes – often these are made with basic paper so they process through dogs bodies quickly and without difficulty. Place some kibble or treats in the rolls, fold in the ends and let your pup enjoy. For the pizza boxes, smear peanut butter on the oily area at the bottom of the box and add a few treats. Close the lid tight (they need to work for it), then let them at it – Note....this one can be messy so be sure to give this to them outside or in an area you don't mind peanut butter in.

Thrown food/treats – No assembly needed. I like doing this with dry cat food but any kibble will do. It can be done inside or outside but I recommend starting in a small area to be sure all food is cleaned up. Take a small handful of food, toss it in the yard and encourage your dog to Find it! As she searches – and is rewarded for searching by tasty cat food – encourage her to continue and expand her radius until she gets every piece. Some dogs need to be encouraged a few times but for many the cat food is enough. Note: if you have a competitive dogs or a dog who may fight over treats/food, be sure you do this activity with only one dog at a time.

Have a lab, shepherd or similar dog? See if you notice their personal search pattern, many naturally search in large circles or grids.

Hide n Seek – Play with your pups by asking them to Sit and Stay then running off and hiding somewhere in the house, then calling out or whistling to get them to find you. Celebrate excitedly once they find you and repeat often. Challenge your dogs by moving or hiding in different places (not teasing, playing). A modified approach to this activity is to hide toys and treats in different locations in the house or yard (don't forget their crates and favorite places). This is a great way to get your dog involved with their environment and give you a little down time.

Recycle water and soda bottles – Many high activity dogs need an outlet for their energy, an empty water or soda bottle can be just that (think of a kid with a hunk of gum in their mouth chopping away happily). Place it in an old sock to protect your pups mouth.

Bring it up a notch: Toss some treats or kibble inside and leave the lid off to use as a slow feeder.