



ON-LEASH DOG REACTIVITY

Dogs that display on-leash dog reactivity may lunge, pull, whine, bark, growl, and/or snarl at other dogs while on leash, and some may even snap or bite if they get close enough to another dog. Many of these dogs are actually friendly to other dogs when allowed to meet off-leash, but can be difficult to manage on-leash.

Reactive behaviors may occur for different reasons. Many dogs display on-leash reactivity because of frustration – they want to get near the other dog but are not able to. Dogs may vent this frustration through barking and pulling, which may escalate to growling and lunging over time as their frustration builds. Some dogs may just lack proper dog skills due to not having enough experience meeting and interacting with other dogs. Other dogs may behave this way out of fear, and they have learned acting this way makes the scary thing (other dogs) go away.

It is important to understand why your dog is reactive on-leash, but there are a few guidelines to follow that will allow you to safely walk your dog and enjoy doing so.

Bring treats. When you see another dog on a walk, lure your dog's line of sight away from the other dog with delicious treats and keep walking. Even if your dog is reacting, use the treats to distract him and guide his attention away so he focuses on you instead. The treats will need to be especially yummy in order to compete with all of the distractions in the environment, especially the other dogs. Eventually, your dog will learn that seeing other dogs = getting treats from you.

Increase distance. It is important to not let your dog practice reactive behaviors. Every time your dog engages in these behaviors, they become more ingrained in his behavioral responses. Whenever possible, deliver treats to your dog *before* he is so close to the other dog that he starts reacting, as it can be difficult to get his attention once he is having a full-blown reaction. This means you may need to change directions or increase space between you and the other dog to prevent your dog from reacting, then deliver the treats at a 'safe' distance (see graphic on back). Choose walking routes that will allow you to increase the distance between your dog and other dogs.

Teach your dog to 'look'. You can speed up the training process by teaching your dog to look at you on cue. Hold a treat in front of your face, and when the dog makes eye contact with you, deliver the treat. Once he seems to catch on to the idea that looking in your eyes means he gets a treat, start saying 'look!' as he does so. Gradually stop using the lure of holding the treat by your face, and just say 'look!' and give him a treat when he does so. Practice this indoors and eventually outside in your yard, and then when going for walks. You can also use your dog's name instead of the word 'look'.

Hold off on taking walks. It may be best to avoid dogs the first few weeks after bringing home a new dog that displays on-leash reactivity. Work on behaviors like 'look' indoors and in your yard so that they are well-rehearsed by the time you go out for your first walk.

Animal behavior questions?

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Avoid dog parks. Many dog-reactive dogs are not suitable to take to dog parks. Until you get to know your dog's off-leash behaviors better, do not take him to a dog park. Try introductions and play time with your family's/friend's dog-friendly dogs first.

Use special equipment. A head halter (e.g., Gentle Leader) or front-clip harness (e.g., Easy Walker, Freedom) can assist in controlling your dog's movements on leash and discourage pulling. Be sure to use them as directed.

Don't use punishment to treat the behavior. Using verbal or corporal punishment (i.e., yelling, hitting), popping the leash, or using aversive equipment like prong collars, choke chains, or shock collars can worsen reactivity for many dogs. When these types of techniques and equipment are used, dogs may build negative associations with their handler or other things in their environment. For instance, a dog barks and lunges on-leash when it sees other dogs out of frustration, so the dog is fitted with a prong collar. Now every time the dog sees dogs on leash, it

experiences pain from the prongs. Though the dog may temporarily stop barking and lunging on-leash, dogs can tolerate increasing amounts of pain over time, so the lunging will likely return. Further, the dog may begin to associate pain with the sight of these 'triggers', which can result in aggressive behavior towards other dogs over time. Dogs learn best by communicating to them what behavior we do want and reward them for that behavior, rather than punishing them for the behavior we *don't* want. For these reasons, the use of positive reinforcement and humane equipment described above is preferred over these other methods.

Sign up for training classes. Training classes can provide you with further information on how to work with your dog-reactive dog. NHS has classes designed specifically for these dogs and can also work with you on a one-on-one basis. If you work with a trainer outside of NHS, look for one who holds a certification and uses positive reinforcement techniques.

Green zone:

Dog is relaxed:

- loose body
- sniffs ground
- explores environment
- distracted with treats
- able to get his attention

You should:

- give treats and praise (use 'look' cue if trained)
- remain at a comfortable distance from the other dog

Yellow zone:

Dog starts to engage:

- slows down
- stiffens/becomes tense
- stares/focuses
- less interested in treats
- may not be able to get his attention

You should:

- lure attention with treats (use 'look' cue if trained)
- create distance between you and the other dog (U-turn or change directions)
- treat and praise for calm behaviors/focusing on you

Red zone:

Dog is reacting:

- barks
- growls
- snarls
- lunges
- uninterested in treats
- unable to get his attention

You should:

- quickly create distance between you and the other dog (U-turn or change directions)
- distract with treats once able to get his attention (use 'look' cue if trained)
- treat and praise for calm behaviors/focusing on you



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