

LEASH REACTIVITY

Presenting Behavior

Your dog may lunge, pull toward and/or bark at people and other dogs while on their leash. If you know your dog likes to play with other dogs, this is probably good news — another reminder that your dog is social. However, there are challenges with meeting other dogs on a leash: since the leash restricts your dog's ability to approach and investigate other dogs, this can lead to increased excitement and agitation and eventually frustration. Your dog may start associating this frustration with the sight of other dogs. Most dogs, when off leash, naturally meet from the side (in an arc) and sniff each other in a polite greeting, but only for a few seconds. When on leash, dogs are forced to approach head on and are unable to turn their bodies for a relaxed and appropriate greeting. This can come across as more threatening to other dogs. Most dogs do not want to fight, so they display threats (lunging, snarling, snapping) to make the threat go away. On their leash, they have nowhere to go.

Early Signs of Stress

- Pacing
- Panting
- Scratching
- Smelling the ground
- Lip licking
- Flattened ears
- Low tail

Common Signs of Stress

- Stiff body
- Snapping
- Growling
- Barking
- Lunging

Management

Avoid situations that would put your dog over their threshold. Remember, the goal here is to keep your dog from barking or lunging or doing any other kind of reactive behavior. (A

good way to tell if your dog is under their threshold is if they accept food or treats.) Follow these tips to help manage your dog's stress on the leash.

- Identify and make a list of your dog's triggers (i.e. men, children, other dogs), as well as how close they can get before your dog is triggered. Keep an eye out for these triggers when you're out with your dog and avoid areas where you might be cornered or unable to create distance between your dog and the trigger.
- If available, try using barriers (i.e. cars, bushes) so your dog cannot see the trigger.
- If you see a trigger, turn and walk the other way while talking encouragingly to your dog. Keep walking until your dog is comfortable with the distance.
- If you can't avoid approaching the trigger, try to go around them in a wide arc.
- Keep your dog's attention with encouraging talk or with treats. Reward your dog more often if that's what it takes to keep their attention.
- Each negative experience will set your dog's progress back, so go slow! Don't try to decrease the distance between your dog and their triggers too quickly or you might only make things worse for them.

Obedience Training

- Practice attention redirection with the following exercises:
 - Name attention
 - Back up U-turn
 - Touch
 - Watch and find it
- Train a strong sit: start in low distractions and build until your dog will pay attention to you no matter what's going on in the background. Once they've got that down, see if your dog can watch attentively while sitting.

Leash Reactivity Training (Desensitization and Counterconditioning)

- When you see a trigger, create enough distance between your dog and the trigger so that they'll take food. (Remember, scared dogs will have a hard time eating.)
 - If you need to create distance between your dog and the trigger, turn and walk the other way while talking encouragingly to your dog. Keep walking until your dog is comfortable with the distance. (Don't worry about getting them to walk on a loose leash to create distance if necessary.)

- When you're a safe distance from the trigger — but still able to see it — start rewarding your dog with high-value treats (i.e. meats and cheeses). Keep rewarding them until the trigger is out of sight.

Objectives

- First and foremost, keep your dog calm.
- Create positive associations with your dog's triggers. Instead of having your dog get scared when they see their trigger, you want them to think positively.

Important Rules to Follow

- **Follow the order of events.** Don't give your dog treats until *after* they see their trigger. This is very important because you want the trigger to precipitate the treats. The treats start coming continuously when the trigger appears and stop coming when the trigger disappears.
- **Use high-value treats.** In fact, these should be the most special treats you have in your arsenal. (You don't want to be giving these treats out for just *anything*. Also, consider switching up the treat — sausage one week, cheese the next, etc. — every so often.) Have these treats with you every time you go on a walk in case you run into your dog's trigger along the way.
- **Don't forget to make a list of your dog's triggers!** In addition to the trigger itself, take note of how close your dog gets before they start to react, or how long they can stand to be around their trigger before it starts to get to them.