



## **Are You a Member of Leash Lungers Anonymous? (aka The Midnight Dog Walker's Club)**

You are probably a member of LLA if while walking, your dog sees another dog and proceeds to do any of the following: lunge, jump, whine, growl, bark, thrash about, and/or seemingly turn into Cujo. Leash reactivity is a dog behavior issue that has become extremely common. It is an interesting fact that approximately 95% of dogs that react while on leash, are not in fact, dog aggressive. Most of these dogs can successfully socialize when they are OFF leash. The boundary and restraint of the leash seems to exacerbate the reasons that usually cause this type of reactivity:

1. **Fear**-Go Away, Go Away! Please give me space!
2. **Frustration**-Hey, come back here! I'm DYING to play with you!
3. **Past Experience**-Other dogs= Bad
4. **Punishment**-Other dogs= Pain
5. **Genetics**-All dogs have some reactivity due to their natural survival instincts and territoriality.

For owners, it is embarrassing, scary, and stressful to see their dogs behave in such a crazy, aggressive looking way. For many people, the walk eventually becomes so dreadful, they stop walking their dogs all together, which is never good. When dealing with leash reactivity, it is important to remember that this is behavior modification and there is no quick fix or magic pill. Success depends on how much work the owner is willing to put into it. Unfortunately, people tend to be impatient and if there is not a significant improvement within about 2 weeks, owners tend to give up and go back to being a member of The Midnight Dog Walkers Club. It doesn't have to be that way!

Here's the deal: Leash reactivity is almost always progressive and the more we practice anything, the better we get at it. There is a good chance your dog has practiced reacting to other dogs so much that he has become an expert! Not only that, but now it's his habit. We all know It can take months to make or break a habit. Your goal is to prevent your dog from practicing the undesired behavior and introduce a desired behavior! Redirect, redirect, redirect. Stop concentrating on what you don't want and start teaching your dog alternative behaviors and games so you can communicate what you DO want.

### **Teach your dog to do this:**

1. SIT and keep his attention on you while another dog walks by. As long as he keeps his eyes on you, the treats keep coming. It's an OPEN BAR!
2. Name Recognition-Turn his head and look at you.
3. Touch (Hand Targeting) - Touch your hand with his nose.
4. About Turn Party-When you see another dog, immediately turn the other way, run and have a party!
5. Find It! -Toss a handful of treats on the ground, away from the other dog.

### **What You Need:**

1. A hungry dog that has gotten out some energy with a game of tug, fetch, or Flirt Pole.
2. A head collar (Gentle Leader or Halti) or front connecting harness.
3. 4 to 6 ft. leash (No Flexi leads) *Hands free belt leashes are highly recommended.*
4. The most delicious, stinkiest treats in the whole wide world that your dog never gets except during the walk.

### **During the Walk:**

1. Never, ever allow on-leash greetings!
2. Creating distance will always help. Figure out your dog's critical distance. How far away from the other dog must he be in order to keep under threshold?
3. Create or find barriers to put between your dog and the other dog, such as your body, bushes, cars, etc.
4. Don't wait for your dog to start reacting before redirecting him. Know the triggers, anticipate that your dog will react, and constantly be aware of your surroundings.
5. If you get caught off guard and your dog goes over threshold, don't try to re-direct, just get out of there and create distance as fast as possible.
6. Stay positive and practice calm persistence.
7. Give your dog constant feedback and encouragement. If you don't feel like a happy, jolly, fool, you're not doing it right!

Finally, it is important for owners to be aware of their own behavior when their dog is reacting on leash. Are you tensing up on the leash, yelling, yanking, punishing? Has this become your habit? If I could interview your dog, would he tell me that you were a great owner except for the fact that you freak out every time you see another dog on leash? If we want our dogs to be calm, we must learn to be calm and know that with leash reactivity, aversive techniques will only make things worse, never better. With a plan that includes patience, consistency, counter-conditioning, and desensitization, leash reactivity can and will get better. You will, in fact, reach a point where you don't have to dread the walk anymore. Don't give up and remember to BREATHE & BELIEVE!

