



## LEASH *Reactivity*

### ARE YOU A MEMBER OF LEASH LUNGERS ANONYMOUS?

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You are most likely a member of LLA (Leash Lunger's Anonymous), if while walking your dog on a leash, and he sees another dog, he proceeds to do any of the following: lunge, jump, whine, growl, bark, thrash about, and go berserk. Leash reactivity is a dog behavior issue that is extremely common. It is interesting to note that a very high percentage of dogs that react while on leash, are not in fact, dog aggressive. Many leash-reactive dogs can successfully socialize when they are OFF leash. The boundary and restraint of the leash often exacerbates the reasons that cause this type of reactivity:

- **Fear-** Go Away, Go Away! Please give me space!
- **Frustration-** Hey, come back here! I'm DYING to play with you!
- **Past Experience-** Other dogs= Bad
- **Punishment-** Other dogs= Pain
- **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 stressful and unpleasant, they stop walking their dogs all together. When dealing with leash reactivity, it is important to remember that this is behavior modification and there is no quick fix or magic pill. *It is imperative to understand and remember that your leash reactive dog is not giving you a hard time. On the contrary, your dog is having a very hard time.* Just like people, dogs can have extreme anxieties, fears, panic attacks, etc. Most people can empathize with these emotions and disorders, and like anxiety in people, leash-reactivity is not something that typically completely extinguishes. However, with management and training, it can get a whole lot better and we can give up our Midnight Dog Walkers Club membership.

Here's the deal: Leash reactivity is 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! 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. It is possible to teach your dog to make different choices and change stress cue to calm cues.

### ***Teach Your Dog:***

- SIT & DOWN Defaults - Keep attention on you while another dog walks by. As long as eyes stay on you, the treats keep coming. It's an OPEN BAR!
- Name Recognition-Turn his head and check in with you.
- Look at That! – Looking at the other dog results in delicious things!
- Emergency U-turn/ Get Out of Dodge- Make this a super fun game!
- Go Find It!- “Bowl” treats on the ground to re-direct attention

### ***What You Need:***

- A hungry dog that has ideally gotten out some energy with a game of tug, fetch, or Flirt Pole.
- A head collar (Gentle Leader or Comfort Trainer) or front connecting harness (Freedom).
- 6 ft leash (No Flexi leads)
- Super-duper delicious treats that your dog never gets except during the walk. As much as possible, feed all meals during the walk.

### ***During the Walk:***

- Never, ever allow dog to dog on-leash greetings!
- 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?
- Create or find barriers to put between your dog and the other dog, such as your body, bushes, cars, etc.
- 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. *Interrupt before he irrupts!*
- 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 quickly as possible.
- Stay positive, practice calm persistence, and understand that this process is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Give your dog tons of positive 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, punishment methods will only make things worse, never better. With a plan that includes patience, consistency, management, and training, leash reactivity can and will get better. Will it get perfect? No. Our dogs are not robots and none of us will ever do anything perfectly. However, you will reach a point where you don't have to dread the walk anymore. Don't give up and remember to BREATHE!