

## Dog Reactive Dogs and Overly Playful Dogs

Dogs that have poor social skills can be a volatile mix when put together. Many pet dogs don't have great social skills meeting other dogs. Because of this, incidents can happen when dogs that have poor social skills get put together or in a mix of new dogs. Not all poor social skills are aggression. Sometimes a young dog is overly playful, regardless of what the other dog wants, and this can lead to a fight as well. Below is a training plan for teaching your dog to "Honor" the presence of other dogs, ignoring them, regardless of their behavior and focusing on you. This will allow you to take a Dog Reactive dog into a pet store, vet clinic, and out for a walk without worrying about them starting an incident. This is accomplished by finding the dog's distance threshold for reactivity. These exercises need to be performed with two people and two dogs. The other dog should be one that your dog normally reacts to negatively. These exercises are best practiced outdoors in a neutral location for both dogs such as a park. This will remove territorial elements from the situation. Bring plenty of motivating treats or toys to keep your dog's focus.

- Be CALM and POSITIVE. Your dog will pick up on any negative feelings you have, which will make it much harder to extinguish the behavior or make any progress in training. We sweat continuously and dogs can smell the difference in pheromones and other chemicals that change as well as subtle changes in muscle tension and body posture or vocal tension that occurs when we are stressed out. If you cannot be calm and positive during these exercises, do NOT work on them. Wait until you can be. If you fear your dog will hurt someone, positively condition them to a muzzle so that the danger of them causing damage is removed from the situation so that YOU can be calm.
- Know the subtle signs that your dog is beginning his antisocial behavior which may include but is not limited to:
  - Stiffening of body posture, especially legs, tail, and neck
  - Body posture stiff and forward, ears and tail up
  - Hackles (fur on back of neck and rump) up
  - Growling
  - Intense staring
  - Tail straight up and wagging stiffly
  - Barking
  - Showing teeth
- Find the dog's "**Threshold**" for reactive behavior. This is done by slowly moving the dog/person your dog becomes antisocial towards (known as the "**Target**") in his direction until the dog starts showing the first signs of antisocial behavior. Once you have the threshold, you will know how far away the dog needs to be to be able to exhibit "good" behavior so that you can get his attention and reward him for that good behavior.
- Teach the dog a strong "**Leave It**" command. Once the dog has a strong response to the command, start using it in situations where the dog would normally become possessive. Reward the dog if he ignores the target he would normally show antisocial behavior towards.

- Gradually lower the Threshold distance by consistently practicing and rewarding him for good behavior (such as practicing eye contact, basic obedience, or simple tricks,) as you slowly bring the Target closer. If the dog starts ignoring you and focusing negatively towards the Target, move the Target back away and try again. This can take some time and should be practiced regularly (at least 2-3x per week if not every day).
- Reward the dog for showing calm or friendly interest in other dogs. Friendly interest looks like:
  - Calmly looking at the other dog without attempting to move towards that dog
  - Tail low and wagging
  - Ears back
  - Not lunging
  - Not vocalizing (growling, whining, barking)
- DO NOT touch, comfort, or try to calm your dog, especially saying things like “it’s ok!” to the dog while they are exhibiting the antisocial behaviors! This just rewards the dog for exhibiting those behaviors and teaches the dog that “it’s ok” to be antisocial! Only reward the dog when they are being neutral or friendly towards the Target or are ignoring the target and have their attention on you!
- NEVER punish the dog physically or get harsh with the dog when he is exhibiting antisocial behavior! All he learns from that is that when other dogs/people approach, you get mad and bad things happen. This may cause the behavior to become WORSE as the dog gains a more and more negative view of approaching people and dogs! We want the dog to learn to enjoy meeting other people and dogs!
- Reward all neutral and positive interactions between your dog and other dogs/people at all times by praising him, especially if that person or dog has been a Target in the past. He will learn that you like it when he is being social and will learn what behaviors cause him to get your attention and praise.
- Once the dogs can be in relatively close proximity while remaining calm, you can have them meet. If they attempt to sniff noses, then genitals, that is a good meet. End it there, even if the dogs look like they want to play. Misunderstandings happen during play, and many times one dog can get overwhelmed by the exuberance of the other. Play can escalate into a fight. It is best to keep these exercises calm and friendly rather than exciting.
- Sometimes leaving the area and ending the exercise without having the dogs meet is a good thing. The dog needs to learn to ignore other dogs, since we don’t always know how the other dog will react to meeting your dog. Reward the dog if he leaves the Target alone and follows you. DO NOT reward the dog if he is still focused on the target but follows you. He is using you as a power base to fuel his insecure negativity and doesn’t want to be away from that power.