

Understanding and Helping your Reactive Dog

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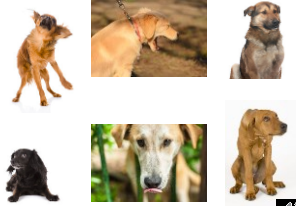
Why does your dog react?

- ❖ Can be excitement, prey drive, play or boredom
- ❖ Usually starts with fear
 - ❖ Fight, flight or freeze
 - ❖ Just like humans



What does fear look like in a dog?

- ❖ Won't take food
- ❖ Hyper vigilant
- ❖ Panting even if they are not hot or tired
- ❖ Pacing
- ❖ Covering
- ❖ Looking away
- ❖ Shaking
- ❖ Somewhat frantic
- ❖ Overly distracted



Which does your dog choose? Fight, flight or freeze?



How can you help?

- ❖ Choose the right trainer!!
- ❖ Identify trigger
- ❖ Determine specifics and environment
- ❖ Teach dog to see trigger without reacting
- ❖ Practice! Practice! Practice!



Choosing the right trainer

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT/ FORCE FREE

- ❖ Understands why the dog is reacting the way he is
- ❖ Has empathy and compassion for both the dog and the person
- ❖ Teaches the dog "coping" skills
- ❖ Teaches the dog a new behavior when the trigger is present (ideally)

TRADITIONAL/ DOMINANCE BASED

- ❖ Usually tries to explain the behavior using dominance theory
- ❖ Rarely understands the reason behind the behavior (or the triggers)
- ❖ Punishes the dog for being afraid



Identify Trigger **VERY IMPORTANT!!!**

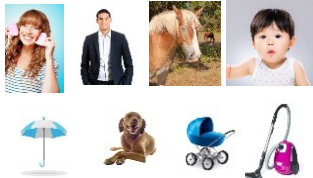
Identifying the trigger or triggers may be challenging. It can take some "detective" work.

- ❖ Who does your dog react to? Be as specific as possible
- ❖ What does your dog react to? Details are important
- ❖ Where does your dog react? This may vary
- ❖ When does your dog react? Is there something specific
- ❖ How close does the trigger need to be to start the reaction? Or how close does the trigger get before your dog notices it?



Who does your dog react to?

- ❖ People?
 - ❖ Men? Women? Children?
 - ❖ Sunglasses, hats, helmets or other clothing?
- ❖ Dogs?
 - ❖ A breed? Big? Small?
 - ❖ If they do a behavior first?
- ❖ Moving objects?
 - ❖ Bikes? Cars? Scooters? Remote control cars?
- ❖ Other animals?
 - ❖ Cats? Rabbits? Squirrels?
- ❖ Novel objects?
 - ❖ A new sign? A tarp on a car?



What does your dog react to?

- ❖ The more specific you can get the better
- ❖ This may become a process of uncovering “layers”
- ❖ The triggers may fluctuate or evolve



Where does your dog react?

This can vary and may seem “strange” but if your dog is already experiencing stress from the environment, he is more likely to react.

- ❖ Your house?
- ❖ On walks?
- ❖ At the vet office?
- ❖ At the park (or a specific park)?



When does your dog react?

- ❖ Does a dog or person have to look at your dog?
- ❖ Is it when you talk to another person?
- ❖ Is it when a dog is barking at your dog?
- ❖ Does it happen if another person let's their dog get in your dog's face?
- ❖ Is there are specific behavior from another dog or person?
- ❖ Is it if a car goes by quickly or is loud?



IMPORTANT!!

HOW CLOSE DOES THE TRIGGER NEED TO BE TO START THE REACTION?

If your dog is reacting you are too close!!

Reacting means he is OVER threshold!!

“When A Person is Drowning is Not the Time to Teach Him to Swim” (Haim Ginott)

HOW CLOSE DOES THE TRIGGER GET BEFORE YOUR DOG NOTICES IT?

Teaching needs to start BEFORE your dog is reacting

Your dog must be UNDER threshold to learn

If YOU notice the trigger FIRST- start teaching then



Steps to help your dog

- ❖ Prevent unwanted behavior
- ❖ Find a high value treat/reward
- ❖ Teach eye contact
- ❖ Teach sit
- ❖ Keep dog below threshold when trigger is present
- ❖ Reinforce looking at trigger without reacting
- ❖ Gradually move closer to trigger



Prevent unwanted behavior

- ❖ Any behavior that is “practiced” will get stronger
- ❖ Management is key to prevention
 - ❖ Avoid the situation
 - ❖ Create a barrier
 - ❖ Redirect
 - ❖ Limit access



Find High Value treat/reward

- ❖ “Value” is determined by your dog
- ❖ Anything your dog likes is fair game (unless he has food allergies)
- ❖ Food is typically better because you can feed it and repeat
- ❖ In some cases a game, trick or toy may be helpful



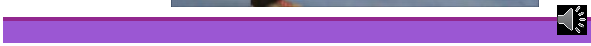


Teach eye contact (ideally with clicker)

- ❖ Teach your dog to look at you when you say his name
- ❖ If your dog looks at you on his own, reward that too
- ❖ Using a clicker creates a “unique” sound that means- a treat is coming! Eventually your dog will hear the click and look at you as a reflex.



Eye contact video



Teach Sit (with distraction)

- ❖ First teach sit in a quiet, low distraction environment
- ❖ Gradually increase the distraction
- ❖ Use to keep your dog focused on you when the trigger is present



Keep dog under threshold while trigger is present

- ❖ If dog goes over threshold he cannot learn
- ❖ Make sure you keep a "safe" distance when you see the trigger
- ❖ Let the dog look at the trigger, click and treat for not reacting



Teach dog to look at trigger without reacting

Tuck video



Gradually move closer to trigger

- ❖ Move at your dog's pace
- ❖ Learning may not be linear
- ❖ There may be set backs
- ❖ Go SLOW!!
- ❖ Stop before your dog reacts
- ❖ End with success



Tuck video



Other things to consider

- ❖ Natural remedies/ supplements
 - ❖ Zylkene, Anxitane, Thundershirt, Adaptil pheromones
- ❖ You may never completely "fix" the behavior- it may involve constant management
- ❖ Is this behavior "abnormal"?
- ❖ Medications?
- ❖ Behaviorist?



Some behaviors may be “normal” but they are still undesired or inappropriate for the situation



Prevention is the best medicine

- ❖ Safely socialize puppies
- ❖ Gradually introduce new dogs to new experiences
- ❖ If you go to a breeder- meet both parents
- ❖ Choose the right dog for your life style



Questions??