



Tips On Managing a lead-reactive dog

If you have a dog lunging, pulling toward, or barking at other dogs on walks, you will know how stressful and embarrassing it can be. You may be offered “advice” from well-meaning friends and relatives (who are not dog professionals) that only seem to make the matter worse. We have a few tips that may help you both.

A very good article to read is written by Reactive Dog expert Sally Gutteridge

[Reactive Dog Help](#)

A very good article explaining how you might feel if you have or adopt a Lead Reactive dog is..

[Reactive Dog Grief](#)

So, what to do? Here are some steps to improve the quality of yours and your hound's walks:

- Stop walking your dog in busy areas! It is really that simple. Fear reactive dogs are stressed when they see other dogs. They need space. They need time. They need their stress levels to be reduced as much as possible. It is vital you walk them in quiet areas, or at quieter times, until they feel calmer in general. Learn about ‘Trigger Stacking.’
- Invest in a good quality harness - we recommend the Haqihana DOUBLE H, Ruffwear Webmaster.
- Use a longer, adjustable lead (NOT an extending lead).
- Distance is crucial for reactive dogs. Please avoid dog parks, pavement walks and narrow tracks, where you have no option but to pass dogs. Your main aim is helping them to feel more at ease when they see other dogs, keeping them calm/relaxed enough so they are in a better frame of mind to learn and make positive associations.
- Whatever you do, keep your dog’s wellbeing your main focus. The walk is not about you. It is about the dog. What do they need? Where would they prefer to walk? We are not saying you can never walk in areas where there are other dogs in sight. But it takes a long time to create and nurture a positive emotional change.
- Verse yourself in counter-conditioning and desensitizing. Also have a look at engage-disengage games on the internet.
- If you have other dogs, it is best to walk your reactive dog separately, at least to start with.
- Cut down on high paced, frenetic and arousing activity as it releases stress hormones which will be detrimental and counter-productive to their progress. It is more helpful to your reactive dog if their activities are calmer.

- Please do not expect lead reactivity to go away overnight. It takes a long time before your dog will feel easier about the situation. Can people change their personalities/beliefs/fears overnight?
- Owning a reactive dog is a journey. Don't expect to go from A-Z without set-backs. It is a continual learning process. Take each day as it comes.
- Remember they are not behaving this way to 'act out' or because they are a 'bad' dog. They feel threatened.
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For those unavoidable situations, where suddenly a dog is hurtling towards you, you can teach a "This Way" command.

PLAN AND PREPARE! You will soon be accustomed to planning your walks and negotiating the best environment for your dog. A field is great for creating any distance necessary. Have some escape routes up your sleeve. Go armed with a selection of very tasty treats (they must be 'high value' to give your dog the wow factor when they see another dog), or even a toy if your dog is toy orientated. It really doesn't matter if you go to the same place – there will always be new sniffs and interesting things for your dog. When you are out on your quiet walks, practice doing some scatter feeds – throw some treats on the ground for your dog. This will help build confidence and positive associations.

Be creative in selecting your places to walk and again be mindful of certain times in the day also. It is better to avoid walking around residential areas, so find a suitable place and drive there. Try Industrial estates, local Cemeteries (morbid, but generally quiet and without dogs), one of our recent foster carers found a local Park and Ride which is perfect. They go later in the day. There are fields you can hire out the sole use of at a very reasonable price. Learn about dog body language and communication – observe both your environment and your dog for any potential triggers and changes in your dog's demeanor – these can be very subtle, from a yawn, a lip lick, a turn away, a lift of one paw, air scenting, displacement sniffing, to the less subtle freeze, shake off, growl, bark, lunge.

Set your dog up for success, setting realistic goals. When you start to bring other dogs into it (please don't rush onto this), start at a distance from any dogs. This distance all depends on the dog. Their unique 'threshold' could be 40 metres away, or it could be 400 metres, or even further. Your aim is to keep them at a distance where they are not stressed out by the other dog's presence. If they are becoming fixated on the other dog, you are too close. Scatter some treats on the ground to divert their attention and move away. Start within their comfort zone/bubble and provided you go at their pace, you will notice that over time that bubble reduces in size. This will happen as they build resilience and begin to understand they have choice. Know your dog's limits. Be aware of other dog's energies too. Exuberant and fast paced dogs can be unnerving for dogs who are wary of other dogs. Beware the dog that is running full pelt towards you. If this happens, get away quick!

So you are in a quiet area, and you see a dog in the distance. Your dog also sees the other dog. Excellent! Immediately get your dog's attention and reward. Do not wait for him to react! You can simply say Good boy/girl! And give lots of small and wondrous treats and praise in quick succession. You are teaching them to associate the presence of other dogs with something amazing! It should be like they are winning the lottery. When your dog looks at you for the treat, this is also brilliant as it breaks their eye contact from the other dog before developing into a stare. You don't even have to hand feed the treats. You can just

scatter them on the floor like a mini treasure hunt. Simple but very effective. They have had a positive experience, great, leave it there and walk away.

Mix it up and give your dog a breather. One day go somewhere you will see dogs at a distance, the next day, somewhere quieter.

If he barks and lunges at the dogs, your training went too far too fast. Or you just didn't realize a dog was nearby. Simply add more distance and repeat.

If your dog has harmed another person or dog, we recommend acclimatising him to a muzzle** for walks. This will keep everyone safe while you are working on the behaviour.

We also recommend seeking professional assistance. We can give you details of suitable trainers and behaviourist who will offer you a discount as a Suki's adopter. Please remember that your dog is reacting because he could be:

- Frustrated because he wants to go and play and the lead is holding him back.
- Scared/wary of other dogs. He may have had a bad/traumatic experience.
- Has been poorly socialised, if at all.
- Also consider that your dog may never have been on a collar/harness/lead before, so to be on a lead, for their own safety, is a very odd feeling to them and can easily cause frustration.
- In pain. It may be worth a trip to the vets to see if there are any underlying physical issues. In fact all good Behaviourists will insist on a preliminary vet examination.

Understand the physiological changes that happen when your dog is stressed. We all as humans experience stress and some of us will know what it feels to be at the end of your tether. Usually we would have undergone a series of events that have built up and hey presto, we are now at eruption point. Learn about 'trigger stacking.'

A common issue people find with reactivity is a dog who is not accepting treats when ordinarily they would. A dog refusing treats is a good indicator of their stress levels being too high. Dogs lose their appetite when stressed or fearful. Remember dogs need to be calm, in order to learn.

Unfortunately, stress is prevalent in today's society and it is no different for dogs. Periods of prolonged stress can wreak havoc to the dog's physical and mental health and they need time to recover and heal from this. I guess you could equate it to a "nervous breakdown." Stress levels do not go away overnight. In fact when a dog is overloaded with cortisol it can take weeks and weeks for this to dissipate. If your dog is stressed, then promote calmness and relieve them from any pressure, don't place unrealistic expectations or ideals on them.

REMEMBER:

Walking is a small percentage of their lives. It is not the end of the world owning a lead-reactive hound, it may mean making some changes to support your dog, but they will appreciate your efforts. Dogs have a relatively short time with us. We can spend too long trying to "fix" them, rather than just loving them for who they are.