



Managing Leash/Barrier Reactivity

Is your dog barking at the sight of other dogs or people through your fence, windows or while you're on your walks. If you are experiencing this, you are not alone. Leash and barrier reactivity are two of the most common undesirable behaviors in companion dogs. These behaviors are often fear-based or frustration-based. Even dogs that play well in an off-leash, dog park type setting can also experience leash or barrier reactivity.

What is Leash/Barrier Reactivity?

- Leash reactivity is the term for when a dog on-leash is pulling, lunging, barking and/or growling at the sight (or sound) of another dog.
- Barrier reactivity is when similar behaviors are displayed from a dog who is behind a window or fence who sees (or hears) another dog.

Tips for Prevention and Management

The good news is that there is a lot the owner CAN do!

- Prevent frustration by eliminating visual access through key windows or section of fence line. Close blinds, put up solid fencing, move furniture, etc.
- Maintain a loose leash and an upbeat, relaxed attitude when walking your dog. A taut leash or stressed dog walker can intensify the dog's behavior. It's important to focus on allowing your dog to sniff and walk and move around, asking them to hold a sit or down when another dog passes might increase their frustration. It's often best to keep moving, change directions or walk at a farther distance from the approaching dog.
- A front clip harness helps to divert pressure away from the dog's sensitive neck and limits the amount of restraint your dog is feeling — while helping to limit your dog's pulling. Be sure to use a fixed length, six-foot leash in place of a retractable leash.
- Carry high value treats (not the dog's everyday kibble) and use them generously when the trigger is present. If your dog is otherwise healthy, you can skip breakfast so they are little more food motivated for their morning walk. If you're dog isn't eating on walks, they're likely feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Take note of when they're opting out and try adding higher value, variation or more distance between you and whatever they're barking at.
- Select your walking routes wisely. Avoid congested routes or routes that offer little options for changing directions or moving further away. Walking head on towards other dogs is socially

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inappropriate for dogs and can add to stress, be sure to curve away when passing dogs or try crossing the street. Pick walk routes that allow for this.

- Be aware of your dog's body language and changes that indicate when your dog has noticed the trigger (ears will perk up or their bodies will stiffen). Treat then! Don't wait for them to start reacting.
- The idea is not to only reinforce your dog for staring at you — even though we just appreciate that they aren't barking. It's really important for the learning process that our dog's note the presence of the other dog is what's causing all the good things.
- Build a positive association. By managing your dog's proximity to the trigger and consistently reinforcing with treats with they notice triggers, you can slowly influence their emotional response in these situations to a positive one.
- Your dog can't learn and bark at the same time — so be sure to take a break to distract them, reorient them to you, *then* resume training. Your dog may do best watching dogs walk away to begin the training. They may also do best if you cross the street or take more space.

You Are Not Alone! Help for Your Leash Reactive Dog

If you do not see a change in your dog's behavior towards other dogs while on leash by using the above suggestions, consider a Reactive Rover class, which ARF offers. These classes are designed specifically for dogs that are sensitive towards other dogs when on-leash. By joining a class, you will be able to practice handling skills under the guidance of a trainer, troubleshoot common pitfalls in training and work in a safe and relaxed environment where exposure to other dogs is very controlled. To sign up for this class email dogtraining@arflife.org.

Alternatively, you can also consider hiring a private trainer who is knowledgeable in this area and that employs positive training methods. Aversive methods such as pulling on the dog's leash or using prong or choke collars to correct the problem will damage you dog's relationship with you and has been found to make reactivity worse.

Additional Information on Reactivity

- *Patricia B. McConnell and Karen B. London. Feisty Fido: Help for the Leash-reactive Dog. Black Earth, WI: McConnell Publishing, 2009.*
- *Kimberly Moeller. Reactive Rover. Kimberly Moeller Publishing, 2010.*
- *A wonderful resource for owners of reactive dogs: <https://dogsinneedofspace.com/>*
- *Self-guided 3-phase plan for reactive dogs including information on dog training basics: <http://careforreactivedogs.com/>*

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