



Creating a Calmer, Less Aroused or Reactive Dog

As with most things, prevention is easier than cure! Keep these suggestions in mind when raising your pup or living with your dog, and he will have little need to become reactive.

- ◆ Learn, respect and respond to your dog's body language/signals. Help your dog navigate the world without fear and without needing to defend him or herself by reacting.
- ◆ Keep your dog healthy and pain free.
- ◆ Don't take good behavior for granted! Reward offered calm, friendly behavior around dogs, kids, etc. Start early!
- ◆ Learn about your dog's thresholds, which apply to all aspects of training and behavior modification.
- ◆ Carefully and mindfully socialize your dog (every interaction should be a happy, positive experience!).
- ◆ Slowly build confidence for scary people, things, etc. by creating a positive emotional response.
- ◆ Teach puppies/dogs to enjoy handling, petting, grooming, vet exams using positive reinforcement or counter conditioning.
- ◆ Teach and reinforce calm behaviors such as sitting for attention. Don't inadvertently reinforce bad behaviors, for example petting when your dog barks at you.
- ◆ Teach self-control behaviors (leave it, stay, loose leash walking).
- ◆ Prevent your dog from practicing reactivity; don't allow barking at fences or windows, fights at dog parks, etc.
- ◆ Don't allow your dog to approach other dogs you don't know (especially on leash). Practice methods to distract and redirect your dog, so you can move away calmly.
- ◆ Use comfortable walking and training equipment (pain increases arousal).
- ◆ Remain calm yourself during dog interactions. Your dog feeds off of your responses.
- ◆ Be sure your dog has appropriate exercise and adequate rest.
- ◆ Reduce stressors in all aspects of your dog's life (home, daycare, dog park, dog sports, classes).
- ◆ Know your dog's triggers (what creates stress, over arousal or reactivity) and make every attempt to manage, avoid or change them.
- ◆ Know your environment! Avoid areas/times when triggers or stressors are likely to appear.
- ◆ Do not punish or correct your dog for reactive/aggressive behavior such as growling. This will only suppress the growl and cause your dog's behavior to escalate, possibly to biting. Growling is communication. Find the reason behind it and work to modify the situation or your dog's behavior by working with a professional if needed. And avoid painful or scary punishment for any situation; it can cause distrust and/or increase aggressive behavior.

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