



# *Teaching the* **Reactive Dog Class**

**Leading the Journey  
from Reactivity  
to Reliability**

**EXERCISES**



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# Exercises

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## Week One Mechanics

### *Help! I Need Four Hands!*

For class (and for many of your homework exercises) you are required to have two leashes on two separate collars/harnesses/headgear. You will also have a clicker in one hand and treats to dish out and deliver to your dog. Seem overwhelming? Here is how I recommend handling the equipment:

- Hang the treat pouch on your left side, preferably near your hip or on the backside of your pants. We want you to have ready access to the treats, but we don't want the treat pouch hanging in your dog's face. That's too distracting!
- Hold both leashes in your right hand, so that they hang in front of you, with the clicker, also in your right hand, pressed against the flat side of the leashes. This arrangement allows you to click with one hand and then reach easily into the pouch with your other hand and dispense treats to your dog in heel position while you're holding on to both leashes.

Although this is the way that I recommend juggling leashes, clicker, and treats, many times students come up with a more comfortable way for themselves. Whatever works for you is fine. You will test this system in Week Two when you put it into practice. ■

## Week One Home Management

### *Getting Your Dog to Say "Please"*

Teaching your dog that he can earn good things for himself by offering good behaviors, rather than “punishing him into submission,” is the key to showing your dog that you are able to provide leadership within a compassionate framework. You become the leader because you control the resources. This lesson also creates a dog that is willing to work for a variety of rewards and is an enthusiastic participant in the learning process.

You should be far more concerned about reinforcing desirable behaviors and preventing rehearsal of unwanted behaviors than about establishing “dominance” over your dog. The first training technique is based on mutual respect, trust, and support; the second technique is based on a framework that is oppositional in nature. No longer do most modern trainers resort to techniques like shaking, alpha-rolling, or hanging a dog from a choke or prong collar to “show him who is boss.”

Through methods based on positive reinforcement, the dog learns that he can earn the things that he likes by offering behaviors that you like. Many reactive, impulsive dogs are used to getting their demands met by offering some version of screaming “NOW!” at their owners through barking, jumping, mouthing, and so on. It is far better to have a dog that says “Please” by offering a nice, quiet sit when he encounters something he wants. Over time, you can train your dog to offer such “default behaviors” as the Default Sit, this week’s Foundation Behavior. (A default behavior is one that has been so heavily reinforced that the dog will offer it on his own, unbidden, in situations where he is uncertain, excited, frustrated, or wanting something.)

Start at home. By asking your dog to perform easy and well-trained behaviors before giving him things he wants, he is learning that behaving well is fun! Sit, down, or hand targeting are examples of easy behaviors you may request of your dog. Keep it simple but variable. Dogs love surprises!

While asking dogs to sit for their meals is a common practice in many households, you can take this practice to the next level by asking your dog to sit before getting scratches, going for a car ride, getting leashed up for a walk, or being released from his crate. For many dogs, petting and praising are extremely valuable opportunities for interaction with their guardians, so use these, too, to your advantage.

### **Beware of the Demand Disguised as a Default Behavior**

If in the course of this management program, your dog that normally barks, paws, or otherwise demands attention in obnoxious ways at home switches, for instance, to sitting, that's progress. But recognize it for what it is. Your dog is saying, "Look I am sitting. Put your book down and take me out to play!" Instead of acceding to his demand, ask him for another behavior that he can add to his repertoire of behaviors that say "Please." In that way, the dog's list of "Please" behaviors keeps growing while you are still the one making all of the training decisions. Of course, if you and your dog are out in the real world when he sees another dog, and he offers you a default sit, then rejoice and shower him with praise and treats!

You may find it helpful to make a chart. On one side of the chart, you can list anything and everything your dog likes, that he is willing to work for—from treats to toys to praise to the opportunity to be released from his crate. On the other side of the chart, you can list all the behaviors your dog knows. Before offering your dog something from the "my dog likes" column, ask him for one or more behaviors from the "my dog knows" category. The more your dog likes a specific reinforcement, the more likely he is to work for it, so if your dog *loves* the chance to play with his best doggy pal, you may ask for a few easy behaviors before delivering such a high-value reward!

This week, pay special attention to all the reinforcement your dog is getting "for free." While you may give your dog some things for "free" (never for bad behavior!), you should also start asking your dog to perform behaviors you like before granting him some of these privileges. ■

## Week One Foundation Behavior

### *The Default Sit*

Many reactive dogs also struggle with impulse control. These are the types of dogs that typically respond with the canine equivalent of screaming, “NOW!” when confronted with something they want; jumping, lunging, barking, or mouthing. Teaching these dogs the canine equivalent of asking “Please?” politely when confronted with something desirable can result in a huge improvement in quality of life and reduction in stress for these dogs and the people that love them. Imagine how nice it would be if, whenever your dog wanted something—a toy, being leashed for a walk, being released from the car or to his dinner bowl or to a bully stick—he sat politely and waited. Are you ready for the best part? You can teach your dog to offer a sit on his own, without being asked or cued, whenever he wants something! It’s called a default behavior.

The purpose of teaching a strong default behavior (in our class, “Sit”), is because we want the dog to be able to make good decisions for himself in the absence of instruction from you, the handler. If you happen to be out walking your dog and a neighbor stops to ask you a question, it would be nice if your dog chose to sit and wait politely as opposed to an inappropriate behavior he might have selected before class, like barking and lunging.

In her book *Control Unleashed*, Leslie McDevitt says “Truly conditioned default, or automatic, behaviors can override instinctive behaviors. A default behavior is one that the dog can fall back on when he is upset, frustrated, excited, or just plain wants something he’s not getting.” This behavior needs to be practiced to the point where it becomes automatic in nearly any environment.

You should begin practicing these exercises with the training equipment your dog uses in class and in a distraction-free environment. This allows both you and your dog to grow further acclimated to the tools you need to manage his behavior effectively.

You may prefer your dog’s default behavior to be a down as opposed to a sit. Both are equally effective, so use whichever is more comfortable and reliable for you and your dog. We often recommend sit simply because it is a behavior that most dogs already know somewhat well when they start attending reactive dog class. If you choose a default down as opposed to a sit, remember that lying down places dogs in a substantially more vulnerable position than sitting, so when introducing distractions, you may have to split your criteria even further than students who choose a sit.

## Training the Default Position

1. Teach your dog to sit, using shaping, capturing, or targeting.
2. Ask your dog to sit.
3. As your dog sits, click, and toss a treat so he has to get up and retrieve the treat.
4. When he has finished eating the treat, if you need to, say his name to get his attention. Watch carefully as he eats his treat, because as he finishes it, he will make a decision, either to look back at you or look back at the environment. If he chooses to look at you, capture his attention with a click and a treat! If you notice his attention is wandering back into the environment, quickly say his name and be ready to click and treat when he turns in your direction to respond.
5. Repeat steps 2–4.
6. Practice this behavior 5 times.
7. Move to another location. Repeat steps 1–6.
8. Practice for two sessions, of five sits each, per day. Bonus points for keeping some treats in your pocket as you go about your day and capturing offered sits outside of regular training sessions!
9. Practice in a variety of environments to “proof” the behavior.

*Note:* “Proofing” is the process of teaching your dog to respond to your cues in any situation. The process involves breaking the goal behavior down into tiny component pieces, gradually increasing the difficulty level at a speed dictated by your dog’s enthusiasm and understanding (as reflected by the rate of reinforcement you are able to achieve in a given session). ■

## Week One Emergency Behavior

### *Escape Plan: Getting Out of Dodge with U-Turns*

Imagine you and your dog are enjoying a stroll on a country road. It is a gorgeous, sunny morning. In the distance, you note a woman who appears to be walking four dogs. At this distance, you cannot determine if these dogs are leashed or not; they are just furry dots moving quickly along the horizon.

Having lived with a reactive dog for some time, you can't help but expect the worst. You feel the panic bubbling up inside of you. Before the reactive dog class, your dog would have honed in on the dangerous distractions ahead and would have attempted to pull you in that direction.

This week you are going to practice a new approach. Rather than moving forward, you are going to train your dog to turn 180 degrees and walk the other way. Your turning and moving in the opposite direction will cue your dog to turn and move with you, regardless of which direction you take.

If you practice this behavior to the point of fluency, you will be able to choose to avoid situations like this one and be proactive about preventing problems rather than placing yourself and your dog in a crisis situation. As a result of your efforts, your dog will see a clear path to safety: following your cue to turn and leave. You will give him the training and leadership necessary to keep him safe in what once might have been a dangerous situation.

Avoiding a reactive event successfully will feel great for you and your dog; it is empowering. Rather than letting the environment dictate the outcome of the situation, you can take the initiative to prevent stressing yourself and your dog. Click, treat for you!

One of my first reactive dog class assistants coined the term “wheeling” for the emergency behavior of turning 180 degrees and heading in the opposite direction—away from a potentially dangerous or stressful situation. She commented on how cool it was to see the dogs “wheeling around” with their handlers when they happily ran away from some of the difficult distractions we presented in class.

Initially practice these exercises in distraction-free environments so your dog can learn this behavior while remaining under his reactivity threshold. You can introduce distractions as your rate of reinforcement increases. Your initial goal should be working toward a high rate of reinforcement, where your dog is getting many clicks and treats per minute and is working with you enthusiastically. Only at that point should you begin introducing low-level distractions. Do practice with your dog wearing the equipment you are using in the classroom.

As with any well-practiced behavior, the dog should perform it with joy! To achieve this result, you will need to train the behavior in many environments and situations. Your goal behavior may have many different components: you want your dog to turn in any direction, at any speed, in any environment. With practice, your dog should be able to perform this behavior at a variety of paces, from a quick sprint to a walk even a tortoise might find too slow.

While you are training this behavior in public, do not be surprised if your neighbors think you are insane. I know mine did when I was training this exercise with Ben! We calmly walked together until, suddenly, I pretended to see another dog, abruptly wheeled around, and ran away with Ben in the opposite direction. I always completed the sequence with a rousing round of play. Don't be surprised if other park-goers do a double take when they see you pull this maneuver, continuing on with their walks looking more than a little confused.



When you first start practicing the U-turn, reinforce your dog when you stop your forward motion (left), reward again when he turns to the right with you instead of lunging forward to the end of the leash (center), and again when he completes the turn (right).

### Training the U-turn

1. Walk forward at a brisk pace with your dog on your left.
2. Stop your forward movement.
3. Click as you stop, offering your dog a treat while he is positioned at your side.
4. Start to turn to your right. As you do so, click, giving your dog a treat as you get to the 90-degree position.

Treating at the 90-degree position is especially important to do. Typically your dog will walk with you in a straight line but may fly to the end of the leash as you begin the process of turning, which offers him an opportunity to vocalize, lunge, or otherwise fixate on the trigger. You will want to control your dog's movement throughout the turning process, encouraging your dog to hug your side throughout the turn.

Later, when you are proofing this behavior, repeat the exercises while turning to the left.

5. Once the 180-degree turn is complete, click the dog and deliver reinforcement at your side.
6. Practice, practice, practice!
7. As the behavior becomes more reliable, you can begin to fade using treats in the beginning and middle of the turn, starting to click and treat the dog only as he completes the 180-degree turn.
8. Think about what you will use as a verbal cue. Turning of your body is a cue itself, but an additional verbal cue may provide your dog with helpful information and will likely come naturally to you, a notoriously verbal human!

*Consider using whatever words come naturally to you at a moment when you are nervous or panicked. Because this is a group class situation, I ask my students to “keep it clean,” but using a cue that is both practical and comes naturally will help establish consistency. ■*

## Week Two Home Management

### *“Calm Behavior Gets You Everything!”*

At any given point in time when you are with a dog, one of you is training the other. While this is common knowledge among trainers, you may be surprised to learn that your dog has trained you to do any number of things, usually in response to a behavior you don't like. Your dog barks, so you let him out of his crate. He jumps all over you because he is excited for a walk and then is rewarded with a walk. He keeps dropping tennis balls in your lap until eventually you give in and throw one, “just once.”

Attention-seeking behaviors may include barking, whining, jumping, pawing, biting at pant legs, or mouthing your hands. Attention-seeking behaviors nearly always result in the dog getting what he wants: attention! Remember the opposite of attention is not punishment; the opposite of attention is...drum roll, please ...*No attention!*

Whenever possible, it is best to deal with attention-seeking behaviors by getting up and walking away. If a dog is displaying a behavior that is difficult to ignore, go into another room, close the door behind you, and wait for calm behavior before returning to the dog or allowing him to join you. Even a flicker of eye contact can reward an attention-seeking behavior, so it is best to avoid making eye contact with or otherwise acknowledging the dog during this process. Unless it is an emergency, the general rule of thumb is, “If the dog is demanding you do something, try something else.”

Attention-seeking behaviors are the canine equivalent of a toddler screaming, “*Now! I want this now!*” Waiting for dogs to offer desirable behaviors and then rewarding them with attention and other assorted reinforcers creates dogs that ask “Please?” instead of demanding “*Now!*” This strategy creates dogs that make much better companions, since they have learned that the route to getting the things they want is through offering the handler what *she* wants. It's really a win-win situation!

Because attention-seeking behaviors typically have well-established reinforcement histories, if the handler changes the household rules, these behaviors frequently get worse before the handler sees improvement. Imagine that you have spent the last dozen years getting your favorite beverage from the soda machine at work only to find out one day that it doesn't dispense your soda when you press the button. On day one, you may mutter under your breath, mourning the loss of a dollar you will never see again. On day two, you may shake or kick the machine, uttering a string of soda-deprived profanities. On day three, you give up, walk down the hall, and try another machine. You tried harder at what had always worked previously before giving up a strategy that was no longer paying off, and attention-seeking dogs function in much the same manner.

Dogs can also feel frustrated at rule changes. For dogs that tend to use their teeth when frustrated, this can be disastrous. Implementing only one home-management change per week will lessen the amount of stress your dog experiences as new standard operating procedures (SOP) are established. When adding structure, it's important that you do so slowly and safely at a rate the dog can accept and adapt to readily.

Give your dog attention only when you want to reinforce the behavior he is offering at the time. Reward the behavior you like. When you encounter behavior you don't like, these are your options:

- Manage the environment to prevent the dog from rehearsing that behavior: Use baby gates at the entry to your home to prevent him from jumping all over you, for example.
- Ignore the behavior: This works for attention-seeking behaviors but not for self-rewarding behaviors like counter-surfing. Ignoring a counter-surfing dog as he eats an entire contraband pot roast will not make the behavior go away!
- Change the behavior by teaching your dog what you would like him to do instead.

You may find keeping notes in a place where your entire family can access them will be helpful in getting consistency. In the table below, you'll find that the end results are often the same for the dog, but the ways in which he earns those rewards may need to change considerably!

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the opportunities or circumstances where undesirable behaviors are likely to occur?
- What are the undesirable behaviors we want to eliminate?
- What is rewarding or maintaining these behaviors?
- How will I deal with this behavior?
- What do I want my dog to do instead of the unwanted behavior?

**Problem Behaviors and Solutions**

Opportunity	Undesirable Behavior	Reward	Solution
New guests enter the house	Jumping on guests	Touching, eye contact, scolding (talking), pushing the dog down (all offer attention)	Manage the situation to prevent the dog from jumping by putting him in a crate until guests have entered. Teach him to sit for greetings, where he can be rewarded with touching, eye contact, praise, or acceptable play.
Outside in yard unattended	Barking at neighbor's kids	Dog gets called inside, is given a treat for coming when called.	Manage the situation by supervising the dog at all times when he is outside. Teach skills like hand targeting so you can get and maintain your dog's focus when the kids come outside. Try to call your dog away before he begins barking at children. Reward eye contact.
Pot roast on counter	Raider of the Lost Pot Roast	Pot Roast Plus may be a fun chase game when owners "catch me in the act!" (until actual capture)	Prevent access to the kitchen if food is on the counter and you are unable to supervise. When you are present and able to supervise, consider training your dog to lie on a mat, then give him bits of the pot roast for waiting patiently while you prepare dinner.
In crate	Barking to be released from crate	Release from crate	Ignore dog for barking in crate if possible. Let dog out when he "says please" by sitting or lying down quietly.

Creating a similar chart for your dog's problem behaviors and identifying potential solutions may be extremely helpful! ■

## Week Two Foundation Behavior

### *Hand Targeting*

Hand targeting is such a wonderful, versatile behavior. It is one of the first behaviors I like to teach to puppies. Well-trained, a hand target can function as an “invisible leash,” enabling you to move your dog from one location to another without equipment or conflict. Guest wants to sit next to you on the couch? Use a hand target. While some of your friends may grab their dogs by the collar to pull them off the couch, and still others may have to toss treats to lure their dogs from the sofa, you have an easier solution: Simply hold your hand down near the floor, say, “Touch!” and, as if by magic, your dog just gets off the couch, offering her spot to your guest. You can use hand targeting to teach everything from heeling to interaction with various agility obstacles or the scale at the vet’s office!

Hand targeting can also be part of recall training. The presentation of a hand target is a nice, big visual signal to your dog that functions as a magnet, bringing him into your space exactly where you want him. Say your dog’s name, hold your hand high and then sweep your hand down so that your dog will come right into your body on arrival. If your dog is far away, you may need to raise your hand higher than if he’s close to you, but dogs excel at noticing even subtle movement and usually read an emphatic hand signal well.

Perhaps you have met a dog that, on hearing a recall cue, bounds back to his handler only to continue running gleefully past her, heading behind her at full speed. While the image may make us giggle, it’s not funny for the handler and may be downright dangerous for the dog, especially for a reactive dog. Incorporating hand targeting into your recall training can prevent such problems before they crop up.

Hand targeting is great for shy dogs and can be taught as a “cure” for hand shyness. Hand targeting provides “bouncy” dogs that jump up when meeting people a great alternative greeting behavior, since touching a hand target presented at waist height or lower requires a “four-on-the-floor” greeting. From a young age, I teach all of my Golden Retrievers to touch a person’s hand gently when it is presented in front of their noses, interacting politely for a brief moment before happily reorienting to and reengaging with me.

Finally, you can use hand targeting as an incompatible behavior to redirect reactive or aggressive dogs. Instead of having your dog lock on to and react toward a particular stimulus in the environment, you can teach your dog to target your hand when he encounters a trigger. If you want to get really crafty, consider teaching a duration target, where your dog learns to press his nose into your palm until released!

Remember to practice this exercise with your dog's training equipment on so you both will feel more comfortable using it.

## Training Hand Targeting

1. Rub food on your hand.
2. Place your hand half an inch in front of your dog's nose.
3. Click as he moves toward your hand, and then treat.



To start, you want your dog to offer lots of hand touches (and get lots of good rewards) from close up—only 1" or 2" away. As your dog gets more confident, you can gradually increase the distance he has to reach to touch your hand, or, separately, you can vary your hand position. Be inventive and make it fun.

4. Repeat, reinforcing your dog with a treat after every click.
  - a. Vary your location in the room.
5. Continue steps 1–4 until your dog is touching your hand immediately upon presentation. Try the following variations:
  - a. Place your hand above your dog's head.
  - b. Place your hand below his head.
  - c. Place your hand to the left of his head.
  - d. Place your hand to the right of his head.
  - e. Place your hand one inch from his nose; click as he takes a step toward you to touch your hand.
  - f. Place your hand two inches away from his nose; click as he moves toward your hand.
6. Practice this behavior ten times a day in a distraction-free environment.

## **Continuing Education: Default Sits**

Continue to practice your default behavior from last week. If all has been going well with your training, you can begin introducing low-level distractions, like the television playing quietly in the background. Adding distractions will help build reliability into the behavior and will keep the learning process fun, exciting, and unpredictable for your dog. Work in short sessions, a few times a day. ■

## Week Two Emergency Behavior

### *Creeping: Slo-Mo Wheeling*

One day I was walking Ben in my neighborhood when we encountered a black Labrador that had a well-established pattern of barking and rushing out the door to greet Ben and me each time we'd walk by and along his invisible fence boundary. Each time until that one day, that is. On that day, the Lab decided that the momentary displeasure of an electric shock from his invisible fence was a small price to pay for the opportunity to engage in actual unsupervised and rude greeting behaviors. He blasted through his fence and proceeded to insert his nose up Ben's butt.

I felt my belly start rumbling, the inklings of panic blossoming in my gut. Ben looked at me, surprised. I collected my thoughts quickly and gave him the cue, "Shhhhh-hhh," which signaled Ben that he and I were going to start walking together... very... very slowly. I knew if we ran at this point, the Lab probably would have bitten Ben in the rear and might well have decided to come after me, too. I knew our only chance to get away safely was to creep away as slowly and deliberately as possible. I continued to walk in this fashion with Ben for about 10 to 15 steps, until the Lab lost interest and walked away.

It was a scary moment, but exhilarating as well. Ben was able to make such good choices, whipping his head toward me at a time that previously would have been overwhelming and possibly dangerous for us both! I was able to rely on the hard work we'd both put into establishing reliable default behaviors. I remembered to "breathe and assess" rather than "scream and run away!" Ben was able to move with me, willingly, confidently, and comfortably, at any pace I dictated. Wouldn't it be nice to know that your dog will turn and keep pace with you reliably, allowing you to dictate where you go and how quickly you get there?

"Creeping" is "wheeling" with your dog, in any direction, at a speed slow enough that you could literally creep away from another dog without inciting any arousal at all from your dog or the trigger dog.

As with all the training exercises you will learn, while training this behavior you should always practice in a quiet, controlled, distraction-free environment. Do practice with all of the equipment you and your dog use in the classroom.

## Training Creeping

1. Walk forward with your dog at a brisk pace.
2. Begin to slow your pace until you are moving so slowly even a 90-year-old woman with replacement hips would say, “Hey, hurry up!” If your dog wants to speed up, talk to him in a slow and quiet voice, gently encouraging him to stay with you. You can stick a treat in your dog’s face to lure him at first if you need to.
3. Slowly come to a halt, clicking as you do so. Slowly reach for a treat, and feed him slowly, while he is positioned at your side.
4. Very slowly start to turn to your right. As you do so, click and give your dog a treat as you arrive at the 90-degree position. Try to deliver your treat slowly and in the correct position before your dog has a chance to forge ahead. If he does forge ahead, take a couple of steps back and use a treat lure to get your dog back into heel position. Keep a treat in front of your dog’s nose until he gets used to moving his body slowly.
5. Once the turn is complete, click the dog, reach for your treat, and deliver it slowly and quietly at your side.
6. Continue practicing this behavior.
7. As the behavior becomes more reliable, you can begin fading the treats you offered in the beginning and in the middle of the turn, only clicking and treating the dog as he completes the turn with you.
8. I find it helpful to place this behavior on a verbal cue as well. Ben’s cue was “Shhhhhh,” which was accompanied by my placing my finger up to my lips, just as I would signal a toddler to be very, very quiet. ■

## Week Three Home Management

### *Every Dog Deserves a Sanctuary of His Own*

It is critical for your dog to have a safe place, a sanctuary that he can call his own. Although you may have a dog that is not friendly with people or other dogs, you may want to have visitors of either species at your home at some point. Many years ago, when I was living with Ben, I still invited visitors to our home to bring their dogs along as well. When they did, Ben would go into his crate in our finished basement with a frozen stuffed Kong. As an added sound barrier, I put the TV on to help “normalize” the environment and allow him to relax without fixating on the sounds of activity upstairs.

Living with a reactive or aggressive dog can feel isolating. If you do not find ways to create a healthy outlet so you can live a somewhat normal social life, you may find yourself resenting the dog you love so much.

When visitors are expected, you will want to know the approximate time they will be arriving so that your dog will be in his Safe Space before they arrive. The Safe Space should always have fun things: a work-to-eat toy, a frozen stuffed Kong, an antler or marrow bone. The ideal fun thing is some item that your dog a) really enjoys and b) can enjoy safely even if you are unable to supervise. It’s a good idea to play soft music, the radio, or television as a distraction so the dog will have something other than the sounds of your human or canine visitors to focus on.

Make it clear that the visitors are not to visit the dog at any time without your presence and approval. The Safe Space room is strictly off limits, with absolutely no exceptions! If curiosity killed the cat, it may seriously injure even well-intentioned visitors and place you and your dog in an uncomfortable, potentially dangerous, position. Additionally, such an event may provide your dog with the opportunity to rehearse aggression and reactivity while reinforcing your dog’s belief that people are unpredictable and not tremendously smart about respecting his boundaries.

If your dog has a room of his own already, slowly begin requiring that he spend more time in it each day. Be sure that you are putting him in his Safe Space for variable amounts of time at different times of the day. Give him mentally stimulating toys unpredictably, referring to “Toys with a Purpose” (see Week Four, Exercise 1, page 28) for ideas if you are unsure of what to offer. Do put the TV or radio on while the dog is in this room: you want the room to sound as “normal” as possible. For example, if you usually listen to a certain type of music or watch a certain television show at the same time every day and your dog happens to be in his Safe Space during that time, choose those background noises to normalize that environment.

If your dog does not already have a designated Safe Space, the following tips will help you create one:

1. Decide which room you will be keeping your dog in. Your choice of room matters less than the room's security. Your Safe Space could be a room with a strong baby gate, an X-pen in a spare bedroom, or a guest bathroom that you rarely use. As long as the dog cannot break out of his Safe Space and has enough room to play with his toys, the space will be fine. To avoid creating a situation where your dog can develop or rehearse barrier frustration, do not use a room where the dog has visual access to visitors.
2. Feed each meal in this location. Prepare your dog's meal in another room, keeping him with you. He can be doing any polite behavior he likes (other than jumping, barking, and so on) as you prepare the meal. If he is behaving inappropriately, ask him to offer a behavior you like such as sitting or lying down. As long as it's polite, it's acceptable.
3. Once the meal is ready, take it to his Safe Space, and just as he is about to enter the space, give your verbal cue, whatever it may be. After he's entered the space, set down his meal. I use "Kennel Up!" with my dogs. In this way, eventually you will be able to send him to his Safe Space on a verbal cue from any distance. This is handy if and when an unexpected visitor arrives.
4. As you continue to develop your dog's Kennel Up behavior, ask him to "Kennel Up" from different areas and distances in the house. When that behavior is reliable, you can practice asking your dog to "Kennel Up" from an outside area, making sure that he can run quickly to his Safe Space inside.

From time to time, you may wonder if you should put your dog in his Safe Space to discipline him for undesirable behavior. I do this with my dogs because, in most cases, when my dogs get into trouble, it is because they are tired and overstimulated. I put them in their Safe Space with mentally stimulating toys so they can settle and de-stress. Within minutes, they fall asleep. If you make the Safe Space a happy place to be 99% of the time, then the 1% of the time you use it to give the dog a quiet environment to relax will not undo all your previous hard work conditioning the Safe Space as a happy place. While teenagers may be relegated to their bedrooms when they are "grounded," few hate their bedrooms because that is where all the fun stuff usually is! ■

## Week Three Foundation Behavior

### *Your Dog's Melting Point*

The first step in rehabilitating your reactive or aggressive dog is to determine his reactivity threshold, the point at which he is about to step over the line and react. At any time he is conscious, your dog is working on one of two levels: he is either “under” threshold or “over” threshold. If your dog is “under his threshold,” we call his state of mind “operant,” that is, he is able to process information from you, respond, and learn. If he is “over his threshold,” he reacts inappropriately to triggers—whatever sets him off in the environment—which severely limits his ability to listen to, respond to, or learn from you. Triggers are variable. Anything can be a trigger. The sight of dogs and people are the most common; however dogs can also react to specific triggers such as fast-moving objects or children’s activity. A dog’s ideal working threshold is below his reactivity point, characterized by his ability to notice the trigger without an inappropriate, undesirable, or dangerous response. A dog at threshold level may be physically aroused (often he has a slightly harder mouth when taking treats) but is able to eat readily and respond to well-known cues.

### **Determining Your Dog’s Working Threshold**

While you may not have a specific number of feet or yards in your head that defines your dog’s working threshold, you probably know instinctively how close your dog can come to a known trigger before he overreacts. For example, if your dog reacts to other dogs, you may feel fairly relaxed if you encounter a dog a football field’s distance away, but when another dog crosses the street and approaches you, you can feel your heartbeat quicken, your respiration rate increase, your hands get clammy, and your grip tighten on the leash. The same holds true if your dog reacts to people, and a stranger walks toward you.

Your dog’s threshold may be influenced by multiple factors: distance; time elapsed; the behavior, gender, or appearance of the other dog (some dogs may react more strongly to dogs of a particular size, gender, or body type, or dogs that are romping and playing versus sitting quietly or sniffing), and so on. If your dog is right at the edge of his tolerance level, you may want to keep your exposures short in duration. If you want to work on longer duration exposures, it’s a good idea to work slightly farther away from the trigger in question or find a more “subdued” trigger. Pay attention to these factors; as you learn more about your dog and his comfort zone, you will be able to orchestrate exposures to triggers in a controlled manner that helps you and your dog stay comfortable, engaged, and feeling safe learning together. Since dogs get better at anything and everything they practice, practicing subthreshold exposures will help break the cycle of reactivity.

If you do not know what your dog's working threshold is, you will need to gather a little information. For this exercise, you will either need to recruit a friend with a nonreactive dog or locate an area where handlers walk their dogs on leash, like a local park. Ben and I did much of our training work at a local park that borders a busy street, so the chances that someone would be walking a dog off leash were slim to none. The more space available to you the better, so that you can exit quickly and safely if necessary.

## Determining Your Dog's Reactivity Threshold

1. Ask your friend to walk her dog at a distance that you feel is safe for you and your dog, or set yourselves up at a similar distance from main walking paths.
2. At that distance, instruct your friend to walk her dog back and forth perpendicular to you and your dog; if you are walking forward in a straight line, she will be moving laterally across your path.
  - a. Above all, avoid head-on or frontal approaches, which are most likely to trigger a reactive response.
3. Once your friend is walking her dog back and forth across your path at your estimated threshold distance, you can begin walking with your dog, but just take a couple of steps forward, and then evaluate your dog's body language for signs of stress.
  - a. Keep in mind that the ideal threshold distance for your dog means he can stand at the edge of the "reactivity cliff" without falling off and launching into a full-blown reaction.
4. If your dog is doing well at the current distance, you can shrink it by moving forward a couple of steps more.
5. Keep your eyes on your dog throughout this exercise, noting his reaction at each approach.
6. When you have reached a distance where you feel your dog is close to reacting, stop! Note this distance, then back up approximately five feet. This is where you will want to begin the exposure exercises for your dog.



If a dog and handler cross your path and you see your dog beginning to ramp up, you know you've reached your dog's melting point. Step back 5' and try again. If he tolerates the dog and handler at this further distance, you've found his working threshold.

Here are some signs that your dog might be approaching his threshold:

- Increased rate of respiration (panting)
- Decreased rate of respiration (holding breath)
- Inability to eat/decreased interest in reinforcement
- Inability to refocus after each treat
- Heightened levels of environmental scanning
- Raised hackles
- Body stiff, seemingly unable to move
- Dilated pupils/glassy-eyed stare
- Excessive salivation

For a human-reactive dog, the formula is basically the same (without the stranger's dog), and you would want to find a distraction-free site without a lot of other people who would only heighten your dog's stress.

In class, we manipulate this working threshold, gradually shrinking it as we move closer to the trigger or triggers that concern your dog, always at a pace *determined by the dog's success*. While your dog will not be meeting or interacting with other dogs in class, he will be learning the skills necessary to navigate environments where he will encounter his triggers with confidence and good behavior.

Your dog will learn that other dogs and people are part of the working environment but what keeps him safe and prevents the reactive response is focusing on you, his life coach. It's not uncommon to encounter dogs that are not aggressive toward other dogs but are uncomfortable in their presence. Once they start learning that there is a structure that can keep them safe, these dogs grow in confidence and, at some point, may be able to interact safely with well-selected doggy friends. This is not true for all dogs, however, and most may develop great coping skills in public environments around their triggers while still preferring not to interact physically or socially with other dogs. This mindset is OK! Dogs do not need relationships with other dogs to be happy, and your rehabilitated reactive dog will have a great quality of life with you as his play partner.

The focus is always on teaching your dog to continue thinking in a doggy-saturated or a people-saturated environment while taking cues from you, his life coach. He will look to you for the guidance needed to keep him safe and comfortable, allowing you to make decisions for him regardless of circumstance. ■

## Week Three Foundation Behavior

### *“Can You Look At This Dog?”*

This is the phrase that I said to Ben each time we encountered a dog: “Can you look at this dog, Ben?” Ben then turned his head, looked at the other dog, and then looked at me as if to say, “See! Yes, I can do it! Now give me my cookies!”

Although mine was not the best cue (it’s too long), it made me feel better saying it in a singsong voice. (Leslie McDevitt, in her book *Control Unleashed*, suggests a lovely cue: “Look at that!” Short and easy!) I also liked the idea of asking Ben a question. I wanted to let him decide whether he had the emotional strength and self-control to look at the other dog. In the ten years that I worked with Ben, there were only two times that he actually said, “No!”

Once was when we had a private agility lesson in an arena where there was a Rottweiler in an X-pen at the far end of the space. Usually I could walk Ben into a space and click and feed him for happily looking at the other dogs. Once he was familiar with the environment, we were ready to work off leash. This day, however, when I asked him to look at the Rottweiler, he stopped, growled, and stood behind me, using me as a shield. I looked down at him, baffled. Ben had never said “No” in response to this question. I thought to myself, “Should I actually *make* him look at the other dog?” but realized that forcing Ben to look at this trigger would counteract all that I had taught him. Looking was always his decision. So, instead, I heeled him away, asking him to focus on his work. And that he did with nary a look in the Rottweiler’s direction!

In Week Four, we work on teaching the dog to look at the types of triggers (strangers and dogs) that have frightened or overstimulated him before. In the past, the sight of such triggers might have made you feel tense and extremely frustrated at the inappropriate reaction you expected from your dog. “Why does this have to happen to me?” you muttered to yourself. “All I wanted was a nice dog!” To make next week easier for both of you, this week you will start shaping your dog to look purposefully at neutral objects for a click and then to turn back to you for a treat. Next week you’ll be working on the same behavior with an actual trigger, not a neutral object.

Once your dog catches on to this behavior, it’s your choice whether or not you want to put it on a cue. It’s not necessary to make progress, but sometimes it is nice to have control over the behavior.

## Training the “Can You Look?” Behavior

1. Practice with your dog in his appropriate training equipment.
2. Decide which object you will use.
  - a. It should be an object that means nothing to your dog emotionally (so don't choose his favorite tuggie that makes him go bonkers).
  - b. Sometimes it may be more realistic to teach your dog to look at a small stuffed dog or doll, but any object will do.
  - c. Be sure that your dog is comfortable with the object you select before you start working with it.
3. Put the object down so that your dog can see it but not touch it.
  - a. Do not place it just out of his reach! We do not want your dog to feel any frustration during training!
4. Click and feed your dog as he looks at the object.
5. Practice clicking and feeding your dog for looking about ten times.
  - a. If your dog loses interest, pick up the object and put it down again with a flourish to spark his interest.
6. Now pick up the object and go to a different room.
7. Repeat Steps 3–5.
8. Continue to vary where you work, inside various rooms as well as outside.
  - a. You may need to adjust the reinforcement value of your treat as you work in these different environments.
9. As your dog begins to offer the look behavior reliably, you can insert your verbal cue if you want. It is not necessary to put this behavior on cue for the rest of the training to work.
  - a. As your dog looks at the object, insert your verbal cue to look.
  - b. Click and feed your dog a tasty treat for looking at the object.
10. What you are aiming for is a dog that rapidly bounces back and forth between looking at the object and checking in with you for his treat. ■

## Week Three Emergency Behavior

### *Come Front*

In this exercise, you will teach your dog to walk with you and respond to changes in your movement and direction. You will begin to move forward together, and if you begin moving backward, your dog will reorient his body toward yours and seek the “front” position himself, by aligning his front paws between your feet. This is a wonderful way to get your dog’s attention and focus when you suspect a troublesome situation may be brewing. Simultaneously, it allows you to remove yourselves from the situation.

I remember attending an obedience class with Ben. On our left was a woman with a dog that fixated on Ben, locking on visually to stare. This can be a challenging situation for any reactive dog, and initially Ben handled the situation with aplomb, ignoring the dog and offering me all of his attention. I noticed as the class proceeded, though, that maintaining this level of focus on me became increasingly difficult for Ben, and his attention began drifting toward the other dog. When we lined up for the recall exercise, it was just our luck that we ended up right next to the offending party, closer than ever. Not wanting to place ourselves in a situation where an unwanted reaction would be imminent and nearly unavoidable, I knew I needed to change our position relative to our classmate and her dog.

I started walking backward. The instant I changed the direction of my movement, Ben spun around and started to approach the “front” position. Now all of his attention was back on me and we could move easily in partnership together once again.

When you are working through exposure exercises with your dog, the ability to turn your dog’s body toward you immediately and silently is a necessity, not a luxury. In a class situation, you may be working an exposure exercise and find that despite all your clicking and treating, your dog is so fixated on a trigger that he will not reorient to you to collect reinforcement. In these types of situations, breaking the stare by having your dog move willingly and happily with you, away from the trigger, is a great way to interrupt undesirable behavior patterns while regaining your dog’s attention.

### **Training Come Front**

1. Walk forward with your dog on your side. While the left side is traditional, you may choose whichever side a) is most comfortable for you and b) you can maintain consistently. Choose right *or* left for this stage of training.
2. Stop moving forward.

3. With a treat held in both hands, place your hands in front of the dog's nose and turn the dog's head in toward you as you take a few steps backward.
  - You want to hold the treat with both hands simply because you do not want the dog to focus on the left or right side of your body, but to come to the center of your body (lining his feet up between your feet, which should be spread shoulder-width apart).
  - Your dog should now be facing you.
4. Stop moving.
5. Click and deliver a treat at the center of your body.
6. Repeat this exercise until the dog swings into the front position quickly to accept his treat.
7. If you are having trouble with the dog coming to the front of your body, try this exercise:
  - a. With the dog in front of you, fill each hand with the same number of treats.
  - b. Let the dog know that you have the treats.
  - c. Take a step back.
  - d. As you are stepping back, bring one of your hands up, against the center of your body, at the height of your dog's nose. Pretend that your elbows are glued to your torso so that the dog has to come in close to get the treat.
  - e. Click, if you like, and deliver the treat. It is best to click with the hand that will not be delivering the treat, so you can avoid clicking too close to the dog's ears. Clicking close to a dog's ears can be frightening—try it near your own ear and you may be surprised at how loud it sounds!
  - f. Repeat this exercise again, only this time deliver the treat from your *other* hand. Your dog should be getting a treat at the center of your body, and you will alternate your treat delivery hand after each step backward. (Switch your clicker hand accordingly.)
  - g. Repeat until all of your treats are gone.
  - h. Go slowly, so that the dog understands that staying in front of you is a reliable predictor of a high rate of reinforcement. Once the behavior is learned, you can go back to Step 1 and practice steps 1–6.

Practice this behavior often at home and in a variety of low-distraction environments using the equipment your dog wears at class. Practice until the dog turns automatically to find front when you begin walking backward. You may want to practice this

exercise with distractions you can easily control (food or toys on the floor, a favorite person on the other side of the room or street, and so on) before you begin practicing the “Come Front” exercise in conjunction with exposure to triggers.



Use treats in one or both hands to lure your dog into position facing the front of your body. Let your hands do the work. With your dog at your side and a treat on his nose, take a couple of steps forward, start to bring the treat toward your waist as you step backward, making sure he turns toward you, and reinforce when his body is face to face with you. ■

## Week Four Home Management

### *Toys with a Purpose*

Why give your dog toys “for free” when you could give them for good behavior? For many dogs, play is both a powerful motivator and one of the best ways to build strong bonds with their people. By playing with boundaries, you are improving your dog’s manners and your relationship with your dog—talk about a win/win!

Divide your toys into the following categories:

- standard toys
- interactive toys
- mentally stimulating toys

*Standard* toys are toys that the dog has access to throughout the day. They may be variable in type (tennis balls, stuffed animals, squeaky toys, and so on) and are often stored in a toy box. Your dog may pull a few out here and there but rarely plays with any of them for an extended period of time. Having constant access to these toys, your dog often grows bored with them over time. It’s just like children who get dozens of toys on Christmas, and by New Year’s are still playing with only three of them.

Rotating your dog’s toys is a great way to keep them fresh and exciting. To combat “toy satiation,” take your dog’s toys out of the toy box, put them into a new container that he cannot access, and place the container on a closet shelf, in a drawer or cupboard, or in the basement. Give your dog two or three “new” toys daily only after he has performed a reliable behavior.

Each day, you can go to the container with your dog and make a big deal out of choosing a hidden toy. Build his excitement. Pull a toy out of the box, show it to your dog, and ask “How about this one?” in a happy voice. Cue your dog to sit, and as he does, you can either click or verbally mark the behavior (“Yes!”) and then give your dog the toy. Your dog may then run away happily or do what he likes with it. Repeat this procedure three times daily, each time with a new and different toy.

If you have children, let them assist in selecting toys for rotation and presenting them to your dog. It’s a fun way to help them become more involved in the responsibility of pet ownership and builds a good relationship between your children and your pet. If you choose to teach your dog to put his toys away (something your instructor can help with), ask your dog to put his toys away each day. Otherwise,

you or the children should make sure the toys get back into the container and put away until the next day when you can pick three new toys.

*Interactive toys* are those that you use to play cooperatively with your dog. Frisbees, tennis balls, and tug toys fit this category. As with the standard toys, you should keep these toys out of sight until you are ready to engage with your dog. Providing the toys only when you are ready and wanting to play with your dog will keep their novelty and reinforcement value high. This strategy also prevents unwanted attention-seeking behaviors, like a dog dropping tennis balls in your lap and barking for play when you are trying to help your daughter with her homework on the couch. Next week's Home Management assignment covers the rules of play with your dog.

*Mentally stimulating toys* are those that act as “babysitters” when you cannot watch your dog. These toys require the dog to concentrate, and they help drain excess energy—they function as the canine equivalent of Sudoku or crossword puzzles and can keep your dog mentally entertained for hours. Perhaps the most popular is the classic Kong toy, which you can stuff with a variety of yummy foods and freeze to provide your dog with hours of fun. (You can buy Kong toys at [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com).) Mentally stimulating toys are ideal for rainy or snowy days when you may not be able to get in a good long hike, or for when you need to keep your dog in his crate for several hours while you entertain visitors. Giving your dog something to do will help prevent him from engaging in unwanted behaviors.

### **For the Love of a Kong**

Some dogs, particularly puppies, need to learn how to eat food from a Kong. For these dogs, putting a smear of food near the large opening makes it easy and fun for them to lick it out. Gradually, you can begin stuffing the Kong more fully. As you start filling the Kong, it can help to place dry treats (pieces of kibble), which dispense easily, inside the Kong, with just a smear of a soft treat, like peanut butter or cream cheese, around the edges.

The dog then receives a large jackpot for his efforts. As his skills improve, you can begin reducing the amount of kibble and increasing the amount of soft treats (canned dog food, cream cheese, peanut butter, yogurt, and so on) at the top.

For high-energy dogs, it's a good idea to feed every meal from these types of toys, replacing the dog's food bowl with work-to-eat toys. Most dogs are more than happy to make such a transition—the difference between a meal out of a frozen

Kong and a meal from a dog bowl is much like the difference between a meal served at a fine dining establishment and one purchased at a drive-through fast food restaurant. Once your dog is accustomed to eating from food-dispensing toys, a regular food dish is a bit of a letdown!

In addition to the Kong toys, there are a variety of commercially available puzzle toys (like Nina Ottosson toys, available at [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com)). You also can experiment with making your own work-to-eat toys with materials readily available in your house. Try giving your dog supervised access to a clean water bottle full of kibble, or smearing canned dog food inside of a cupcake tray and freezing it. ■

## Week Four Foundation Behavior

### *Sweetening the Trigger*

In class this week, we talked about how changing your dog's emotions about his triggers requires changing his behavior toward them first. As a first step, you practiced letting your dog look at a trigger from a safe distance so he didn't react. You clicked and treated him for looking, and he turned back to you for his reward.

To start training this behavior at home, you need to set up situations where your dog looks at a trigger (another dog, a kid on a skateboard, a moving car) but remains under threshold, so pick your distance and the nature of the trigger carefully. You learned how to do this last week practicing "Your Dog's Melting Point." Your task is to reinforce your dog for anything and everything he does that is not part of his normal reaction sequence while that trigger is in the picture. Don't be surprised if, after a few successful sessions practicing this exercise, you see your dog visibly relax a bit when a trigger appears. He may not be as cool, calm, and collected as the dog of your dreams, but he's definitely learning some skills to keep himself safe—and you less frazzled. This success "sweetens" the trigger.

*Note:* The instructions below use a dog as the trigger, but any other trigger that's relatively predictable in the workspace you select will serve as well.

### **Sweetening the Trigger**

1. Work with your dog and his appropriate training equipment (your two-leash safety system) within his established threshold. Generally this means in a learning space free of "space-invading" people and other dogs, even those with "friendly" intentions. What you need is distractions (dogs, people, and/or other triggers) that are visible but that are not focused on approaching, greeting, or otherwise interacting with you and your dog.
  - a. Your dog should be stimulated but not over the top. How much space does he need to be able to notice, but not react inappropriately to, his triggers?
  - b. Work in short, successful sessions, no more than 30 to 60 seconds.
  - c. Record the results of each exposure session, using one sticker or notation for a successful session, another sticker or notation for a less desirable outcome.
  - d. Watch the trend. If more sessions are less than desirable, change your training plan.

2. When your dog simply looks at the other dog (or other trigger)
  - a. Click and feed your dog rapidly.
    - i. If you are unable to click, simply feed your dog as quickly as you can while the other dog is present.
  - b. If your dog fixates on the other dog, try several of the following:
    - i. Say your dog's name, then click and treat.
    - ii. Present your hand, and cue your dog to "Touch." Click and treat if your dog complies.
    - iii. Stick the treat on his nose to try to turn his head as you turn your body in the opposite direction. Reinforce him for following you with a click and treat as you do so.
    - iv. Start walking backward. Click and treat your dog for following you (the "Come front" exercise).
3. When your dog hears another dog, quickly click and feed your dog.



When practicing clicking and treating your dog for looking at targets, be conscious of trying to get the dog to turn toward you for his treat. To get your dog to turn away from the trigger, you may call his name (as the student is doing here), put a treat on his nose to lure him into a turn, present your hand in front of you to cue a hand target, or use the Come Front exercise.

Your behavioral history is a roadmap of where you've been together and a source of information you can use to plan your next training session to maximize confidence and learning. If you occasionally have an unsuccessful training session, your notes will help you tease out what is different about those sessions so that you can

work through the challenges together. If you are seeing an increase in undesirable behaviors, it means that some part of implementing the technique needs attention, so please contact your training coach who can assist you in reformulating your training plan.

During each class, we will review your training reports from the previous week, so be sure to bring your notes along with you to class. You and your classmates will learn together about what works well and what doesn't. This sharing time is important not only to get feedback about your dog, but to create supportive relationships with your classmates, sharing your successes and setbacks as you learn.

It is better to limit your exposures to the classroom if that is the only environment where you are able to work your dog while ensuring both your safety and your dog's ability to remain under threshold. One of your most important roles as a canine life coach is to prevent your dog from rehearsing the behaviors you are trying to remove from his repertoire.

*As you are working through these issues with your dog, remember to take away all opportunities for him to rehearse his undesirable behaviors. ■*

## Week Four Emergency Behavior

### *“Go Sniff”*

We’ve all been there. You’re out for a walk with your dog, enjoying a beautiful day together. Quietly, you celebrate that your walk thus far has been trigger- and stress-free and you’re almost home. And then it happens. A jogger turns a corner quickly and is barreling toward you. Your heart races, and you begin scanning the environment desperately, looking for a visual barrier behind which you can hide until the distraction passes. You’ve used all the treats you brought along on this walk and wonder how you can distract your dog from this potentially volatile situation.

There’s nothing worse than feeling powerless to prevent your dog from going over threshold. It’s scary, embarrassing, frustrating, and dangerous. The “Go sniff” exercise will empower you; you will never have to feel that powerless “What am I going to do?” panic again. Imagine how good it would feel if, instead of panicking, you could just ask your dog to “Go sniff” and know his nose would turn away from the approaching distraction and toward the ground for a good scent inspection. Sniffing is a perfect example of a behavior that is incompatible with aggressive or reactive displays.

### **Training “Go Sniff”**

1. Walk your dog on the grass.
2. Stop forward movement. Stand still.
3. Scatter a number of high-value treats on the grass in front of your dog’s face. While these treats can be crunchy or soft, crunchy treats will buy you more time.
4. As your dog watches you sprinkle treats, insert the verbal cue “Go sniff!”
5. Stand up straight and allow your dog to take as much time as he likes searching for all the treats.
6. As he finishes, say “All done” in a neutral manner and continue walking forward. A verbal cue is helpful to end the behavior officially so that when you use this strategy in real life, you can ask your dog to finish sniffing when you are ready to resume the walk.
7. You may periodically “reload” the ground to prolong your dog’s sniffing, building duration into this behavior for when you need it.
8. Practice this behavior on a variety of surfaces, including concrete. Practice distractions and duration separately and often before you begin asking for prolonged sniffs in arousing environments. ■

## Week Five Home Management

### *Play with a Purpose*

Many dogs love to play with their owners, and those that don't can be taught to enjoy play. While it may take a little extra time to teach a reluctant dog to play, the rewards are well worth the effort. Even the most dedicated dog owner gets busy, and combining quality play with a mentally stimulating training session will give you the most bang for your training buck. While these benefits extend to all pet owners, they are of special value to the owner of the reactive dog, a dog that needs a strong bond with his handler to navigate challenging and trigger-heavy situations successfully. Finding a game that your dog loves and using it to reward behaviors you like is perhaps the fastest and most reliable way to build great and reliable behaviors.

### **You Start and End the Play**

To build a better relationship with and better manners in your dog, you start and end the play. Giving in to the demanding dog that drops tennis balls in your lap for hours on end, squealing and whining, only reinforces that demanding behavior. I learned this lesson the hard way once with my American Eskimo dog, Corey. Corey frequently (and rudely) demanded that I throw tennis balls for him. Whenever I was busy with a task, he scratched my arm until I gave him my attention. While I acquiesced to this behavior for some time, the day he scratched my arm so hard he ripped my shirt, I knew I had to take a different approach.

Little did I know that I had actually taught Corey to demand play by giving in when he insisted I play. Responding when he scratched my arm reinforced his demands. Ignoring him sometimes and giving in other times actually put the behavior on a variable reinforcement schedule, strengthening the unwanted behavior. The more he practiced—and the more intermittent the reinforcement—the more intense his demands became.

I had to decide when it was time to play and to make sure there was time for that each day...according to *my* schedule. When I wanted to play each day, I went to my hidden toy container and took out the tennis ball. You will do likewise, and likely will find that your dog exhibits some undesirable behavior like barking or jumping when you retrieve the ball. It's important to ignore all these demand behaviors, waiting for a pause in which you can insert a cue for a behavior that you *want* from your dog. Only when your dog has completed that behavior is it time to go outside and let the games begin.

The best time to initiate a session of play, then, is when your dog is behaving well and doing something you like, such as relaxing quietly on a mat or at your feet. Ignore

your dog's demanding behaviors, and wait for him to settle before calling him over to play; this will teach him that quiet and calm behavior is the way to earn the fun games he loves so much.

## Leave Him Wanting More

Once you have begun a play session, make sure you end it before the dog decides to quit or check out. If you like to play retrieve games with your dog, how many times will he fetch and return with the ball before he decides to take the ball away and find a cool spot in the shade to chomp it to shreds? If your dog fetches an average of ten times, consider ending the game after seven or eight tosses.

If your dog does not know how to retrieve, you can teach him how to enjoy this game inside. Once he is having a great time fetching throughout your home, move the game into the backyard. Training your dog to retrieve prevents unwanted situations like “reverse fetch” or “keep away” where the dog runs around the yard with a ball in his mouth, wagging his tail like a maniac. You chase him around in exasperation, and all your neighbors peer out their windows, laughing as they video the scene on their phones for later YouTube postings.

### **Monster: A Fetch Game**

Please note that some dogs do not know how to play or may feel inhibited about play because they fear being punished. For these dogs, toss the ball and entice the dog to pick it up. If he picks the ball up in his mouth, tease the dog, or chase and follow the dog, showing him that you are interested in the ball. This is how I taught Ben to play ball again (he had stopped playing after a trainer I went to early on “hung” him on a prong collar). I gave him the ball, crouched, and said, “I’m going to get you!” slowly following him around as he happily ran around me, holding my arms up stiffly like a walking Frankenstein. (These tactics were not scary to Ben, obviously. When doing similar exercises with your dog, know how he likes to play and be approached.) Ben loved this game, which eventually blossomed into a typical fetch game that I named “Monster!” I began using it as a conditioned reinforcer when I showed Ben in obedience competitions. When the judge said, “Exercise finished,” I looked at Ben and said “Monster!” and he leapt for joy as we moved along together to the next exercise.

### What About a Game of Tug?

Tug is a fantastic game that gets an undeservedly bad reputation. Played with structure and rules, tug is a great way to build a bond with your dog, provide him with physical and mental exercise, and reinforce him for desirable behaviors with something other than food. Because tug involves high levels of arousal and dogs using their teeth, it is best reserved for adults. You should not play tug with a dog that is aggressive toward you or anyone else who might tug with the dog.

Take the tug toy out of the box and show it to your dog. Ask him to perform a well-trained behavior, like “Sit.” Once he sits, mark the behavior, and give your dog a cue like “Take it!” to start the play session. You can then tug with your dog, back and forth: he tugs, you tug, taking turns. I do not allow the dog to whip the toy from side-to-side by himself at this time. We are playing cooperatively and will “kill” the toy together!

After tugging back and forth for a couple of rounds, ask your dog to drop his end of the tug toy with a cue like “Out!” If you have never taught your dog how to release a toy, simply place a high-value (human-grade) food treat in your mouth, and as you give your dog the release cue, spit the piece of food at your dog’s nose. Hot dogs or string cheese work great for teaching dogs to release tug toys! Most dogs will drop the end of the toy to find the treat. As your dog releases the toy, praise him and show him where the treat has fallen. It usually takes only a few repetitions until your dog is dropping the tug immediately when you ask. Nice job! You can then play another round of tug or put the toy away.

When ending a session with my dogs, I signal the end of the session and hold the ball or tug toy over my head, heading to the house as the dogs jump up to get it. I want them to love and treasure these sessions, and I build that enthusiasm by keeping our sessions variable and making it impossible to predict when and how I want to play. Remember that keeping interactive toys picked up and out of your dog’s reach when you are unable to play or uninterested in playing with him will help preserve each toy’s special value. ■

## Week Five Foundation Behavior

### *Rock-Solid Stay*

Teaching a dog to assume a stationary position and maintain that position until cued for a release is one of the holy-grail behaviors of dog training. Not only is it useful; it is impressive to watch. Have you ever walked into an obedience class where dogs of every size, age, and temperament are lined up sitting and waiting patiently for their handlers to return to them and release them for the next exercise? It's this exact scene that made me fall in love with the sport.

With dogs that struggle with reactivity or aggression, mastering a "Stay" can help you control your dog regardless of the situation.

For safety reasons, you want your dog to stay until you tell him to move, period! Because holding a position in the face of distractions is such an important safety behavior, it is worth laying a solid foundation and slowly building the behavior by asking for more. Since you usually will want to keep your reactive dog close to you, the emphasis in this class is on building duration.

You can start teaching "Stay" in either a sit or a down position. Start with the position that is more comfortable for your dog, and use the same technique later for the other position. You will want to practice so that your dog can stay in the designated position reliably in front of, behind, and beside you.

### **Training the Rock-solid Stay**

1. Select either a visual or a verbal cue for "Stay." You may add this cue as you are teaching the behavior or once you have taught the concept of stay, whichever you prefer!
2. Remove the treats from your hands so you don't distract or lure your dog out of position.
3. Move your dog into heel position on your left side, position him in a sit or a down, and say "Stay."
4. Pivot to face your dog so that you are standing toe-to-toe.
5. Count to ten. Without bending over your dog, massage him calmly and offer encouragement and praise to keep him in position. Move your hands slowly. If you must bend, bend at the knees instead of bending over your dog.
6. Repeat your stay cue if you are using it at this time.

7. At the end of the behavior (no more than 5 seconds, at first), click and feed your dog. If you can pivot back to your dog's side before clicking, do so. If not, click and feed him in front.
8. Release the dog in a neutral tone of voice. You may want to avoid using "OK!" as your release cue, since you may use it without thinking at a time when you would not want to release your dog from his stay.
9. To build duration, slowly lengthen the amount of time that your dog remains motionless, awaiting his release cue. Add at most 5 seconds at a time, and only if your dog is successful at holding his position 80 percent of the time at the shorter interval.
10. Once the dog is staying in position until released reliably, you can "ping pong" your criteria by varying the amount of time he is expected to stay, alternating between shorter and longer stays. ■

## Week Five Foundation Behavior

### *Cueing Eye Contact*

Last week, you practiced clicking your dog for any nonreactive behavior he offered when faced with a trigger and reinforced him when he turned toward you for his treat. This week, following your practice in class, you are going to kick it up a notch and teach your dog to look to you for guidance when he encounters a trigger he finds concerning. The trigger, in fact, becomes a cue to check in with you.

As you are working through this exercise, remember that this process will look different for every training team. Some will require more time or repetitions than others to achieve the same end goal. Fret not; this is a normal part of the learning process.

Initially, your dog's head will likely be "bouncing" between you and the trigger as you compete with the distraction for your dog's attention. With practice, however, your dog will offer you his focus more readily and steadily. When your dog begins looking to you for guidance and reinforcement in response to seeing (or hearing) a trigger, you are halfway to winning the battle with reactivity: you now have an operant dog that is ready to learn better coping skills! This dog deserves a jackpot: Bravo!

*Note:* The instructions below use a dog as the trigger, but any other trigger that's relatively predictable in the workspace you select will work as well.



If your dog sees a trigger (left), and calmly reorients to you, offering eye contact (center), give him lots of praise and great reinforcement (right). If he freezes or locks on to the target, feed the floor or interrupt the moment by clicking and feeding.

## Training Your Dog to Offer You Eye Contact When He Sees a Trigger

1. Expose your dog to a trigger at a safe distance.
2. Allow your dog to look at the trigger, but withhold the click for a couple of seconds to see if your dog turns toward you in anticipation of a click as if to say, “Hello? I was looking at that other dog for a second. You must have missed it. Surely you intended to click?”
  - a. If your dog locks eyes with the other dog or freezes, click, and interrupt the moment by feeding. Don’t push it!
  - b. Deliver treats on the floor or ground if needed.
3. When your dog turns his head to look at you—even for a split second, click for the eye contact.
4. Repeat. Click and reward liberally when your dog notices a trigger and reorients in your direction.
5. As your dog improves at this game, gradually increase the duration of your dog’s eye contact with you before you click and treat. ■

## Week Five Emergency Behavior

### *“Get Behind”*

Teaching your dog how to get behind your body on cue is a trick that lets you use yourself as a visual barrier for your dog when a trigger approaches and environmental barriers are unavailable. No matter how well you try to control the environment in which you are training, surprises, the traditional enemy of reactive dogs, are occasionally unavoidable. This convenient behavior will empower you in such situations, like one that occurred in an agility class I once attended with Ben.

One night at class, a young and exuberant dog came down with a severe case of the zoomies, romping around the room wildly. Few dog owners can resist cracking a smile at such a sight, but such a distraction in the working environment is a huge challenge for any dog and handler team, let alone one working through a reactivity problem. While once such an event might have promoted a meltdown for Ben and me, the well-taught “Get behind” behavior saved us both from going over threshold.

I asked Ben to get behind me, which afforded me the opportunity to quickly toss a handful of high-value treats away from us and toward the approaching dog, where her owner could collect her as she gathered the treats off the floor. “Get behind” helped Ben and me avoid disaster and showed him he could rely on my fair guidance and judgment to keep him safe in the face of a situation he would perceive as dangerous.

If you practice this behavior enough, you may find that your dog begins to go behind you on his own when confronted with a situation he finds anxiety-inducing, allowing you to address the situation appropriately. When this transition happens, the trigger becomes a cue to “Get behind,” and the behavior becomes a cue to you that your dog is nearing his tolerance threshold and is requesting additional space for himself.

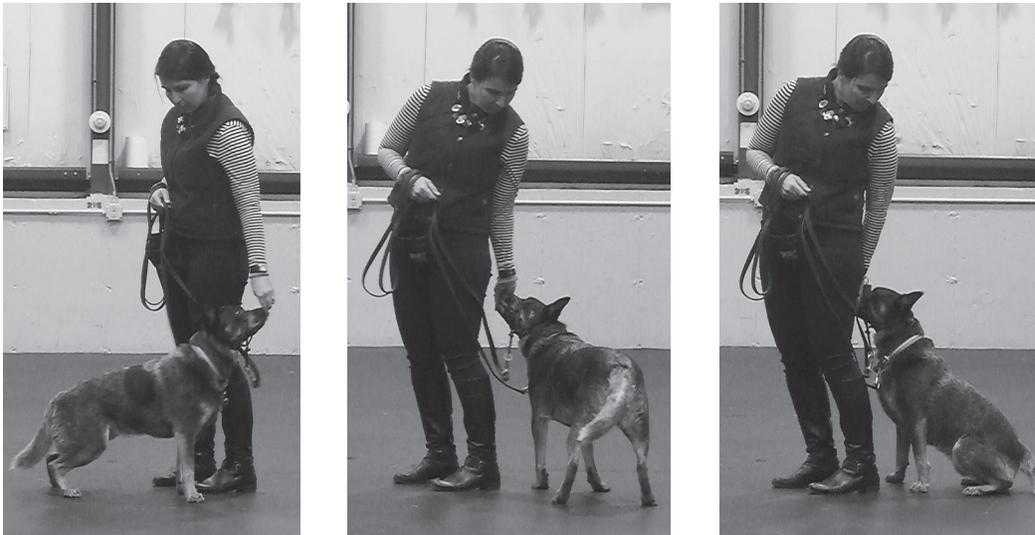
### **Training “Get Behind”**

1. Start with your dog in front of you.
2. Begin by having your dog target your hand in front of your body, at your body’s center.
3. Click and treat your dog for performing this behavior.
4. Now that you have refreshed the stationary targeting behavior (where your dog moves toward your stationary hand), it is time to begin teaching a moving target, that is, teach your dog to follow your hand as you move it in any direction. Build the behavior in tiny increments. At first, you may only be clicking and treating a stretch of the neck, then building toward one paw moving toward your hand, then a full step, and so on. Your dog’s success

will dictate the rate at which you build this behavior. If your dog refuses a touch, it is likely a sign that you have raised your criteria too quickly. Build this behavior until your dog can move from your side to behind your body, clicking and treating each touch.

5. Once your dog moves behind your body, click and offer him several treats in that position.
6. Once your dog is going behind your body reliably and enthusiastically at least 80% of the time, select and add a cue that would come naturally to you in an emergency situation.

*You should teach the “stay” portion of this behavior separately as a foundation behavior.*



Start with your dog targeting your hand directly in front of you so he is facing you. Click and treat him for touching your moving target hand. In a sweeping U-turn, you will slowly move him behind you, clicking and feeding him along the way. Once he is behind you, click and treat him generously.

## Training the Body Block

There are times when you might want to be able get your dog behind you in a more protected fashion, in effect to body-block another dog from getting to him. In that case, it would be helpful to train your dog to “Get behind” up against a wall, so that he ends up sandwiched between the wall and your legs. That position allows you to watch and face a threat head-on. Since a sudden movement into a constricted space can be unnerving to your dog, you should get your dog used to “being trapped” between you and the wall slowly. Cue “Get behind” near a wall, and gradually narrow the space as you move closer and closer to the wall. Once your dog is used to the narrow space, you can proceed with more speed. ■

## The Art and Science of Exposure

Whatever path you choose to continue your dog's education, the hardest lesson is learning to "translate" lessons learned in class to real-life scenarios. For six weeks, the goal was to turn you into a dog trainer, so you could plan and make the kinds of decisions for your dog that we've taught you to make in class. Now it's up to you to implement what you've learned about exposing your dog to triggers. Here are some commonsense principles:

***Practice those emergency behaviors!*** As much as you might like to control the world out there completely, there will always be surprises. It's best to be prepared with behaviors to escape with your dog, hide him behind you, or distract him with sniffing, behaviors that are so well practiced you don't have to think about them.

***Always remember that "your dog is your teacher."*** Just as your emotions can change from moment to moment, your dog's can, too. Your success last week in agility class doesn't guarantee the same performance this week. No matter how eager you are to improve your dog's behavior, don't rush it. Read your dog carefully as you proceed, and set your exposures to his pace.

***For exposure work to succeed, plan.*** What's the trigger? What will it be doing? How far away? What reinforcement will you use? How long will the exposure last? What will you click? How many clicks are you aiming for? If your dog reacts, what will you do? Is there an escape route? If not, can you hide your dog behind you? What, in your mind, will constitute success?

***Whatever the plan, the first few times make it easier or simpler.*** Lower the criteria. Aim for a shorter exposure. Pick a site with no distractions. It's the best insurance against failure.

***Prepare meticulously.*** Make sure you have all the gear you need, clicker, treats, and so on, and have it clear in your mind exactly what you're going to do. If you've enlisted a friend to help, using her dog as a trigger, give her specific instructions about exactly what you want her to do. You could even conduct a dry run without your dog if it would make you feel more comfortable. Make sure that your practice space is as you thought it would be, without unexpected distractions—only the ones you are counting on.

***Include in the plan a quiet place and time to decompress, digest, analyze, and write in a training journal.*** The best way to move forward is to understand where you've been and to know which plans succeeded and why so that you can build on them. It's equally important to figure out where and why things went wrong so you can avoid those mistakes in the future.

***Breathe! Be kind to yourself and to your dog.*** As Karen Pryor says, "It's only behavior!" ■

## Week Six Foundation Behavior

### *Parallel Walking*

Perhaps you, like many owners of reactive dogs, wish only for the simple pleasure of walking down the street with your dog at your side, even if another dog/handler team is using the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street. I know that this was an important goal for me in my life with Ben; my Golden Retriever was such a handsome boy I wanted to show off not only his good looks, but some nice manners as well. I taught Ben those skills through the parallel walking exercise. You will learn what it feels like to walk your dog with another team without an inappropriate reaction. Once your dog has acquired this skill, you will find that it offers you a taste of “normalcy.”

While initially you may learn this skill in the controlled environment of the classroom, for the best results you should continue practicing these exercises with a variety of dogs after you graduate. To make this learning process fun and prevent setbacks, at first practice with dogs your dog already knows, and later with neutral and friendly but unfamiliar dogs. Follow the instructions below carefully to practice this exercise safely:

### **Training Parallel Walking**

1. Invite your friend and her nonreactive dog to go for a walk with you. Choose a place where there is little possibility for off-leash dogs or uncontrolled triggers and where there are visual barriers in the environment, like woods or parked cars. Safety first!
2. Prepare all of your equipment. You will need a clicker, highly palatable treats, a treat pouch, and the double-leash system and supporting equipment you used in class.
3. Establish your dog's working threshold. How close can he get to your friend's dog at a lateral distance while maintaining his composure? The best threshold is one where the dog is curious but not explosive!
4. Walk forward, moving parallel in the same direction as your friend and her dog at the distance you've determined is safe. The arrangement of the line should be as follows: dog, handler, dog, handler. If you cannot walk side by side, you may have the other handler start walking ahead of you. As your dog grows more comfortable, you can slowly close the gap and establish his threshold distance for working parallel.

5. Click and treat, using a high rate of reinforcement, for any behaviors that are not aggressive or part of your dog's reaction sequence.
6. Work in short sessions that are geared toward success, and quit while you're ahead!



This is what a parallel walking exercise might look like in class, using cones to separate the student/dog teams. Here the two teams are aligned dog–student–dog–student. Each handler clicks and treats often as the dogs walk along the cone path at a distance apart that both can tolerate. For the antsy, feeding the floor can help. Turning can be an extra challenge, so if you need to put a treat right on your dog's nose to keep your dog with you in the turn, that's fine.

If you are unable to arrange controlled parallel walking exercises with known dogs, scope out your neighborhood for opportunities where you can replicate the setup described above. When I was working with Ben, we struggled to find volunteer training partners, so I looked for parks with lots of space where people frequently walked their dogs on leash. After locating a calm dog, I positioned myself so I was walking in the same direction as the other dog at whatever distance Ben could tolerate comfortably.

Also consider going to facilities that hold obedience or training classes. These locations often offer reactive dog handlers the opportunity for multiple exposures as students enter and exit the classroom with their dogs. Pet store or veterinary hospital parking lots also provide lots of practice in a short amount of time, if you can find such locations with enough space to keep your dog under threshold. Think strategically. Especially when you first start working outside, find settings where the visibility is good so that you don't have a trigger dart out suddenly from behind a corner you couldn't see around. In case you need to beat a hasty retreat, park your car where you can reach it easily. ■

## A Primer for Running Exposures

Now that class is over, it's critical that you continue your dog's training. Since planning and managing exposures are both essential and a bit intimidating, here are the basic guidelines.

Remember that each time your dog engages in a reactivity sequence, he is rehearsing and getting better at that behavior. Each negative experience in the presence of a trigger reaffirms your dog's suspicion that the trigger is something to be worried about. Going over threshold never teaches your dog the lessons you'd like him to learn. Therefore, you will need to find one or more locations where it is possible to expose your dog to triggers at a safe distance that keeps him under his reactivity threshold.

You can use the formula described below with any trigger. Whether your dog is sensitive to dogs, people, deer, or moving objects, the process is the same. I use the "dog" example here because most of the students who take the reactive dog class come because their dogs are sensitive to other dogs.

Use the training equipment you use in class, including your clicker and the highest value treats in your arsenal.

### Clicking Away Reactive or Aggressive Behavior

1. Work below your dog's reactivity threshold. Be sure you have enough space to retreat to safety in case of an emergency.
2. Decide in advance how long your training session will be. Start off with a short session, perhaps 30 seconds to 1 minute. Slow and steady wins the race: it is always better to err on the side of caution when increasing session length. Add only a few extra seconds at a time in the initial stages of training while you are building your dog's "exposure muscles."
3. Quit while you're ahead. You may be tempted to extend the session for as long as your treats will last if all is going well, but exercise some impulse control and don't overextend your sessions! Celebrate your success by ending the session before it goes downhill; this is one of the lessons I learned from Ben as together we learned about the exercises presented in *Click to Calm*.
4. Click and feed your dog at a high rate of reinforcement each time he looks at or hears another dog.
  - When you feed your dog, deliver your reinforcement so that he focuses on your face, luring the dog away from the trigger. Try to turn his body, or at least his head, away from the trigger and toward you as you feed.

- If this is impossible, step in front of your dog to body-block as you feed him a treat. You are using your body to create a visual barrier.
  - If your dog struggles to break his gaze from the trigger after most clicks, you'll find the "Come Front" emergency behavior to be an especially helpful refocusing tool. Practice this behavior in a number of distraction-free environments before taking it out in public. Increase the level of distractions for this exercise gradually before using it in a trigger-rich environment.
5. If you are noticing any of the warning signs mentioned in "Your Dog's Melting Point" (Week Three, Exercise 2, page 19), or if your dog is so stressed that he has stopped eating, move farther away from the trigger, opening up as much space as your dog needs to feel comfortable eating and working.
    - After each click, feed your dog by dropping food on the ground. Your dog cannot be sniffing and reacting at the same time. By delivering your food on the ground, you are manufacturing an alternative, incompatible behavior and preventing your dog from reacting or triggering a reaction in another dog.
  6. Watch for subtle signs of relaxation in your dog, a lessening of tension, more normal breathing, a softer gaze. Remember that your observation skills and ability to read your dog have improved markedly during class so you have become more adept at knowing when and how to proceed. When your dog is comfortable looking at the trigger and responds instantly to the click to get his treat, withhold your click a second or so to get him to turn back to you and offer you eye contact *before* you click.
    - The more successful exposures you set up, the quicker your dog will generalize that a trigger is a cue to look at you and the less often you will have to start with clicking just looking at the target.
  7. If your dog sees a trigger and whips around to offer you eye contact unbidden, click and feed him lavishly; it's a sure sign that he not only understands the game; he's comfortable enough in this situation to play it with you! Great work! You are on your way to establishing this game as a default behavior your dog and you will love.

## One Change at a Time

Once your dog cues reliably off a trigger to look at you, you can increase the challenge in a variety of ways:

- Move a step or two closer to the trigger.
- Wait for longer eye contact before clicking.
- Cue a well-trained behavior, then click.
- Make the trigger more challenging. For instance, if your trigger is a sitting dog, ask his handler to walk him back and forth across your path slowly, maintaining the distance between you. Gradually you can escalate the trigger dog's movement so your dog learns to tolerate a dog playing tug with his handler wildly and noisily.

Always watch your dog for signs of stress, and only proceed when he's comfortable and able to offer you eye contact readily.

## How Did It Go?

After each session, it's time to evaluate your own and your dog's success. There is meaning behind the phrase "learning curve"—learning never occurs in a straight line. Remember that setbacks are part of the training process and provide valuable information that you can use to structure future training sessions better. Be as kind to yourself as you are to your dog, and avoid getting discouraged; just as your dog is growing in his skills, you are still developing yours as well.

Ask yourself questions like these:

- a.) How long was the session?
- b.) How close were you to the trigger?
- c.) Was your dog calm, overstimulated/over-aroused, or over threshold?
- d.) If your dog reacted, ask yourself,
  - Did any specific behavior or action by the trigger stimulate the response? (For example, the trigger dog started tugging with a toy or lunging on the leash.)
  - How did you respond? How well did your intervention work?
  - How long did it take your dog, after going over threshold, to calm down to a level where he could start learning again?

- Was there more than one trigger present (for instance, one dog approaching on leash while two others suddenly darted by in a chase game)?

Keeping track of trends in your training, using a notebook, spreadsheet, calendar, or other record-keeping format with which you are comfortable, will expedite your training. Note successful and less successful days with different symbols. (Remember that reactivity and aggression are actually normal behaviors for all canines. These behaviors are only problematic when they spiral out of control or create dangerous situations for humans, dogs, or other animals). Once you have worked your dog through his reactivity, looking back at your training record is such a great reminder (and positive reinforcer for you!) of how far you've come together as a team.

### **Keep a Training Journal? Really?**

As humans, we notice when things go wrong but often dismiss quickly when things go unbelievably right! When your dog has an outburst (even if it hasn't happened in the last six months), you feel defeated and may question whether working with your dog was the right thing to do. You forget easily that your dog has made tremendous progress and hasn't reacted in so long.

Your training journal helps you keep things in perspective and the demons of self-doubt at bay. The very fact you make the effort to use the journal shows your commitment, and it will pay off for both you and your dog. ■

## What's Next?

Decide how to continue with your training: take a class, work in outside environments, or take private lessons. If you sign up for a class, take one where you already know the subject matter so that you can concentrate on your dog. Also, be sure to let the instructor know that you might hang out on the sidelines and click and treat your dog for watching all of the strange people and dogs in the classroom. Only move into the classroom space when you are sure that your dog can handle it. And, when in, stay for very short periods of time. Prepare to get to the class early enough to survey the situation and be prepared to leave early so that you do not get caught in small corridors and hallways.

### General Guidelines:

- Check out the environment first *without* your dog before entering with your dog.
- Decide where to put your dog's crate, treats, and so on, ahead of time. Or keep your dog in the car during "down" time.
- Before entering a building with your dog, use the "Get behind" cue to check out the workspace quickly before your dog enters.
- If you are taking a group class, bring your dog in after the class has already started so there won't be any stray dog/handler teams clogging up the entrances to the building and the ring. In the same fashion, leave the class earlier than all of the other students. Be careful about students coming into the building for the next class as well.
- Do not assume that the same behavior will exist in the same environment from week to week. Make sure you observe your dog first before deciding your level of exposure.
- Choose your criteria based on the behavior that you see there, at that moment.
- When going into a new environment, briefly lower your criteria. As your dog begins to generalize the behavior, adjusting criteria will take less and less time.
- Use a treat, and a rate of reinforcement, higher than the distraction level of the environment.
- If your dog is not eating, it means that he is over threshold. Learning cannot take place at this level. Re-evaluate.

- Work your dog under threshold for short periods of time.
- If your dog reacts, move farther away from the trigger. Unless it is a safety issue, be sure to move after the dog has either stopped reacting or lowered the intensity of his reaction.
- You may need to practice the “Cueing Eye Contact” exercise frequently while in a highly stimulating environment.
- Take away all of the opportunities for your dog to rehearse undesirable behavior.
- Be ready to find a spot against the wall to body-block another dog from touching your dog. Teach your dog the body block ahead of time.
- Get your dog used to staying behind you for an extended period of time.
- If your dog has an explosion, think about the following:
  - Were you in the environment too long?
  - Did you get too close to the concerning trigger?
  - What type of reinforcement were you using?
  - At what rate?
  - How long did it take for your dog to recover?
  - Could you control the environment?
  - If not, how can you do so in the future?
- Be sure to update your training journal when finishing the training session. ■