

Down Dog Digest

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Education feature: Emergency games to get you out of trouble

Carol's Challenge: How tolerant is your dog? Do the fun quiz to find out!

How to help your Reactive Rover Support for your Frustrated Fido

Does your dog become a whirling dervish when they see another dog? Is your Reactive Rover difficult even to hold on lead as he lunges and barks?

A reactive dog is a dog that barks, lunges, pulls or growls, usually when it is on lead. The trigger is usually seeing another dog, or sometimes a person, or some inanimate object, or a moving object.



There are two main types of reactive dogs,, 'nervous greeters' and a 'frustrated greeters'.

A nervous greeter is typically nervous around other dogs both on and off lead. When they see their trigger some freeze, some retreat back but others pull and bark, making themselves look big and scary to try and make the threat go away.

A frustrated greeter is typically friendly with other dogs when off lead, but when on

lead becomes frustrated when he or she can't get to the other dog. Some of these dogs bark excitedly, others dance on their back legs and some may pull and lunge. Or all of these together.

It's easy to grasp that some dogs just don't like other dogs, or are afraid of them, so the resulting displays make sense. But when your dog clearly loves other dogs, it seems counterproductive for him to show behaviours that are off-putting to humans and to other dogs alike.

Why on earth is he doing something that is likely to make other dogs want to avoid him, rather than approach?

Because he can't help it.

I often see this behaviour in dogs who have a history of being able to approach other dogs whenever they want, on-leash or off.

I'll see it in dogs who grew up in a multi-dog, off-leash environment, such as in a rescue kennel, or dogs who lived in a rural community where dogs are allowed to regularly run loose, or in dogs imported from a street-dog colony in another country.

I'll also see it in dogs whose owner routinely encourages them to "Go say hi!" to other dogs when walking on leash, in a misunderstanding of what socialisation is. Or the owner who allows their dog to drag them up to other dogs for greetings.

How to help your Frustrated Fido

These dogs then become frustrated when they are thwarted from their desired goal of greeting the other dog, and this frustration results in an emotional, temper tantrum display that can be quite impressive.

Whereas the solution for a fear-reactive dog is usually to move farther away or out of sight, this often only upsets our frustrated greeter even more.

Sometimes frustrated greeter dogs can be aggressive to other dogs when eventually let off lead, not because they're inherently nasty, but as a result of the pent-up desire to play and release energy.



But your dog simply cannot go up to greet every dog they see. You need to help your dog to learn to tolerate frustration and control their impulses.

Focusing all your energy on "stopping these behaviours" rather than teaching appropriate behaviours, can also be frustrating to your dog.

Imagine if you walked around with someone saying "don't do that", "don't do that either," "and don't do that" but never telling you what you should be doing! That's frustrating to anyone - and dogs can experience that same response.

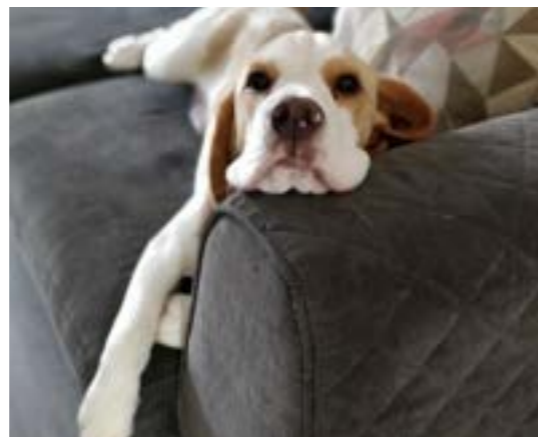
It's important your dog learns some impulse control as this helps them be more tolerant of frustration. This training is best started at home.

Teach your dog that calm behaviours unlock a world of rewards, frustrated behaviours don't unlock rewards, and by waiting and not getting a reward right away, there are far more,

and far better, rewards.

To start, make a list of all the things your dog enjoys each day. Write everything down – for example: going out of the door, having his lead or harness on, chewing a toy, playing tug, snoozing on the sofa, eating his dinner - order them from least to most valuable to him then use them to train. The sort of things to do include:

- Teaching him to wait at the door instead of bolting out
- Teaching a sit or down until released
- Teaching your dog to sit and wait to enter and exit the car
- Teaching your dog to sit and wait for the food bowl to be put down
- Teaching your dog "leave it" so he walks by and ignores any tempting goodies on the pavement (that could even be harmful) instead of pulling to get it. The advantage is that he will get more and better treats when he "leaves it"
- Teaching that whining and barking doesn't get attention, only quiet, calm behaviour does
- Teaching that calm behaviour is what starts a game of fetch or tug started.
- Teaching him that calm behaviour is what allows him up on the settee



If your dog is a frustrated greeter, management is the simplest key to a low-stress existence.

You need to know your dog's "threshold distance" - how far away he needs to be for him NOT to react. This distance may be different for different breeds and types of dogs. It's often

How to help your Frustrated Fido

What to do when out and about

greater for high energy hounds and less for lumbering Labradors.



Management means keeping your dog away from other dogs by staying at or beyond his threshold distance, especially while you do the training to reduce his reactivity.

The details of how to do that are beyond a simple newsletter, but the key elements are:

- Use high value food rewards
- Work with a calm friend's or family dog
- Let your dog look and feed treats until the other dog is out of sight or moves away
- Repeat, until your dog looks at you when the other dog appears

- Then move two steps closer and repeat
- Move closer still and repeat
- Work with different dogs - more excitable dogs, playing dogs, under control, off-lead dogs (where safe)

Be patient! It takes a loooooong time...

Once your dog can stay calm fairly close to various other dogs, you can use other rewards, such as getting closer to the other dog (which is what your Frustrated Fido really wants to do.)

This approach and retreat technique means that calm behaviour moves your dog closer to the other dog, but any aroused behaviour moves him further away.

Once your dog remains calm walking all the way up to the other dog, you can start to go on a nice, calm, parallel walk with the other dog. Sometimes (not on every occasion) allow the dogs to say hello (remember the three second rule!) then walk on again.

Practice (lots of practice) Produces Progress!

Life happens... Emergency Games

There are times when you need other training games to help you through unexpected or unavoidable encounters. Here are two useful games:

Find it: Drop a high-value treat near your feet and cheerfully say, "Find it!" If necessary, point to show your dog where the treat landed. Repeat many times, until when you say "Find it!" your dog immediately looks for the treat. If you need to keep your dog occupied while other dogs leave an area or walk past, this game can become "treat party" where you drop one treat after another until the danger is past.

Slide and guide: This is an emergency fun game to turn your dog through 180° to move in the opposite direction when you need to 'get out of town'. Slide your hand down the back of the lead and push the flat palm against the lead to guide your dog round the turn as you say something like, "Let's go" or "This way".



Carol's Challenge

Each issue I set you a challenge. This time your challenge is a fun quiz: What level of frustration tolerance does your dog have?

1. At the door, does your dog:
 - A) Push it open to get out as quick as possible
 - B) Wait patiently until you allow him to move
 - C) Spin round and round excitedly
2. When asked to sit, does your dog:
 - A) Sit then immediately leap up again
 - B) Sit and stay sitting until you release her
 - C) Look at you in puzzlement
3. Passing a discarded pile of crisps, your dog:
 - A) Inhales them before you can speak
 - B) Looks, but ignores them when you ask
 - C) Tries them, but hates salt and vinegar
4. You get a tug toy. Does your dog:
 - A) Grab and pull it out of your hand
 - B) Wait until you invite him to play
 - C) Run off to get his ball instead

How many As, Bs and Cs did you score?:

Mostly As: Your dog has more or less no frustration tolerance - do some training!

Mostly Bs: Well done! Your dog is a model frustration management maestro

Mostly Cs: Your dog has a mind of her own and is probably a spaniel or collie...



Need more help?

If you want more guidance and help with your frustrated or fear reactive dog, you might want to consider joining our Reactive Rover bootcamp.

This is a four week intensive course and it's not for the faint-hearted. You'll get:

- a live online video call each week showing you practical training assignments to complete with your dog
- two online follow-up sessions each week, including video check-ups, to iron out any problems you're facing and answer any questions you might have

- unlimited email support

- your own individual workbook to use to record your notes and chart your progress step by step

It's a practical course and you need to do the work! Through the video check-ups I'll be able to make sure you are making progress – your dog's reactions will tell me whether you've done the training

If you'd like more details, please get in touch via email or visit our website

<https://www.downdog.co.uk>

We hope you've enjoyed this Down Dog Digest. Please feel free to share it with any friends, neighbours or family members you think might find it interesting,

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If you'd like more information, tips, and advice about owning, training, caring for and enjoying your dog more, check out our website www.downdog.co.uk. Visit the blog and download our free helpsheets on a wide range of topics. Get it right from the start with your new pup, book group or one to one training, and check out our Down Dog Devotee membership programme to have fun with like minded owners.

If you've got a Problem Pooch, why not visit the Doggy Doctor's Surgery for help, in person or online www.doggydoctor.co.uk.