

Reactive dogs may lunge, pull, whine, bark or growl at other dogs and in some cases people. Some of these dogs may even snap or bite the other dog if they get close enough. Dog reactive dogs are not necessarily being “aggressive” but the frequent “practice” of their reactive behavior can lead to aggression. Walking a reactive dog can be very difficult, especially if you live in a neighborhood where there are lots of other dogs and people on the streets. It is a common misconception that you can help your dog get over this problem by continuously introducing them to other dogs. Instead, you should seek assistance from a qualified trainer or veterinary behaviorist. Until you can get that assistance, follow the guidelines below to keep yourself and your dog safe.

Tips for Reducing Reactivity

Fill your pockets with delicious treats.

You may also choose to use a treat bag. Treats should be something special that the dog loves and that the dog does not get at other times. Be sure to take treats with you on every walk and take more than you think you will need.

If at any time your dog will not eat the treats, you are too close to the other dog! Simply remove the dog from the situation as quickly and calmly as you can.

Use a leash or harness that will help make it easier to train your dog.

A front clip harness (Easy Walk or Freedom Harness) will redirect your dog’s front end to you if he gets to the end of the leash. This can be very helpful in taking your dog’s attention off of passing dogs and redirecting back to you. Give your dog a treat every time your dog looks back at you.

Try to avoid other dogs and people.

Walk your dog early in the morning, late in the evening or even mid-day when there are less people out walking their dogs. Don’t take your dog to places where you know there will be lots of other dogs.

When you do see a dog...

Turn and walk the other way as soon as you see the other dog. If you can’t turn and walk away try placing yourself and your dog behind a building or car so that your dog doesn’t see the other dog passing by. Give your dog some treats when you turn away and while you wait for the other dog to pass.

Teach your dog to focus on something else.

Try playing “Find It” on your walks to get your dog focused on you and interacting in a game. Ask your dog to do any tricks that he knows like “sit”, “shake”, or even just make a kissy noise and when your dog looks at you give him a treat. You can practice tricks while stationary whether waiting to cross a street or waiting on a dog to pass. Getting your dog’s mind engaged and interacting with you will take his mind off of being able to focus on other dogs.

If your dog is barking at another dog, you are too close!

Move away from the other dog and try to get your dog to focus on you. Try keeping a greater distance from other dogs in the future until your dog gets better at paying attention to you around other dogs

Sign up for training.

Look for a trainer or behavior specialist that is skilled and experienced working with reactive dogs. Some training facilities offer group classes specially for dog reactivity. See the SPCA handout on [Finding Your Pet a Trainer](#)

Good References

Feisty Fido by Patricia McConnell, PhD and Karen B. London

The Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson

Decoding Your Dog Edited by Debra Horwitz and John Ciribassi