



Behavior and Training Department Behavior Resources

The Difficult Dog

Your dog lunges at passing dogs, snaps at approaching people, or growls when you least expect it. Maybe you think your dog is unpredictable - sometimes she's okay with a person or another dog, sometimes she isn't.

What you do know is that you don't trust her to behave in a civilized manner, and want to do something about it. Can you? The answer is, maybe.



Why is my dog aggressive?

Aggression is a natural behavior, not an aberration. Most aggression is defensive in nature – that is, the dog is reacting to what she sees as a threat. Here are some of the reasons a dog may be aggressive.

Fear - This is the most common cause of aggression. In fact, it can be argued that all aggression stems from fear, with the exception of predatory aggression, which is hunting behavior. Oftentimes, dogs that have become aggressive over time were fearful or cautious as puppies, and have learned that the best defense is a good offense.

A fearful dog learns what works best for her, and will default to that behavior. Some dogs respond to fear by fleeing, some by freezing, some by growling and threatening, and some by attacking viciously.

Trauma - One of the more common causes of fear-based aggression is a traumatic episode in early life - being jumped by another dog, physical abuse by a human. The younger the dog is when the trauma occurs, the more lasting the imprint of the event. Often, the dog learns not to trust dogs, people... or even you, since you have been unable to keep her safe.

Frustration - Dogs who tend to lunge at the end of the leash, to race up and down a fence-line, or to pull frantically from a tie-out (like a leash wrapped around a tree), are very frustrated. They are probably also afraid - or were some time in the past, before they learned that they can scare away anyone or anything that appears threatening to them.

Territoriality – Most dogs are intrinsically attached to a territory. This can be the area where she lives, a car, or even a dog park, if she was there first. Dogs defending their territory can be extremely dangerous; it is instinctive for them to chase away intruders, and it is, also, instinctive for the intruders to allow themselves to be evicted. Usually, dogs will begin with chasing or circling, sometimes air biting. If they are successful, the behavior can escalate, and dog bites are often the result.

Protection - Because they are pack animals, many dogs have a tendency to protect or defend other members of their group. Often they will place themselves between a threatening individual and their pack member. They will often rely on other pack members to defend or back them up as well. We sometimes think dogs are protecting us, when they're really counting on us to protect them! You can tell that the dog's counting on you, if the dog presses up to you when he feels threatened, as opposed to thrusting himself between you and the threat.

Status - Dogs of higher status believe they have certain inalienable rights, like first access to food, sleeping places and territory. A high status dog who feels that a low status pack-mate (human or canine) is acting out of its rank might attack. This is usually very quick - a disciplinary move – an air bite or snap. Some multiple member dog packs will gang up on a high status animal that appears injured, and kick him off his throne. However, in a family, the dogs most likely to fight are dogs that don't have a clear picture of the rules and structure of the household. Major disputes within one household are often extremely difficult to reconcile or diffuse.



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Redirected or displaced aggression - In this scenario, a dog may be trying to get to one target – say another dog through a fence – but can't get to it. His excitement and arousal has to go somewhere, so he attacks whatever is closest. This could be his companion dog, or even you.

Pain elicited aggression - Any dog could lash out when in pain. Some are more likely to than others.

Maternal aggression – Maternal aggression is a natural defensive behavior towards strangers as displayed by a female with puppies, and sometimes a female who is or has gone through a false pregnancy.

Predatory aggression – Not aggression in the true sense, this is the instinct to chase and catch food. Predatory aggression is usually noiseless and very fast. A dog thwarted from chasing his “prey,” (which can be other dogs, children, bicycles, cars, or joggers), can become highly energized, display displaced or redirected aggression and begin to vocalize, often with a high keening whine.

All dogs who feel threatened go through the following series of behaviors. Sometimes the progression is slow, sometimes very fast or almost non-existent. One of our goals in working with aggression is to diffuse or prevent the behavior during the first three stages.

- Anxiety (panting, yawning, ears twitching, paws sweating, pupils dilated, skin sensitive to touch, tails under, hackles raised, etc.)
- Avoidance (I just won't look at it, and it will go away...I'll just check out this corner over here...)
- Freeze (if I don't move, no one will see me...)
- Escape
- Threat (if I look mean, maybe it will go away)
- Aggression (I'm going to chase the darn thing away, or kill it)
- Learned helplessness (dog shuts down completely)

Controlling Aggressive Behavior

If you have a dog with aggression problems, ignoring your problem won't make it go away. Behavior is always in flux, and as easily gets worse as gets better. Punishment may well backfire, since aggression met with aggression often causes aggression. Re-homing the dog thrusts the problem on another human family. So here are the remaining choices. If your dog is aggressive, you must first decide:

- Whether he or she is too dangerous to work with
- Whether the behavior can be kept under control by managing the environment
- Whether you have the ability to help modify the behavior
- Whether you have the time to do so
- Whether you have the commitment to do so

For those who wish to control and train their dogs, the following is a behavior modification program - which takes a lot of work!

Know your dog and his/her body language - from behind the dog as well as beside or in front. Dogs, after all, often walk ahead of their owner.

- Observe the dog's body language when relaxed
- Observe the dog's body language when tense
- Observe the dog's body language when he or she is about to attack
- Observe EXACTLY what sets off your dog - children/other dogs/other male or female dogs/men with beards/people in uniform.



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Know your own response to stress

- Note what you or your family members do when the dog looks like he might aggress, or a situation presents itself that you feel is compromising.

Make sure your dog needs and trusts you

- You can help your dog learn to trust you by controlling the environment at all times. This means that he or she should not be left in charge of an entire yard, especially one that is not fenced or one where the fence abuts a street. The dog will learn to protect the yard, and will get better and better at it.
- It also means that you may have to modify your walks in order to avoid threatening dogs or situations. Generally, we recommend that you do not begin your walks at your house, as the dog can either include more land in his "territory," or use familiarity to become more defensive.
- You can develop need by making sure the dog believes that everything originates from you - food, toys, affection, and security. You can also develop dependence by hand feeding your dog and making sure your household structure is clear to both you and your dog. You can encourage your dog to keep an eye on you always by playing hide and seek (you hide, he seeks), thus encouraging him to check in with you frequently.

Understanding Good Dog Communication

Dogs actually have an intricate and subtle language of their own, involving movements of the head and body. Unfortunately, many of our pet dogs haven't had the chance to learn this language, either because they were separated from their family too soon, or there were no experienced canine teachers on hand. Dogs who strain and lunge at a leash to get at another dog are actually being quite rude. Dogs who charge other dogs – even in play – are also rude.

People are a 'linear' species. We tend to move in a straight line towards our goal. This is because we're primarily visual. In our culture, we also encourage direct eye contact when meeting new people and greeting friends, although we very rarely look directly at strangers we pass on the street.

Dogs do not walk in straight lines, as many an owner has realized as his dog pulls first this way, then that way. Dogs use all their senses when walking, and they'll follow each of them. When a dog is moving in a straight line it is because he has sensed something he wants to investigate or to chase. In other words, he's on some sort of mission. When placed on a leash, many dogs do walk in a straight line, because their guardian is pulling back, thus forcing the dog to peer forward with chest thrust out – a position that automatically challenges other dogs.

In addition, by breeding certain characteristics into dogs, we have altered the way they appear to other dogs. Herding dogs sometimes lower themselves towards the ground, and move forward – stalking other dogs. This can be quite disconcerting to an oncoming canine.

Most dogs, also, do not look directly at other dogs. If they do so, it is either because they feel threatened or challenged by the other dog, or the other dog is very well known to them (though, that is rare). Some breeds are more likely to stare at dogs than others are. Border collies are bred for their "eye," and many bully breed dogs – Boxers and Pit Bulls – have a tendency to gaze intently at other dogs. This makes the dogs they are looking at quite nervous, and sometimes invites aggression.

Keeping the above in mind, here are some good postures and behaviors we encourage and teach.

- *Looking away.* A polite dog will slow down and turn his head to the side when he sees an oncoming dog. This tells the other dog that he is not a threat. Other similar behaviors include meandering to the side of the road and sniffing at something that suddenly seems very interesting, or turning their back on an oncoming dog.
- *Arcing.* When meeting, a polite dog will not move in a straight line. He'll walk in an arc – curving around as he approaches. Again, this communicates to another dog that he has peaceful intentions.



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- *Greetings.* When two polite dogs actually greet each other, they generally sniff at the juxtaposition of head and neck where there's an identifying gland, and then around the tail area, where there's another identifying gland. After greeting, the dogs may decide what to do. Unfortunately, some dogs – perhaps after realizing they don't know a dog – will posture and even start a fight.

The Modification Process

Many dogs that show aggressive behavior cannot be taught to actually like and play with other dogs – but they can learn how to be polite in canine company. Your dog should have learned how to “talk dog” when he was a puppy, but as he hasn't, we have to try to help. We humans are not nearly as adept at teaching as an adult dog would be, but there are some techniques that work.

First, we want to make sure that your dog understands what you want him to do, rather than what you don't want him to do (punishment).

Positive Reinforcement – and what to use

Positively reinforcing your dog is of paramount importance when trying to retrain some entrenched behaviors - in fact, it's important when trying to teach anything. Reinforcement can be a myriad of things - toys, play, petting, praise and food. In class, we use food the most, because it's the most convenient, but you must figure out what your dog loves in addition to treats. The best reinforcers come in pairs. When you use food you praise, or when you pet you give a toy, or when you play tug you get excited, or when they do something you like, you run around it circles - it's your dog, you need to know when floats his boat! When he does something well, reinforce. When he doesn't, most of the time we'll ignore him, or control his environment.

Make sure your dog obeys you

Basic obedience may seem like a bore, especially given your dog's problems, but it's extremely valuable. It allows you to communicate your wishes to your dog... and allows him to understand you. Here are some variations on basic signals or commands.

Obedience Exercises

Equipment

Before you do anything else, you need to have the right equipment – equipment you trust. Your basic leash should be four to six feet in length, and fit very comfortably in your hand. Leather is often best, since it tends to soften with age.

We suggest either a Sense-Ation™ harness, or a head halter (Gentle Leader™ or Halti™). Choke chains and pinch or prong collars are not appropriate, because their action can tend to increase rather than decrease aggressive behavior.

Release Word

The release word tells the dog that you have ended the exercise. It's a very important cue, because otherwise your dog is likely to do the requested exercise and then go on to something else. A common example of this is the dog that will “sit” on cue, but will not stay. Once you have chosen the release word, it should stay consistent throughout the dog's life.

We suggest you use a word that has no other connotations to it – “Release” is a very good one. Others are – “Dismissed,” “Go Play,” “At Ease,” “That'll do.” “OK” is difficult -- you should say the name first, to get the dog's



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attention and to differentiate that word from all the other times you say the word OK in conversation. Don't use "Good Dog," since you'll be using that phrase to praise the dog.

Use the release word to literally release a dog from an exercise. Whether she's watching you or on a sit or down, it works the same way. When you've decided the exercise is at an end, say the release word you have chosen, then step away from the dog and invite her to take a break.

Teach your dog what the release word means.

Ask the dog to do something she knows how to do (maybe "sit"). When she's sitting, say your release word, and give her a treat. Do that about five times, and she will begin to understand.

Marker Word

The marker word or "bridge" lets you "mark" the instant your dog has done something that you like. After marking a behavior you deliver a special reward – generally food treats! We suggest you use the verbal "yes!" or try using a clicker.

Teach your dog what the MARKER word means.

Relax with your dog in a comfortable spot without many distractions. Don't ask your dog to do any behaviors; your dog should just be with you. Make your marker sound, and then immediately deliver a treat. Repeat that sequence 20 or 30 times during the session. Repeat the session at least two or three times over the next day or so.

You'll know your dog has learned the meaning of the marker if you make the sound ("yes!" or "click") at some random moment, and your dog immediately looks at you (or comes running!) for her reward.

Head Snap

It's very important to teach your dog to look at you and begin coming to you when you just say his name. Begin at home with a bowl of various kinds of treats and few distractions. Call your dog's name, and when his head turns to look at you, smile and give him a treat. Do this even if his reaction to your call is slow. We're trying to speed it up. Do it several times; his response should get faster, and he should begin trotting to you after just a few repetitions. End the session after three minutes or so by just getting up and ignoring him. Wait a couple of hours, and begin the process again. It's important that when you end the session, you don't pay attention to him. We're trying to make sure your dog feels it's his responsibility to watch you, not the other way around.

As a variation, try saying his name and then walking quickly away from him. If he comes to you anyway, give him a jackpot - several different treats in a row - with lots of praise.

You can add the word "come" or "here" to the behavior after she's 90% reliable. Be happy when you call him, and always hold his collar when he gets to you before he is rewarded.

Now take the behavior into other areas, where there are more distractions - don't add other dogs until you've "proofed" him with friends, family and other attractions. You may wish to attach a long-line to his collar (not to his head halter), for security's sake.



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Collar Grab

After you're getting a lovely head snap and eager trot towards you, give him a cue - "Gotcha!" Gently grab his collar and praise him when he gets to you. Take it slow; some dogs accept a collar grab easily, but others are nervous about it, and need to understand that it's just another silly human thing.

Watch or Focus

You'll want your dog to not only look at you when you say her name, but also to sustain eye contact with you. For this, you can add another cue, "Watch," "Look," or "Focus" just after you say her name. An easy way to get sustained focus is to use a lure. Place a treat just in front of her nose, say her name and "watch" and draw the treat from her nose to the bridge of your nose. When you get eye contact, say "yes." After several repetitions, wait for a second or so before you mark the behavior, thus extending the period of eye contact. You can work up to several seconds – and remember to smile while you're gazing into her eyes.

Zen Down or Settle

Most dogs that show aggression have a hard time calming themselves down. Indeed, the brain chemistry involved in play and aggression is the same, which is why energetic play can turn into a fight in an instant. Many of these dogs bark or lunge at other dogs (or people) while in their cars, or in their yards or houses. In these cases, we always try to control the environment, so that your dog doesn't get a chance to practice. Closing curtains in houses, bringing dogs out of yards, or using a crate in a car are all good choices.

In addition, your dog should learn to calm down when you instruct him to. To do this, we help the dog physically to move into a comfortable, resting position – even though at first, most dogs have no intention of doing so.

First, have your dog lie down. If he responds to a "down" cue, that's great. If you need to kneel down beside him, and help him down, using pressure on his shoulders or gently lifting his legs out from under him, that's okay too. At any rate, once he's down, you should be kneeling beside him. Now, gently roll him onto his side – it's often helpful to press him back into your body, but it's not necessary. When he's on his side, place one of your hands on his shoulder, the other on his rump, and apply just enough pressure to keep him down. When you feel his muscles relax, you can release him quietly. At first, he may only lie on his side for a second or so – or he may fight it intensely. Stick with it, and he'll learn to relax all the way, and probably enjoy it.

You can use this exercise whenever you wish, but it's especially handy if your dog has become aroused by the sight of another dog, a cat or a "scary" person.

Find It

This is a wonderful exercise to teach - fun for the dog and for the owner. At its most useful, it distracts the dog away from another dog or human.

To teach the exercise, put a treat on the ground, and say, "Find it!" This should be pretty easy for him to do! After he has eaten the treat, wait for him to come back to you, then praise and give him another treat. The goal is to have him look for the food on the ground, and then back up to you.

After a few minutes of doing this, begin to throw the treats on the ground, say, "Find it" then - as he eats the treat - walk away. He'll get the treat and hurry to catch up to you. As he does, give him a voice signal to walk with you ("close," "heel," "with me," whatever you like to use!) Do that again and again. The dog is either looking for the treat or looking at you. This gives him no opportunity to pick a fight! I like to do this with the dog on leash, taking great care NOT to pull the leash. The dog should learn to watch you - you should not be pulling him after you.



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Look Away

Another handy exercise to teach your dog is Look Away. Rather than having the dog look at you, just cuing him to look away from something compelling (like another dog) can be easier for your dog, and it has the added attraction of being read as non-aggressive by other dogs.

In order to teach this exercise, the dog must learn that he must give up the treat in order to get the treat. First, hold a treat near his face. As soon as he stops looking at it, mark ("yes") and give it to him. Do this several times. Then, hold the treat and wait until he actually turns his head away from the treat before you give it to him. Often your dog will look at you rather than your hand. That's fine, but not necessary.

Once he's looking away consistently, you can give the action a cue. Thus, you would say, "Look away" just as your dog is beginning to do just that.

Now, begin to use other attractions – a human that your dog likes, or another pet. As he gets better, you can use a squirrel or other very attractive thing.

When you teach Look Away, you're giving your dog many different options, and some people like this better than Watch Me." You might use this, for instance, when your dogs sees other dogs from a distance, as a way to help him calm down. It's a lot like Find It, in that you're giving your dog something else to do besides stare at or possibly lunge at another dog.

Wait

"Wait" is an easy behavior to teach. When you tell the dog Wait, it should be as though a wall has suddenly dropped down in front of the dog. Wait is different from Stay, in that your dog can move behind the invisible wall, just not go beyond it. In a Stay, your dog should freeze in position for as long as you wish her to. We begin teaching in doorways, which often are very important to dogs. As you progress, you can ask your dog to Wait anywhere, and she should stop where she is.

Begin with the dog sitting or standing in front of a closed door. Stand between the door and the dog, holding onto the leash and the door handle. Before the door is opened, give the cue, "Wait", and a hand signal - we recommend an upside down windshield wiper effect, with the palm towards the dog's face. Your dog does not have to be sitting – although if you wish that behavior to accompany the Wait, that's just fine.

Now open the door a crack. Your dog will probably begin to charge through the door in delight! As she does, bar the door with your body and/or gently close the door in the dog's face. Repeat the sequence until your dog does not try to barge through the door. If she tries again, use your negative marker "Uh uh" and bar her way again. Often, no treat is required in this exercise -- just going through the door is enough reward for most dogs!

Once your dog is waiting at the door, you step through. If she tries to follow, body block the entrance again, or close the door gently in her face. Put her back, and tell her, "Wait again." There is no need to put her back in the exact spot.

Go through the door. When the dog is on one side and you are on the other, count to five slowly to yourself. Then release the dog by turning sideways and allowing her through.

The U-turn

A quick way to turn the dog away from an "attraction," whether it's another dog or anything else is to do a quick U-Turn. The advantage of this kind of turn is that you don't pull on the leash, and there is no need for the dog to pull back (opposition reflex). Leash aggressive dogs often respond to the pull by lunging, and we'd rather



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avoid that! The dog follows your hand around the outside of your body and ends up facing away from the attraction. If you're using a Sense-Ation™ harness or a Gentle Leader™, the effect is even better.

It's quite easy to do: if the dog is on your left side, use a lure (a treat) in your right hand. Say the dog's name, and a cue ("This way") as you put the treat in front of your dog's nose, and move it in an arc towards your right side as you turn to the right. When the dog is walking beside you once more, you give the dog the treat. Reverse this if your dog walks on your right. It's more effective when teaching to bend your knees slightly as you make the turn - it's another cue to the dog.

The opposite of the U-Turn is a Body Block turn – or a turn INTO the dog. This accomplishes two things – it turns the dog, and it moves them back beside you.

Of course, other behaviors like Sit-Stay and Down-Stay are also extremely valuable for you. The teaching methods are included in the "DogSense" handbook.

Following are some of the techniques we use in our Difficult Dog Classes, or during Consultations.

CLASSICAL DESENSITIZATION AND COUNTER CONDITIONING

Desensitization and counter conditioning (D&C) are tools that we use to help your dog accept the presence of whatever he doesn't like – whether it's another dog, children, or 'strange' looking people. When you begin a Desensitization program, you slowly expose your dog to the stimulus that causes his aggressive response. The exposure is always at the dog's threshold, not over it. Counter Conditioning teaches the dog that when he sees the feared 'object' he gets something good, thus creating an association in his mind.

These exercises are usually best when done with an experienced trainer, especially the first few times.

Here's an example of D&C used on a dog who doesn't like other dogs:

- Have the difficult dog, Fido, in a safe location, tied by a very slack leash to an immovable object. Fido should feel comfortable in the location, his owner close by, but not actively soothing him. A little play or obedience work before the session is advisable.
- The owner begins feeding Fido just before he sees another dog - a wonderful, delicious superb treat every few seconds. We want him engaged! While he's being fed, another person introduces a calm, tolerant dog into Fido's field of vision, close enough for Fido to see her, but far enough away that Fido doesn't go into a fit of barking. This can be difficult, since some dogs "tolerance area" is quite large.
- The control dog is walked towards Fido, coming as close as Fido can handle. The owner continues feeding Fido, dropping the food on the floor, if necessary. The food keeps coming, even if he doesn't eat it and the owner talks pleasantly to Fido at the same time.
- When the control dog walks away, the owner stop feeding Fido, and turns away.

Sometimes, D&C can be more effective if the dog has a negative consequence as well. Here's an alternative with consequences:

- Begin as before, feeding the dog when the control dog comes into view. Do not allow prolonged eye contact by either dog.
- Watch for signs of arousal or anxiety (hackles rise, barks, thrusts forward, tail raises, tail lowers, etc.). At the first sign of arousal, the control dog stops and looks away, and the owner abruptly leaves Fido's immediate area, so he can't use the owner as an emotional crutch. It's a very good sign if Fido looks only at the owner and stops looking at the other dog. Whatever occurs, here's where everything comes to a dead halt until the following happens.
- When Fido calms down (sniffs at the wall or elsewhere within his area, sits or, better yet, lies down), the control dog leaves, and the owner returns to Fido's side in that order.



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- Begin the process again. You should be able to bring the control dog closer to Fido...then closer and closer. Eventually the two dogs should be quite close to each other. If there is no arousal, the owner should praise the dog, and treats are in order!
- Go to another control dog, and begin the process again. You need more than one control dog, because dogs don't generalize behaviors well, and sometimes will respond as you wish them to only when a certain set of circumstances – a "picture" – occurs. That picture often contains only the control dog you've been working with!

Abandonment Training for Aggression

When you leave the dog as above, you are actually abandoning him, while hopefully teaching him that oncoming dogs are not going to hurt him. You can use the following technique to "mimic" the abandonment. It's actually an effective way to teach your dog not to pull on the leash as well.

Knotted Leash Walking

The object is to teach the dog that you will NOT back him/her up if he lunges or attempts to attack another dog. You do this by telling him that you're going to leave him, and that he also has the option of leaving – the escape option.

Practicing - Step 1 - Your goal is for your dog to keep checking in with you – he's learning his job (his only job), which is to watch you.

- Pick a word that tells the dog you're going to go – "back out," "hey," "bye", "oops," "run," "yuck" or "oh, oh." I prefer not to use the word "no" since that has a variety of emotions already attached to it.
- Use a 6-8 foot leash. Knot the leash about 18 inches to 2 feet from the clasp that goes on the dog.
- Assuming the dog is on the left, hold the knot with your left hand.
- With your right hand, hold the loop at the end of the leash. He should be able to walk beside you and about a foot behind or ahead of you without pulling the leash.
- As you walk the dog, watch his head and other body language very carefully.
- As soon as he loses attention in you - walks a little ahead of you, or to the side, or even looks away - give your signal (see above), and let the knot go (not the whole leash).
- Hold on to the looped end with your right hand, and change directions.
- The dog should catch up to you, and when he does, reinforce heavily - lots of praise, maybe a jackpot of treats.
- Do this many times. For it to work, it must be as automatic as you putting your foot on the brake of your car.

Practicing - Step 2 (if necessary) - If your dog doesn't start watching you pretty carefully, we'll add some drama. Follow the instructions for Step 1. Make sure you practice this in a safe location.

- If and when loses attention in you - walks a little ahead of you, or to the side, or even looks away - give your signal (see above), and throw the leash at the dog. This shouldn't hurt! It's a tactile signal only, based on the experience that dogs focused on something else do not hear you.
- As soon as you've thrown the leash, back up quickly and call the dog repeatedly, in an excited manner.
- DO NOT STOP BACKING UP UNTIL THE DOG HAS COME TO YOU.
- Praise the dog lavishly for coming.
- This can become an entertaining game for your dog, which is just fine. If he begins to look at you more, that's all to the good.



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More Desensitization and Counter Conditioning

Here's a human example of Desensitization and Counter Conditioning. Say your child is afraid of elevators, and every time she steps into one, she bites her nails and cries. Of course you wouldn't punish her – that would make her more fearful, and dislike you as well. Instead, you might ask her to just step inside an elevator when the door is open, until she's comfortable with that. When she seems okay, you might have her go in and close the door, and later go up one floor. The process would work better if – whenever she stepped into an elevator – something nice happened to her. Maybe she gets a piece of chocolate as well as your praise.

To desensitize a dog to humans, you start with a human who is just slightly scary. For instance, if the dog is scared of men with beards, you desensitize first to a boy, then to a teenage boy, then to a man, then to a man with a beard, and maybe to a man with a beard who's wearing a hat... and then to many men! Counter condition in the same way you would with a dog – whenever your dog sees what he fears, he should get something good.

Combining Techniques to Take Your Training Outside

When you're practicing, the environment is under your control. In the real world, the environment is out of control, and you have to keep alert and prepared for the unexpected. Make sure when you do walk your dog, that he is hungry and that you have some delicious treats. He should be on a slack, not tight leash.

When your dog sees another dog, say your dog's name, and begin to work on what you have practiced. By now you should have found one or two that work best for you. Perhaps your dog has responded well to a Find It, and can be distracted by some treats on the ground. You can prepare your dog for the exercise by having him do a few just as a game. As we mentioned before, Find It forces your dog to use inoffensive body language around other dogs - presenting a non-threatening body posture with little or no eye contact.

If an oncoming dog is too close for a Find It, then a U-Turn might be in order. Use the U-Turn to turn away from the dog, then turn back after he's calmed down a bit. It's nice if you can keep moving slowly. Stopping sometimes increases the anxiety, while moving quickly can spark chase behavior in an oncoming dog.

If you must walk by the other dog, walk in an arc, and when you get past the other dog, heap praise and food on your dog. Your goal is to keep your dog's attention predominantly on you while walking past another dog. He is rewarded before, during and after the process. If he begins to aggress, move rapidly away, but don't yell - it usually makes things worse.

If you must stop to let the other dog go by, as the other dog approaches, call your dog and pivot back and to the side of the sidewalk or path. When he gets to you, signal him to sit, and hold his collar or Gentle Leader underneath his chin (Gotcha). Try to maintain eye contact as you feed him treat after treat, and a jackpot or other major reinforcement (tug of war - catching a ball - anything he loves) after the dog has gone by.

Always carry wonderful treats with you, and vary the number and times you give him a reward for good behavior. He should look upon you as a god or goddess, who dispenses various types of praise and goodies at different rates.

Here's a trick you can use to get your dog to learn to pay attention to you whenever anyone goes by. Select a word of greeting you tend to use with people – for example, “Good morning” or “Hello.” Every time you pass a person – with or without a dog – use that greeting, and immediately reward your dog. Your dog will learn that passers by are an invitation from you to come to you and to get a treat. Passers by will think you are quite polite. This little behavior is a wonderful one to use – even with dogs who just like to greet strangers.



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Replace the aggressive behaviors with alternate behaviors

If during training, you can develop a ball or toy addiction in your dog, go for it! Some dogs are more object-oriented than others. At any rate, using counter conditioning (as above) should develop an association between the sight of another dog (or scary person) and whatever her reward is - treat/ball/goodie. Your aim is to have the dog see another dog, and look at you with an expectant, "where's my _____?"

Generalize the appropriate behaviors to the world

Dogs are place-learners. That is, they will associate a certain area with a certain behavior. This trait allows us to counter condition, but it can backfire if you only train your dog in one location. Do remember to vary your location as the behavior becomes more reliable.

Meeting off leash dogs on the road unexpectedly

Do try to avoid meeting unknown off-leash dogs while you're re-training your dog. However, should you do so, here are some things to try:

- If the dog looks friendly, loosen your leash to the point where the dog doesn't feel it, move away from your dog, while giving a command (again "Find it" might be appropriate, or "Let's go"), arc away from the oncoming dog and walk confidently past.
- OR... throw some treats away from you and either at the other dog or in the path you would like the other dog to take. Call out "Cookies," or "Treats," and move away.
- If the other dog does NOT appear willing to ignore your dog, hold your hand out, palm facing the dog in the age-old signal for halt! In an assertive manner, say "STOP, SIT" to the other dog, or use an umbrella you have conveniently brought along, open it in the other dog's face (you will have already desensitized your dog to the umbrella opening in its face), say STOP or NO, and leave.
- If your dog loses all her training and starts to aggress, use your collar grab, and walk calmly away.

It is not a crime to have your dog on a muzzle when you are walking, and it often allows your dog to learn when you are less stressed. If you do, however, be sure he can breathe and pant. Dogs don't sweat; they lose excess heat through panting.

IMPORTANT NOTES

You have chosen to work on a problem that overwhelms most people, to the extent that they give up on their dogs, or give up their dogs. You should be proud of yourself, and cut yourself some slack! It's important to remember that your dog does not necessarily want to do what you would like her to. She's an unwilling participant in activities that are often stressful and difficult for the handler to do as well. This can make the learning curve steep and frustrating for both handler and dog. Stick with it, and you'll make progress.

Remember that the only constant about behavior is that it is ever changing, and we'd like it to change for the better.

Some things to remember:

Always work your dog slightly UNDER his or her threshold level. If she is getting too tense, she cannot concentrate (neither can you!), and no progress will be made. If this means taking a time out, do so! Retreat is a viable option. If your dog is stressed, or out of control, get out of the situation immediately.

Practice makes perfect. This works both ways. The more often the dog aggresses, the better he will become at it. The more he passes other dogs and nothing happens, the more often THAT will happen.



Behavior and Training Department Behavior Resources

THE PLACE FOR PUNISHMENT

By the time you're reading this you've probably already tried punishing your dog for his aggressive behavior. Often people have tried many different kinds, sometimes recommended by experts. We've found that punishment is contra-indicated, because it often increases rather than decreases aggression. We've also found that practicing the steps taught in class will help you and your dog. There are dogs that are never reliable, and can never interact successfully with other dogs. However, virtually all dogs can improve using these techniques, as well as others that use positive reinforcement to train new behaviors.

When trying to modify the behavior of an aggressive dog, it's paramount to remember that each dog is different. There is NO one way that works, and each case requires individual evaluation. We in no way think we have all the answers - or even all the questions. We hope this handout gives you information that helps all of us learn. Please feel free to use it and enhance it.

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