

Reactivity



Reactivity is an excessive reaction to a specific trigger. A [trigger](#) is anything that causes a (sometimes inappropriate) reaction. For most dogs this looks like;

- Lunging, barking, or growling at other dogs on leash
- Lunging, barking or growling at fences or through windows
- Barking, growling, or pacing when the doorbell is rung

One of the key differences between reactivity and aggression is that either; under different circumstances (i.e. off leash, without a fence) your dog has had friendly encounters with the trigger (most common is other dogs or people); and/or your dog is more likely to attempt to back away from the trigger when it gets closer.

In terms of reactivity issues, triggers most likely cause a severe reaction in dogs. The origin of triggers can be a learned behavior in dogs, but there is evidence that suggests that reactivity issues can also be genetic. The key to working with reactivity is keeping safety as a first priority and having a good dose of patience.

Reactivity comes from a place of fear and anxiety in a dog, so punishment is not recommended for use as a training technique. Adding punishment to the already stressful trigger that your dog is experiencing is more likely to make the reactivity worse and potentially unsafe.

One key safety issue to always keep in mind when working with reactivity is that there is a risk of redirection. Redirection is when a dog is reacting excessively to a trigger, losing most of their executive functions for bodily control, and a bite can easily occur to the handler/owner. Below are some ways to make sure that reactivity incidents stay as safe as possible;

- Do not attempt to handle the dog if he/she is actively barking, growling, lunging at a trigger
- Walk the dog away from the trigger or remove the trigger to the best of your ability
- Make sure that you can keep the dog at an arm's length away if the dog is on leash and excessively reacting. This is so that, if the dog does attempt a redirection bite, you can hold the dog at a safe distance from your body
- Never force a dog to go closer to a trigger if he/she is already having a negative reaction
- If your dog has reactive behaviors, a retractable leash device is not recommended. A six-foot, sturdy leash would be best for your dog

*If any bite, injury, or other emergency happens while working with your dog. Please separate and contain the dog as quickly and safely as possible. Call 9-1-1 for medical assistance and call Animal Law Enforcement at 719-302-8798 for assistance with a dangerous dog.