

## **Introduction**

Do you know a dog who growls, lunges, barks or engages in other unsociable behavior at the sight of passersby? This is a common problem, since it is not natural for all dogs to automatically like every dog, human or other unfamiliar beings.

However, it is essential to socialize your dog so that you can take him or her out in public without posing a nuisance or risk. It is also essential to learn how to get your dog's attention in the presence of all distractions. This is the first step to educating your dog, as well as for establishing yourself as the leader that your dog can trust. Ultimately, you want your dog to look to you for guidance instead of taking action on his own.

In addition, you always want to convey assurance to your dog that you're in control of the situation in public. That means staying calm and avoiding the common mistake of telegraphing anxiety through the leash, which often triggers and aggravates aggressive behavior in dogs.

You'll find detailed guidance and techniques for dogwalking with confidence in the following multi-part tipsheet.

### **Aggression to Passersby** *By Kathy Diamond Davis*

Does your dog growl, snap, snarl, lunge or otherwise threaten passing dogs or people on walks? Perhaps the dog has had bad experiences that make this behavior understandable. Yet it's embarrassing, and raises concerns the dog will injure a person or dog. What can you do? Can this problem be cured? How do you manage the dog safely while working on the aggression?

#### **Safety First**

When a dog threatens, it's unwise to assume the dog would never carry through on the threat. Have your veterinarian check for illness or injury that is often at the root of aggressive behavior. When the aggression has not continued long enough to become a habit, curing or controlling the physical cause will in some cases immediately stop the aggression.

Dogs have a survival instinct to hide their pain. Showing any sign of weakness in the wild could get them killed. Aggression is often the first and sometimes the only change in behavior from pain, as the dog acts to ward off approaches and touches that the dog has learned will hurt. Even the most experienced dog handler can be fooled, so don't be quick to rule out pain as a possibility.

Aggression that has continued long enough to become a habit or is not rooted in physical pain is reason to consult a behavior specialist. Ask your veterinarian to recommend one who can meet with you and the dog, evaluate the situation, and prescribe treatment. A veterinary behavior specialist is the board-certified expert who can evaluate and treat medical as well as other causes of aggression.

The behavior specialist can fit the dog with a head halter or muzzle and teach you how to use it safely and effectively. You will then have excellent control of the dog's

mouth, and a greatly increased ability to keep other dogs and people safe in the presence of your dog.

Either a head halter or a muzzle also helps get other people to remember to keep their dogs out of your dog's face, and to ask your permission before touching your dog or allowing their children to do so. These should be common courtesy and safety measures that people extend to everyone they see out with a dog, but too many don't. The dog who is aggressive to passersby desperately needs this consideration in order to make improvement, and safety demands it, too.

If you cannot enlist the cooperation of other people to govern their dogs and children to provide your dog with the needed space, you'll need to find more controlled settings. An orderly group obedience training class is perfect, if you can sufficiently control the dog for safety to other dogs and people in the class. If not, you'll need to start with private lessons.

Some dogs don't belong in public. One factor is whether or not the person can restrain the dog. A dog has about a three-to-one strength advantage over a person of the same weight. In other words, a 60-pound dog is about as strong as a 180-pound man. Be sure that you are able to control your dog before taking the dog out in public. In fact, because you may need to do something else -- such as repel a loose dog -- while walking your dog, you need to be able to control your dog with ONE hand!

Don't try to walk another dog at the same time you walk an aggressive one. A dog with a questionable temperament requires your full attention on outings.

Avoid walking where there are loose dogs. If your neighbors let their dogs run loose, cooperate with the authorities to work through this problem. Loose dogs endanger everyone who has to walk or drive through the area, and the dogs are themselves in danger of losing their lives at any minute.

One trick that can work to repel a loose dog out of your dog's face is to carry an umbrella with you, the kind that opens with a fast "Whoosh" when you press the button. A lot of dogs will back off from this, and you may be able to keep the dog back by holding the umbrella between your dog and the other one. This won't break up a fight, so it must be used the instant the dog approaches. Move off slowly, without turning your back on the loose dog.

### **Aggression toward Passing Dogs**

The focused attention exercise, developed by expert trainer Linda Newsome, is ideal for handling your dog around other dogs. You teach the exercise first in other settings, but soon will be able to use it anywhere and know that you can keep your dog's attention on you and off anything else. It's a humane way to be in complete control of your dog-especially when combined with a head halter until the dog is totally reliable.

The first requirement for using the focused attention exercise is to find a setting where you can provide your dog with a safe personal space. Don't ask your dog to give you full attention and ignore everything around the two of you unless it is safe to do so. Part of what makes this work is for you to become someone the dog can trust to look out for safety. A dog whose experience builds the expectation of having to always be

on guard has good reason to be aggressive. To resolve this problem in your dog, you'll have to take over the job of safety officer.

Have treats on your person (later you may use a toy instead, but it helps to start with tiny, tempting treats - lots of tiny pieces), but keep them out of the dog's sight. To initiate the attention sequence, say "[Dog's Name]!" and YOU MOVE ABRUPTLY away. If you want to say "heel" or "come" or "front" or "by me," that's fine too. The main thing is, say the dog's name - this is going to become the cue for the dog to give you eye contact - and then MOVE.

When your dog moves with you, quickly PRAISE. This is when you would use a clicker if you wish, but a word of praise is fine, too. Then instantly whip out a treat and give it. Do not show a treat until you are ready to give it. This prevents the sight of a treat from becoming, in the dog's mind, part of the cue to listen to you. When you give a treat, align it between the dog's eyes and yours. You want eye contact with each treat. Soon you'll notice your dog seeking your eye contact even when you don't say the name. Always praise this, and sometimes give a treat to reward it.

You're not done. When you do this sequence, always do it at least 3 to 5 times in a row. That means each time you 1) say the name, 2) move, 3) say the praise word, 4) whip out a treat and 5) give it. This doesn't necessarily require much space, since you want it all to happen very fast and the movement is not over a great distance. You can move one direction the first time, back the other way the second time, etc. But always do at least 3 to 5 repetitions in a row before you release the dog's attention. This is what conditions the dog to SUSTAIN attention on you until you release it.

Practice everywhere, and don't be quick to discontinue the treats. Keep them up at least occasionally forever. Because you're not dangling the treat in front of the dog before giving it, you're conditioning the dog to respond even when you don't have food. You want to make the behavior quite strong and build the importance of other rewards (praise, petting, play, toys, etc.) in the dog's life before moving away from food.

Praising before each treat or other reward will make your praise more motivating to the dog. Eventually you'll be able to praise for the behavior you're rewarding, and use your voice as a bridge while you walk to the treat jar or refrigerator at home. The dog will understand the treat is a reward for the behavior you praised. In this way you can reinforce behaviors you want to see more of -- such as coming quickly to your call -- when the dog does them at a time you weren't expecting to do a training session.

Do not postpone intervening in your dog's aggression issues with the focused attention exercise, a head halter or muzzle, and appropriate expert help in-person. These problems do not magically disappear. Dogs don't just outgrow aggression. It usually gets worse unless the right interventions are done.

The sooner you start working on the problem, the greater your chances of success. Every single time the dog acts on the aggression, the habit gets stronger. It will then take a longer period of time and more reconditioning sessions to change the habit-if it can be changed at all. These problems often emerge in adolescence. This is a volatile

time for dogs and a period of their lives when time is running short for you to effect significant change in the dog's adult personality. There is no time to waste!

If you immediately start the focused attention exercise every single time you spot another dog on outings with your dog, you'll soon find that your dog automatically looks at you when another dog appears! In many cases, you can actually turn a problem and a weakness in your dog's temperament into a special strength! This has been noted over and over in humans who put a great deal of effort into overcoming some disability or disadvantage in life, and you can do the same thing for your dog.

### **Social Experiences with Other Dogs**

Sometimes the effort to create a dog who can play happily with other dogs in dog parks and when out on walks is actually the cause of these aggression problems. Not all dogs have the genetic make up to socialize peacefully with other dogs as they mature past puppyhood.

Dogs frightened by encounters with other dogs in public often become aggressive to other dogs on outings. The leash is one problem since it interferes with dog body language and can make a dog feel and act "trapped" in trying to relate to another dog. If you want to allow a social encounter between your dog and another dog, it's better to find a place they can safely play together without leashes.

You can use the focused attention exercise to teach your dog to pay attention to you when on leash, and ignore other dogs. When you remove the leash and release the dog's attention to go play, the dog is "off duty," and able to interact with the other dog. Making a consistent distinction between working with you and being off duty to go play will give your dog a greater sense of security and will help to ease fears.

The dog who always wins encounters with other dogs can develop an aggression problem, too, perhaps connected with the adrenaline rush of the fight. Adrenaline seems to be addictive. We can't read a dog's mind and predict the future when watching dogs play together in a dog park. Sometimes you can clearly see in watching the dogs that unhealthy patterns are developing, but many times you can't.

It's safest to give your dog play dates in a safe area with one other compatible dog at a time. Whatever your choice in dog social experiences, enlist the aid of a behavior specialist before continuing any dog interactions that have resulted in fear or aggression from your dog.

### **Aggression toward People**

When a dog bites a human, it's a very serious matter. Your wisest course is to enlist the aid of a behavior specialist at the first sign the dog MIGHT bite a person.

Like aggression toward other dogs, aggression toward people doesn't go away on its own. In recent years many localities have strengthened their laws governing dog bites. People have gone to prison when their dogs killed someone. Young children make up most of the fatalities from dog bites.

Few bites result in death, but courts consistently award victims of dog bites all expenses, including time lost from work. Your homeowners insurance might pay for

one dog bite, but then would likely refuse to insure you at all anymore. You would likely be faced with the decision of putting the dog to sleep, after first paying for the dog to be held in quarantine long enough to rule out rabies. This is a thoroughly unhappy ending for everyone concerned.

In the very earliest stages of reaction to people on outings, you may be able to work through the problem with classes, diligent application of the focused attention exercise, and a head halter or muzzle to remove the dog's option of using the mouth against a human. You'll need to work the dog at a distance from people-both physically and emotionally-that allows the dog to feel safe.

Changing a dog's state of mind is a slow process. Don't rush it. Every time the dog sees someone approaching and goes into an aggressive display, you've had a major setback. Your goal is to bring the dog along at a pace that prevents this from happening, until eventually the dog can remain calm around people.

The process also requires cooperative people who will follow your instructions around your dog. At first you'll simply want the dog to see them at a distance and then immediately focus on you. Gradually, over many sessions, you move closer to people, have them pass, have them pass and drop down a treat, have them pay slight attention to the dog, have them very briefly touch the dog, and perhaps-with dogs who can make it this far-you eventually have the dog going up to the person for petting. If the person rushes the process and the dog's aggression triggers, you've lost ground. You can see that a behavior specialist is a great help in structuring the right training situations for the dog.

Genetic temperament, experiences, and of course the skill and commitment of the handler will determine the dog's chances of improvement. Some dogs will never be safe to take out in public.

If you have the facilities to keep the dog at home without posing a threat to other people, you may be able to do that and give the dog a good life. You might be surprised at the number of potentially dangerous dogs who live out their lives this way, in competent hands, and never hurt anyone.

If you don't have those facilities, you'll have a difficult decision to make. Enlist the expertise of a behavior specialist in person to help you assess the dog and your options.

### **Face the Music, and Dance!**

When a dog starts to show aggressive behavior in public, most people make excuses for their dog. "He's just scared." "That person stared at her!" "Those kids were making entirely too much noise!"

Don't make excuses. Don't deny what is right before your eyes. Your dog needs your help, and there's no time to waste.

The focused attention exercise will surprise you. It's a joyful thing. You'll find yourself dancing, and your dog dancing with you! Meeting each other's eyes, moving

together, you praising and the dog happily earning rewards-this makes for a very good time with your dog!

Handling a dog with these problems requires good timing, vocal control, and skill with a leash. You'll need to learn how to keep a LOOSE leash in order to direct the dog with your voice and body language instead. A tight leash interferes with the action of a head halter, and can even make it mar the dog's face. A tight leash also interferes with the dog's ability to focus on you, and makes the dog more defensive. That's exactly what you DON'T want a dog to feel when aggression is an issue.

Get the help you need to become the handler your special dog needs. The added bonus to you is that these new skills will stay with you, and every other dog you live with-in fact, every other dog you MEET will benefit. Just as this training can turn your dog's weakness into a special strength, it can turn you into an awesome dog handler.

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### **( Shaping Better On-Leash Behavior**

Adapted from the Dog Fancy article "We're to Blame for On-Leash Aggression" by Andrea Arden.

\* Teach your dog to look at you on command. Use a special word such as "look." Say the word and follow it with a reward.

\* Once your dog associates that command word with pleasure, keep activities interesting by changing the rewards. Teach your dog to carry a toy. This is an example of a "competing behavior." If your dog is looking at you or carrying a toy, he cannot bark at other dogs.

\* Act very happy when another dog approaches. (This may mean a conscious change in your own attitude and behavior in response to approaching people and dogs.) Consistently reward your dog with verbal praise combined with food, treats or toys when other dogs are near. Make your dog think other dogs approaching equals great stuff. Practice this exercise for at least a week.

\* Feed your dog dinner while on a walk. For each piece of kibble, ask your dog to look at you, sit or lie down. Use the food to reward your dog for ignoring or acting calm upon seeing oncoming people, animals and other distractions.

\* Try using a head halter instead of buckle collar. When used properly, it is a gentle way to control your dog. Also, knowing you have more control can help you relax.

\* Do not punish or reprimand. It usually does not work...and it can backfire.

### **Stop Lunging Behavior -- Two-Dog Exercise**

Adapted from "The Dog Whisperer," by Paul Owens.

Many dogs are taught to act aggressive because the person at the other end of the leash is anxious and communicates that anxiety to the dog. In essence, you're saying, "That approaching dog or person is a threat. Protect me!" If this is the case, change your attitude first, then change your dog's aggressive behavior by following this plan:

- \* Management is a key to handling this problem. For example, using a halter-style collar will help.
- \* Hold your dog in such a way as to not be pulled off balance. Keep your elbows bent and your arms close to your body. Keep your knees slightly bent and balance your weight.
- \* Arrange to have another dog walk by at a distance sufficient to minimize the chance of triggering aggressive behavior. Be ready to reward your dog for moments of quiet behavior. Repeat.
- \* Next, have the other dog walk closer, and ask your dog to pay attention to you. Reward her as soon as she does. Repeat this exercise, gradually decreasing the distance between the dogs.
- \* Distract your dog with a sound or motion to stop the lunging behavior before it happens.
- \* Whenever another dog comes by, use the "Jolly Routine" - talk and act happily and enthusiastically, give him a treat or favorite toy. This technique from canine behavior expert William Campbell helps change the way your dog perceives an approaching dog by getting him to associate the approach with positive things such as praise and fun.
- \* Set up a teaching situation that includes a less threatening dog. Reward that dog first, then give your aggressive dog a reward. Repeat this over and over by touching the other dog and throwing your dog a treat. Eventually the aggressive dog will begin to look at the other dog in a positive way.
- \* Consistently practice behaviors such as sit and stay, progressing to advanced levels. When your dog is fully focused on you, the aggressive behavior will diminish as she relinquishes control to you.

### **The Leash -- Your Best Protection**

Keeping your dog on a leash when outdoors is the best way to prevent the dog from chasing other animals, humans, cars...jumping on people who don't wish to meet dogs up close...getting lost, falling down manholes and getting hit by cars. It also gives you some control if another dog gets in a fight with yours.

### **Getting Pulled by Your Dog?**

If your dog simply pulls when walking, teach him that the walking will stop and will not resume until he calms down. As the oncoming person or dog approaches, put him into a "sit-stay" and shift his attention back to you. Praise heartily. You can use small edible treats to help reinforce the behavior. But don't wait until you're out in public to try to teach your dog "sit" and "stay." First, teach him these important commands in an environment with no distractions, gradually adding distractions as he shows he understands the desired behavior.

### **Fear is Contagious - Don't Telegraph Anxiety to Your Dog**

To maintain the trust of your dog when strangers approach, project confidence and make sure you do not telegraph fear through the leash or by your body language or words. You do not want the dog to think you are anxious about people or animals approaching you. You want the dog focused on you, not the passersby.

When a dog feels threatened by an approaching dog, human or other animal, he will instinctively try to do one of three things: escape, fight, or try to work things out. By staying calm and in control, you can help the dog work things out and realize that passersby are not a threat.

But too often, owners pass their own anxieties onto their dog. A dog can sense his person is nervous about the approaching animal or human. Anxious reactions such as tightening the leash, yanking on the leash, and speaking in a tense or loud manner can interfere with the dog's ability to work things out with the approaching animal...and if he cannot escape, he might resort to the fight option. Anxious owner behavior also reinforces fear and distrust of strangers, making the dog more aggressive to other animals and people.

### **Warding Off Loose Dogs**

In addition to Kathy Diamond Davis's tip about automatic opening umbrellas, here are some other items that dog-walkers carry to help ward off loose dogs: water pistols, plant misters (some with diluted vinegar), pepper spray (can backfire), cookie sheet (to place between dogs and to bang on in order to deter oncoming dogs), airhorns, and tasty chew treats and sticks to throw to send a loose dog running in another direction.

### **Bicyclists, Skaters, Skateboarders, Joggers**

Many dogs are fearful of people whoosing by on bikes, skates and skateboards. As for joggers, some dogs don't like them, and others are inclined to chase them. Remember, that dogs, by nature, are predators. So when somebody streaks by them or otherwise startles them, some dogs may reflexively attack out of fear to protect themselves and their owners. When you see bicyclists, skaters and runners approaching, keep your dog on leash close to you, and consistently follow the management tips elsewhere in this guide.

Among the first lessons to teach your dog is to pay attention to you. Before taking your dog to public places, it's important that your dog knows to count on you, and to look to you, for guidance. It's equally important for you to know how to regain your



dog's attention when he is excited, agitated, frightened or otherwise distracted by someone or something encountered along your walk.

You can find excellent guidance in training-focused books (see the Dog Tip on Helpful Books for Pet People. And some less-comprehensive guidance in online articles such as 'Watch Me' at [http://www.paw-rescue.org/PAW/PETTIPS/DogTip\\_WatchMe.html](http://www.paw-rescue.org/PAW/PETTIPS/DogTip_WatchMe.html)

Practice these so that when you are in public, you'll be able to keep and regain your dog's attention. Keep her focused on you, and as soon as you notice a potential trigger - a loose animal, jogger, bicyclist, skater or the like - give him a behavior cue, such as 'Watch Me' or 'sit-stay.' Carry a bag of small tasty treats, and a clicker if you use this effective tool, so that you'll be prepared at all times. Be sure to reward and verbally praise your dog for listening to you. Don't give a release cue (such as 'OK') until you are well beyond the distraction.

Also, it pays to teach your dog to tolerate triggers such as joggers, bicyclists and baby strollers. You can acclimate your dog to bikes, strollers and fast-moving people with the help of a willing friend or neighbor in the course of a few short sessions. If you have a young dog or newly adopted adult dog, start this conditioning, as part of socialization, from the start. If your dog has already developed a fear of, or aggression towards, such triggers, enlist the help of a good positive-methods trainer/behaviorist before the situation escalates into a bite.

You can also find detailed steps for counter-conditioning responses and desensitizing dogs to such fear triggers in 'The Fearful Dog' and other books in the Helpful Books for Pet People tipsheet. Also be sure to review the free Dog Tips index for other relevant tipsheets, such as those on leadership. Becoming and being the leader in your dog's eyes will make walks, and life, much more pleasant for you, your dog and the people you encounter on outings.

If the chasing or protective behavior occurs when the dog is in a fenced yard watching passersby, call her to come to you. When she comes, let her know everything is all right and she is a good girl.

### **Walking More Than One Dog at a Time**

Beware of taking two strong and/or unruly dogs out walking at a time, since they may play off of each other's excitement upon spotting strangers and be more likely to ignore your attempts to regain their attention, while putting you at a disadvantage with their combined pulling power.

### **Taking an Injured or Newly Disabled Dog in Public**

A dog who has incurred an injury, surgery or vision or hearing problems, or is otherwise in pain, may exhibit more defensive behavior in the presence of strangers (dogs, humans, other animals) due to sensing that his perceived weakness could make him more vulnerable.

### **Neuter and Spay**

It is essential and helpful to spay or neuter dogs. Lunging at other dogs is often reduced when the dog is spayed or neutered. An intact male dog is three times more likely to attack than a neutered dog. A spayed female will not have the same maternal protectiveness and is also less likely to mouth or nip. Because she doesn't have to protect her young, she doesn't have to protect the territory around her.

## **Get Professional Assistance**

It's always worthwhile to get in-person help from a canine behavior specialist. You can also join a group class for dogs with socialization problems so you can practice techniques around controlled distractions. Look for specialists who employ positive reinforcement-based methods. For any dog continuing to display aggression problems, enlist a canine behavior professional without delay.

## **Keeping a Safe Distance, and a Pet Owner's Peeve**

Sharon Kirby offers additional tips for those trying to desensitize dogs to stimuli (such as approaching dogs, strollers, bikers, skaters) that rile them up on walks in public places.

The handler of the reacting dog must gauge distance from whatever causes the dog to bark and as desensitization continues gradually you can get closer.

"I often cross the street or move farther away from person and dog coming toward me and my dogs in order to get to that "safe" distance where I know my dogs will feel comfortable paying attention to me and not worry about the other dog. I am probably at about the 10-15 foot distance now."

Patricia McConnell's booklet, "Feisty Fido", offers a wealth of tips about desensitizing dogs on everyday neighborhood walks. For example: spend time outside of a place frequented by dogs such as vet or pet store - at an appropriate distance of course - and use desensitization tools like treats to gradually reshape the dog's behavior and instill idea that other dogs are a good thing. McConnell also suggests to cross the street at unusual times, not just at intersections, randomly when you take a walk. If you cross streets only to avoid another dog, your dog will catch on to what you're doing and start looking for the other dog every time you change sidewalks. Your ultimate goal: when your dog notices another dog, he will look at you for direction without being asked."

Grounding your dog in the principles of obeying sit, stay and down commands is vital. But for the fearful dog, classic behavior modification can be the key to changing behavior.

Sharon shares a pet peeve to which many dog folks, particularly those with reactive little dogs, can relate: "Even if I thought my dogs could handle being 5 feet or less from a strange dog and owner, I would not try it because so many other owners have extension leads, or even those using a regular leash will let their dog have enough freedom to come right up and sniff noses without checking with the other dog's owner first." Sharon suggests that the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test "meeting" would be the standard in a perfectly polite world, but rarely do dog handlers use it in real life.

One smart technique is the three-second sniff for dog greetings, but this requires that a handler must be able to successfully, consistently recall the dog from the greeting after the count of three.

Notes Sharon: "I've never seen any real life dog owners in my neighborhood ever manage to do that." Sometimes their friendly dogs are so wild that even when Sharon is at least 15 feet away, the dogs drag their owners in her direction. "Somehow a healthy adult male cannot keep a small 25-pound dog at his side without a struggle, and they still slowly sidle towards us!" Then there are the people who don't share the idea that canines, and humans, should be allowed some personal space; they allow their dogs to get "in the face of other dogs without a second thought as to the temperament or needs of the other dog, even though the other dog might be afraid, dog-aggressive, ill, recovering from illness, and thus, "not up for visitors."

These examples show that even people whose dogs do not exhibit aggression can benefit from the guidance of a good trainer. When you're out walking be aware of keeping distance between your dog and other dogs and people. Even if your dog poses no visible threat, it's the courteous thing to do.