



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

Helping Your Reactive Dog Succeed Around Other Dogs

By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

Reactive dogs can learn to feel safe, make better choices, and respond to you instead of reacting to other dogs. Success comes from setting your dog up to disengage calmly rather than “explode.” This guide provides tools and strategies you can practice every day.

Key Training Tools

Bridge/Marker Word (“Yes”)

- Your marker (“yes” or a clicker) tells your dog exactly what behavior earned the reward.
- Practice loading your marker at home: say “yes,” then immediately deliver a treat, until your dog perks up with excitement when they hear it. 10 reps once per day. Use this exercise to prime your puppy for training, which also shows Fido that you have the goods.

Leave It

- Teach “leave it” with simple objects at home, then slowly generalize to bigger distractions.
- With reactivity, “leave it” means, “Don’t focus on that—check back in with me.”

Rewarding Disengagement

- The moment your dog looks away from another dog, say “yes” and reward.
- Catching disengagement teaches your dog that calm choices pay off.

Distance & Thresholds

Every dog has a threshold—the distance at which they can notice another dog but still remain calm and able to learn.

- **Too Close:** barking, lunging, pulling, fixating = over threshold.
-
- **Sweet Spot:** noticing but able to disengage, respond to cues, and take treats.
-
- **Too Far:** your dog doesn’t notice the other dog at all, move closer in small increments.

Always train in the sweet spot. If your dog reacts, you’re too close.



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

Helping Your Reactive Dog Succeed Around Other Dogs

By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

Handling Skills in the Real World

- **Create Space:** step off the sidewalk, cross the street, or turn around before your dog gets over threshold.
- **Use Visual Blocks:** stand behind a car, tree, or fence to reduce your dog's line of sight.
- **Change Directions:** calmly turn away if another dog is headed toward you and reinforce your dog for turning and coming with you.
- **Keep Moving:** sometimes walking in an arc or circles around the distraction helps prevent fixation.

Adding Distractions Carefully

Just like we discussed in previous training tips, distractions must be layered in slowly.

- **Start easy:** calm environments with one controlled dog at a distance.
- **Add difficulty gradually:** closer proximity, mild movement, or mild noises.
- **Increase one element at a time** (distance, number of dogs, activity level).
- **If your dog isn't successful,** it means the distraction level was too high too soon. Back up and try again with more space or fewer challenges.

Practical Exercises

1. Engage-Disengage Game

o Dog notices another dog → you mark "yes" → reward when they look back at you.

2. Pattern Games (U-Turns, 1-2-3 Treat Game)

o Build predictable patterns that keep your dog focused on you.

3. Leave It with Movement

o Practice "leave it" while walking past less intense distractions before applying it to dogs.

Success Tips

- Keep sessions short and positive.
- End on a success—never push until your dog reacts. They get better at the behaviors they practice.
- Use high-value rewards your dog doesn't usually get, think meat chopped up in to small, pea sized pieces.
- Stay calm yourself; your dog reads your body language and tone.
- Remember: the goal isn't to "make friends" with every dog—it's to teach your dog to feel safe and make good choices.