

behavior modification protocols

One of a series of ASPCA® Behavior Modification Protocols developed by Emily Weiss, Ph.D., CAAB



reactivity towards other dogs

The goal of this program is to manage the dog's reactive behavior by teaching him to look at the person holding the leash when in the presence of other dogs.

identifying dogs for the program:

- The dog is a SAFER™ “1” and “2” dog on all parts of the assessment other than the Dog-to-Dog Behavior item.
- He likely responds to seeing other dogs by attempting to rush in with tail high and ears forward, growling, alarm barking, and/or lunging on the end of the leash.

before you begin:

- Provide extra kennel enrichment for the dog in the program.
- Provide daily walks with skilled staff members and volunteers on a path less frequented by other dogs.

program instructions:

1. Teach the dog a “look” cue. The goal of using this cue is to have the dog turn and make eye contact with you when you say the verbal cue.
 - a. Charge (classically condition) a reward marker (click, “good,” etc.).
 - b. Hold a treat in your hand that is visible to the dog. Bring the treat up to the outer corner of your eye, then use your reward marker and deliver the treat when the dog follows the treat with his eyes and makes eye contact with you. Repeat until dog is reliably replicating this behavior.
 - c. Now say the verbal cue “look” and bring the treat up close to your eye. Reward the dog when he tracks the treat with his eyes and makes eye contact. Repeat until he is reliably replicating the behavior.
 - d. At this point, begin to keep the treat hidden until after you deliver the “look” verbal cue and the dog makes eye contact with you. Repeat until he is reliably replicating this behavior in other locations besides the room in which you did the initial training.
2. Teach the dog the “sit” cue.
 - a. Get dog to stand toe-to-toe with you.
 - b. Place bit of food between thumb and forefinger.
 - c. Bring treat (lure) to dog's nose and get his attention with it. It is okay if he licks or nibbles at it, but do not give him the treat yet.
 - d. Slowly raise the lure up and as the dog follows it with his nose, move it back over his head a few inches.
 - e. As his head tilts back, he is likely to sit.
 - f. As soon as the rear touches the floor, say “yes” and give the dog the treat.
 - g. Practice 6-10 times in quick succession.
 - h. After the dog is anticipating the next move and begins to sit before you move your hand up and back, he is ready to learn the verbal command. Take a piece of food, hold it in your hand at about waist level and when the dog looks like he's ready to offer the behavior, say “sit.” When he sits, say “yes” and give him the food.

- i. Dogs need the opportunity to generalize. In order for him to really know the command, you must practice it in many locations, under various weather conditions, around different levels of distraction, and on different flooring surfaces.

Note: The two verbal cues are going to stay separate and you will not be chaining the “look” and “sit” cue/behaviors together. Asking the dog to sit will make it more difficult to be reactive in the initial stages of the program. Once the dog is adopted into a new home, he will be able to be on a walk and be asked to “look” while continuing to walk.

3. Now that the dog knows how to both “look” and “sit,” another dog can be brought into the behavior modification.
4. Have the reactive dog on leash and identify a safe distance from another dog on leash to begin practicing the “look” and “sit” cues. When correctly identifying the proper distance to begin the program, the dog should show little to no reactivity.
5. Have the non-reactive dog out of view and have someone helping bring him into view of the reactive dog. The moment the reactive dog sees him say the “look” cue and reward him for the correct behavior. Then immediately ask the dog to “sit” and reward him for the correct behavior. Be sure you are rewarding each individual behavior in order to keep them separate. The non-reactive dog then leaves out of view. Repeat this until the reactive dog reliably looks and sits when you ask each time the non-reactive dog comes into view. If you cannot get his attention off the other dog, you likely have to begin from a further distance.
6. Once the dog is successful at a certain distance, decrease the distance between the two dogs and repeat the above procedure.
7. Continue to decrease the distance according to the dog’s success and repeat the above procedure.
8. Once the dog reliably look and sits on cue in the presence of many dogs in multiple locations, he is ready for adoption.
9. Keep a daily behavior log.

Note: This is not a behavior modification protocol, but a way to manage the behavior of the dog around other dogs. Be sure to teach the adopters how to use the “look” cue prior to them leaving the shelter with the dog.

When the dog is adopted: Review the “Program for Reactivity Towards Other Dogs” instructions with the adopter which can be found in the Reproducible Forms and Templates section. Remember to follow-up with the adopter at three days, three weeks, and three months post-adoption.

program for reactivity towards other dogs





Congratulations!
You have adopted a new family member.

As your adoption counselor discussed with you, your dog displayed reactive behavior towards other dogs while in the shelter. **What does this mean?** It means that your dog may be more likely to rush towards other dogs with tail posture, growl, alarm bark, and/or lunge at other dogs while on leash. We began a successful management program for this behavior while the dog was at the shelter and we highly recommend that if you choose to adopt, you continue the program in your home. We suggest you follow the plan below, beginning the moment your dog comes into your home.

the plan:

- **Continue to practice the “look” cue (using treats to reward the appropriate behavior)** shown to you by your adoption counselor in the presence of other dogs and without other dogs around.
- **Fit your dog with a Gentle Leader™**, which can be found at your local pet supplies store. Follow the DVD instructions to help your dog smoothly accept the device.
- **Give lots of treats to your dog when he acts in a relaxed, non-reactive manner around other dogs.**
- **Avoid introducing your dog to other dogs until you are able to recognize his reactive behavior and the cues leading up to that point** and also have a few solid verbal cues including “look at me” and “come.”
- **When introducing your dog to other dogs, be sure to have a loose leash.** If you are unable to do the preceding exercises, we suggest you choose another dog to adopt. While we cannot 100 percent predict the future, research does show that dogs who display reactive behavior towards dogs in the shelter are more likely to display the same behaviors in the home. It is important to note that your dog’s reactivity towards other dogs has not been modified, but is simply being managed by this program. We cannot guarantee that your dog can be off-leash with other dogs without displaying aggressive behavior. If you choose to adopt, we highly recommend that you contact a local trainer or behaviorist who uses positive reinforcement techniques to modify your dog’s behavior. We want you and your dog to create a strong bond quickly post-adoption and for your dog to have the opportunity to be able to work through his issues. Please take the time to ask yourself if you are ready to take on a bit of a project.