

FREE GUIDE

REACT

The 5-Minute Routine to Keep Your Dog Calm in Public

Without Yanking the Leash, Yelling, or Dreading
Going Out in Public Ever Again

Read this first

This guide is not a vet. It can teach you how to train your dog. It can't look at your dog, and it can't tell you if something is wrong with your dog's body.

So any time you have a question about your dog's health, call your own vet. That goes double if your dog's barking and lunging started all of a sudden. Pain and sickness can make a calm dog cranky, and only your vet can check for that.

This guide is for the everyday barking, pulling, and lunging on a walk. If your dog has ever bitten a person or another dog, or you are scared it might, get a certified trainer who works with aggression, or a veterinary behaviorist. That is a vet who went back to school to study behavior. Use this guide alongside their help, not instead of it.

One more thing. This guide has short stories about an owner and her dog. They are made up. They are not a real person, and they are not a real dog. They are there so you can see what each step looks like on a normal walk.

The people in the stories are made up. The facts in the stories are not.

What is in this guide

Part 1 shows you why your dog barks and lunges on a leash. Part 2 shows you how to see it coming before it starts. Part 3 is the gear that helps, and the gear that makes it worse.

Part 4 is the five moves for the moment your dog goes off. Part 5 is the routine you practice before the barking starts. That routine is what changes how your dog feels about other dogs, so the outbursts get smaller and farther apart.

At the end is your first week page. It has what to get done, what to do on each walk, and a checklist.

It trains with rewards only. A reward is something your dog loves, such as a small piece of chicken or a quick game with its favorite toy. No yelling, no leash jerks, and no punishing. Every practice step takes about five minutes.

After you read it, you will know which kind of reactive dog you have. You will spot the warning signs before the barking starts. You will know exactly what to do when another dog shows up. And you will have a short routine you can practice every day that teaches your dog to look at you instead of lunging.

PART 1

Why Your Dog Barks and Lunges on a Leash

Your dog spots another dog. The barking starts. Your dog hits the end of the leash, and everybody on the street turns to look at you.

If that is your walk, you are not alone. A dog barking and lunging at the end of its leash happens all the time.

Your dog is not a bad dog

Here is the point. Trainers call a dog like yours a reactive dog. A reactive dog gets too worked up over normal things that other dogs would just walk past, like a dog across the street or a person on a bike.

A dog that only does this on a leash is called leash reactive. Lots of leash reactive dogs are totally fine with other dogs when the leash comes off.

Reactive is not the same thing as aggressive. A reactive dog is making a big, loud scene. An aggressive dog is trying to hurt something.

But a reactive dog can be pushed into aggression, especially if it keeps getting pushed. That is why it is worth working on now, before it gets worse.

And here is something to remember on the bad days. Your dog is not trying to give you a hard time. Your dog is having a hard time.

The two reasons dogs do it: scared, or too excited to say hi

Here is the point. Almost every leash reactive dog is doing it for one of two reasons. Knowing which one you have tells you a lot.

The first reason is fear. Most reactive dogs are scared dogs. It sounds backward that a scared dog would run toward the thing that scares it. But the dog is trying to protect itself. It is trying to make the scary dog go away before the scary dog can get close.

The second reason is frustration. Some dogs are so excited to go say hi that the leash drives them crazy. They want to get to the other dog so bad, and the leash won't let them. So they bark, pull, and spin.

Some dogs have a little of both. They want to go see the other dog, and they are nervous about it at the same time.

Meet Dana and her dog, Moose. They are made up. Moose plays like a champ with other dogs at her sister's house. But clip a leash on him and walk him past a dog on the sidewalk, and he barks, lunges, and spins in circles like he lost his mind.

Dana was sure Moose hated other dogs. He doesn't. He wants to go play, and the leash is stopping him.

Here is how to tell which kind of dog you have. Watch what your dog seems to want. Does it want the other dog to come closer, like a dog that wants to go say hi? Or does it want the other dog to back off and go away?

Either way, the steps in this guide are the same. You just watch a little harder if your dog is scared.

Why the leash makes it worse

Here is the point. A leash works like a fence. It stops your dog from running away from something scary. It also stops your dog from running up to something exciting.

Think about being stuck in an elevator with something that scares you, and the doors won't open. You can't leave. So you get loud, because loud is the only move you have left.

That is your scared dog on a leash. It can't walk away, so it tries to make the other dog walk away instead. If your dog were off leash, it would probably still be uneasy, but the barking and lunging would be a lot smaller.

Where it came from, and why it is not your fault

Here is the point. A dog can get this way for a few reasons, and most of them happened before you ever had a say.

1. Some of it can be passed down. Puppies often take after their parents, and being reactive can run in families.
2. A lot of reactive dogs didn't get to meet enough dogs, people, and new things as puppies. So normal stuff feels like too much.
3. One bad day can do it. A dog that got attacked by another dog can stay scared of dogs long after.

So don't beat yourself up. You don't need to know why your dog got this way to help it. You just need to start where your dog is today.

Rule out pain first

Here is the point. Pain can make a dog cranky and quick to react. So can itching, sickness, and other health problems.

If your dog's barking and lunging started all of a sudden, or it got a lot worse fast, see your vet first. Your vet can check for pain and other health problems. If your dog is very scared or worked up, your vet can also tell you whether medicine might help.

The big idea

Your dog barks and lunges because it is scared, or because it is so excited that the leash drives it nuts. The leash takes away its way out. It is not a bad dog, and it is not your fault. And it can get better.

PART 2

See It Coming

The best time to handle a reaction is before it starts. Once your dog is barking and lunging, its brain is too full to listen to you. So this part teaches you to spot the trouble while your dog can still think.

The warning signs come first

Here is the point. Most dogs show small signs that they are getting upset before they ever bark. If you learn your dog's signs, you get a few extra seconds to turn around.

Watch for these. Your dog may show one or two of them, or a bunch at once.

1. It freezes, or its whole body goes stiff.
2. It stares hard at the other dog and won't look away.
3. You can see the whites of its eyes.
4. Its mouth snaps shut, when it was hanging open a second ago.
5. It licks its lips or its nose.
6. It yawns, even though it isn't tired.
7. The hair on its back stands up. That doesn't always mean angry. It means worked up.
8. Its ears shoot forward hard, or go flat against its head.

Every dog is a little different. Some dogs skip the small signs and go straight to barking. So for the next week, watch your own dog closely. Notice the very first thing it does when it spots another dog. That first sign is your cue to act.

Every dog has a distance where it stays calm

Here is the point. The farther away the other dog is, the calmer your dog stays. There is a distance where your dog can see another dog and still be okay. Trainers call that line your dog's threshold.

When the other dog is farther away than that line, your dog can still look at you, listen, and take a treat. When the other dog gets closer than that line, your dog goes off.

That distance is different for every dog. For one dog it might be 10 feet. For another dog, it might be 40 feet, or a whole park away. For some dogs, a dog across the street is still too close.

Think about a pot of water on the stove. Below boiling, it just sits there. Turn up the heat one more notch, and it boils over. Your job is to keep your dog below boiling.

So your goal on every walk is simple. Keep enough room between your dog and other dogs that your dog never boils over.

Stress piles up

Here is the point. One scare after another adds up. A dog that got scared by a barking dog, then a loud truck, then a jogger, can blow up at something tiny that wouldn't normally bother it. Trainers call this trigger stacking. A trigger is anything that sets your dog off.

When a dog gets scared, its body fills up with a stress chemical. That chemical takes time to drain back out. Some dogs calm down fast. Others stay on edge for days.

So after a bad walk, go easy for a few days. Pick quieter walks. And when you practice, start farther away than you did before, even if your dog was doing great last week.

Make your dog's trigger list

Here is the point. Before you can keep your dog away from what sets it off, you need to know what sets it off and how close is too close.

1. Get a piece of paper, or open the notes on your phone.
2. Write down every kind of thing that makes your dog bark or lunge. Other dogs, big dogs, small dogs, people with hats, kids on scooters, bikes, cars, whatever it is.
3. Next to each one, write about how close it was when your dog went off. Across the street? Ten steps away? Right next to you?
4. Write down where it happened, such as the corner by the park or the house with the fence dog.
5. Put the worst ones at the top and the mild ones at the bottom.
6. Every time your dog reacts on a walk, add it to the list.

Now you know which streets to skip and how much room to give.

The big idea

Your dog shows you it is getting upset before it barks. Every dog has a distance where it can stay calm. Stress piles up from one scare to the next. Watch for the first sign, keep enough room, and you stop most outbursts before they start.

PART 3

The Right Gear

Here is the point. A regular collar puts a lot of pressure on your dog's throat when it lunges. A harness puts that pressure on its chest instead.

1. A front-clip harness is the best pick for most reactive dogs. The leash clips on the chest, so when your dog springs forward, the harness turns it back toward you.
2. A head halter is a strap that goes around your dog's nose and lets you steer its head. It can help with a big dog that pulls. But most dogs need time to get used to it. And if your dog hits the end of the leash hard in a head halter, it can hurt its neck. So go slow with it.
3. Skip choke collars, prong collars, and shock collars. Choke and prong collars can hurt your dog's neck. And all three work by making your dog hurt or scared to stop the behavior. Hurting a scared dog when it sees another dog teaches it that other dogs bring pain. That makes the fear worse.

If your dog might bite, teach it to wear a basket muzzle

If you think there is any chance your dog could bite, a basket muzzle keeps everybody safe while you train. A basket muzzle looks like a little cage over the nose. Your dog can still pant, drink, and take treats through it.

Skip the nylon muzzles that squeeze the mouth shut. They are not right for most dogs.

A muzzle doesn't fix the barking and lunging. It just keeps everybody safe while you work on it. And never put it on for the first time in the middle of something scary. Teach it at home first, with treats, like this.

1. Let your dog sniff the muzzle. Give a treat. Do this a few times.
2. Put a treat way down inside the nose of the muzzle. Hold it still and let your dog push its nose in to get the treat. Don't push the muzzle toward your dog.
3. Do step 2 until your dog shoves its nose in happily.
4. Put the muzzle on, buckle it, and count slowly to five. Give a treat through the front. Take it off.
5. Each time, leave it on a little longer, with treats the whole time.

PART 4

The Five Moves for the Moment It Happens

Let's be honest about something. When your dog is already barking and lunging, it can't learn anything. Its brain is full. Your only job right then is to get out safely and calmly.

These five moves are not training. They are how you get through today's walk. The training is in Part 5.

Move 1. Make room

Here is the point. Distance is your best friend. The second you see another dog coming, put more space between you.

1. Turn around and walk the other way.
2. Or cross the street when it is safe.
3. Or step way off to the side and let the other dog go by.
4. Skip the hello. Your dog does not need to meet this dog today.

A lot of grown dogs don't want to meet strange dogs anyway. Your dog doesn't need to greet every dog it sees to be happy. Letting it greet every dog can even make things worse.

Move 2. Block the view

Here is the point. If your dog can't see the other dog, it is a lot easier to move away.

1. Step behind a parked car, a tree, a hedge, or anything solid between you and the other dog.
2. Get your dog's attention, and wait there or keep moving away.

Move 3. Get out calmly, with no jerking

Here is the point. Keep a good grip on the leash, but don't jerk it, yank it, or yell.

Yanking your dog away adds pressure and makes it more upset. Worse, your dog links that bad feeling to the other dog. So the next time it sees a dog, it expects something bad, and it reacts even harder.

And don't keep saying "sit, sit, SIT" while your dog is barking. Its brain is too full to hear you. Now you are both fighting about two things instead of one.

1. Keep a good grip on the leash.
2. Turn and walk away, talking to your dog in a happy voice.
3. Use your treats to lure your dog along with you.
4. Once you have taught the U-turn in Part 5, use it here.
5. Stay as calm as you can. Your dog reads you, and your stress goes right down the leash.

Move 4. Reward the first look back

Here is the point. Once you have enough room, your dog will start to come back to you. Watch for the very first little sign of it.

1. Watch for your dog to glance at you, or turn its head away from the other dog.
2. The second it does, say "yes" in a happy voice.
3. Give it a treat right away.
4. If your dog is too worked up to take the treat, you are still too close. Move farther away and try again.

A dog that won't take a treat it normally loves is telling you something. It's saying, "I'm still too upset." Believe it, and give it more room.

Move 5. Change the rest of the walk

Here is the point. After a big outburst, your dog is still full of stress. If you keep walking the same busy route, the next dog will set it off even faster.

1. Take a quieter route home.
2. If your dog is still on edge, just go home.
3. When you get home, write down where it happened and how close the other dog was. Put it on your trigger list.
4. Next time, give that spot more room, and start moving away sooner.

Remember Dana and Moose? A week ago, a dog came around the corner and Moose went off. Dana yanked the leash and yelled "Moose, NO!" over and over. Moose barked louder.

This week, Dana spotted the dog first. Moose froze and stared. Dana said "Moose, this way!" in a happy voice and walked the other way, behind a parked truck. When Moose glanced up at her, she said "yes" and gave him a piece of chicken. Then she took the quiet street home.

No scene. No yelling. That was a win.

When a loose dog runs up to you

Here is the point. Sometimes a dog with no leash comes running at you. It is always okay to stop that dog from getting to your dog. Don't worry about being rude. Your dog comes first.

1. Shorten your leash.
2. Call out to the other owner. Say "Please grab your dog," or "My dog is training," or just "My dog doesn't want to say hi."
3. If they don't stop, step between your dog and the other dog. Move your dog behind you.
4. Once your dog is behind you, tell the other dog "No!" in a big, loud voice.
5. Don't toss a pile of treats on the ground for your dog when a loose dog is coming. The other dog may run in for the food, and then you have a fight on your hands.

PART 5

The Routine You Practice Before the Barking Starts

The five moves get you through today. They keep your dog from practicing the barking and lunging, and that matters. The more your dog does it, the more it becomes a habit.

But keeping away from other dogs won't change how your dog feels about them. That is what this routine does. It teaches your dog that seeing another dog means good things happen. Little by little, the outbursts get smaller.

Here is how to practice.

1. Start every new step at home, where nothing is going on. Then move to your yard or the street in front of your house. Then a quiet park. Then busier places.
2. Dogs don't carry lessons from one place to another very well. A dog that does it perfectly in the kitchen may not have a clue on the sidewalk. So practice in lots of places.
3. Keep each practice to about five minutes. A few short practices a day beat one long one.
4. Stop while your dog is still having fun.

The treats that work

Here is the point. Plain dog food won't cut it out on the street. Out there, your treats have to beat out another dog. So bring the good stuff.

1. Use something your dog would do anything for, like small pieces of cooked chicken, hot dog, cheese, or liver.
2. Cut every treat to about the size of a pea or smaller, so your dog doesn't get full too fast.
3. If your dog loves a toy more than food, use the toy.
4. Bring more treats than you think you'll need, on every walk.

Practice 1. Teach your dog that "yes" means a treat is coming

Here is the point. You need a quick way to tell your dog, "That! What you just did! That gets you a treat." A short word does that. This guide uses "yes." Trainers call it a marker word.

On its own, "yes" means nothing to your dog. So first you teach it.

1. Stand in a quiet room with a handful of treats.
2. Say "yes," then give your dog a treat right away.
3. Do it again, and again, about 10 to 20 times.
4. Your dog doesn't have to do anything yet. You are just teaching it that "yes" means a treat is on the way.

From now on, every "yes" gets a treat right away, within about three seconds. Every time.

Practice 2. Teach your dog to look at you

Here is the point. A dog can't lunge at another dog and look at you at the same time. So looking at you is the skill this whole routine is built on.

Start with your dog's name.

1. Wait until your dog isn't looking at you.
2. Say its name once, in a bright, happy voice.
3. The second it turns to look at you, say "yes" and give a treat.
4. Never use its name to scold it. You want its name to always mean something good.

Then teach "watch me."

1. In a quiet room, hold a treat up by your face, so it's easy for your dog to see where to look.
2. Say "watch me."
3. The second your dog looks at your face, say "yes" and give the treat.
4. Do it a few times in a row, then stop.
5. Once your dog gets it every time in the house, try it in the yard. Then on the sidewalk. Then on a walk.
6. If your dog doesn't look at you, you moved to a busy place too soon. Go back to a quieter spot and practice more.

Practice 3. Teach the U-turn

Here is the point. Turning around and walking away is the fastest way out of trouble on a walk. But a dog that gets dragged around gets more upset. So you teach your dog to turn with you, happily, before you ever need it.

1. In the house, hold a treat right at your dog's nose so it follows the treat.
2. Take a couple of steps forward.
3. Turn all the way around, and use the treat to lead your dog around with you.
4. Keep the leash loose. Let the treat do the steering, not the leash.
5. Walk a few steps in the new direction, then say "yes" and give the treat.
6. After a few tries, add a word right as you turn, such as "about" or "this way." Say it in a happy, excited voice. You want your dog to think turning around is fun.
7. Practice it in the house, then the yard, then the street, then busier places.

Practice it way more than you think you need to. When a dog comes around the corner, you want your dog to turn with you without thinking about it.

Practice 4. See a dog, get a treat

Here is the point. This is the step that changes how your dog feels. Every time your dog sees another dog from far away, something great happens. After enough times, your dog starts to think, "Oh, a dog! Where's my chicken?"

Trainers have a long name for this, but all you need to know is the idea. You start far enough away that your dog stays calm, and you pair the sight of other dogs with great treats.

Think about the ice cream truck. When you were a kid, that song came down the street and you didn't think, "Oh no, a loud truck." You thought, "ICE CREAM!" The truck didn't change. What it meant to you changed.

1. Find a spot where you can see other dogs walk by, but far enough away that your dog stays calm. That might be the far edge of a park, or the end of a long street. If you have a friend with a calm dog, you can also ask them to walk back and forth across the street from you.
2. Keep your dog on leash, with a pocket full of great treats.
3. The moment your dog notices the other dog, say "yes" and give a treat.
4. Keep the treats coming while the other dog is in sight.
5. Each time your dog glances at the other dog again, say "yes" and give another treat.
6. Do this for about five minutes, then go home or go for a sniff walk.

Pretty soon, your dog will look at the other dog and then whip its head right back to you, like it's saying, "I saw it. Now where's my treat?" That is the sign it is working.

When your dog does that every time, and its body looks loose and calm, move a tiny bit closer next time. Only a tiny bit.

If your dog stiffens, stares, barks, or won't take treats, you moved too close, too fast. Back up to where it was calm and stay there longer. That is not failing. That is how this works.

Practice 5. Look at me instead of lunging

Here is the point. Once your dog is good at "watch me" and good at seeing dogs from far away, you put the two together. Your dog learns that the sight of another dog is its cue to look at you and get paid.

1. Go back to the spot where your dog can see other dogs and stay calm.
2. When a dog comes into view, say "watch me."
3. The second your dog looks at you, say "yes" and give a great treat.
4. Pile on the treats. You want looking at you to pay way better than barking ever did.
5. Over many days, move a tiny bit closer to where the other dogs walk.
6. If your dog goes back to lunging, you moved too close, too fast. Back up and keep practicing.

Down the road, your dog can start doing this on its own. It sees a dog, and it turns and looks at you instead of lunging. That is what you are working toward.

Sniff walks lower your dog's stress

Here is the point. Letting your dog sniff isn't just killing time. Sniffing calms a dog down and lowers its stress. A stressed-out dog reacts faster, so a calmer dog is easier to train.

1. When you can, take your dog somewhere quiet on a long leash.
2. Let your dog go slow and sniff whatever it wants.
3. Don't train. Just let it sniff.

A 20 to 30 minute sniff walk can tire a dog out as much as an hour of fast walking.

Walk at quiet times and in quiet places while you practice

Here is the point. While you are working on the routine, every outburst is your dog practicing the thing you are trying to stop. So for now, skip the walks that set it off.

1. Walk when fewer people and dogs are out, like early in the morning or later at night.
2. Pick quiet streets instead of the busy park.
3. Skip the dog park for now.
4. If you have a yard, it's okay to let your dog potty in the yard and skip some walks while you practice.

This is not forever. It is just while your dog learns.

How long it takes

Here is the honest answer. There is no quick fix. Some dogs get a lot better in a few weeks. For others, it takes months. The longer your dog has felt this way about other dogs, the longer it takes to change.

What makes the difference is you doing a little bit, every day, again and again. Lots of reactive dogs get a lot better this way.

When it is not working

1. If your dog is so worked up that it can't take a treat even from very far away, talk to your vet. For some dogs, medicine from the vet calms them down enough to learn.
2. If you are trying hard and not getting anywhere, get help from a trainer who uses rewards and works with reactive dogs.
3. If your dog may be aggressive, or has bitten, get a certified trainer who works with aggression, or a veterinary behaviorist.
4. If you are worn out, if your dog seems miserable, or if it's hurting your bond with your dog, that is reason enough to ask your vet about more help.

The big idea

The five moves get you through today. The routine is what makes tomorrow better. Teach "yes," teach your dog to look at you, teach the U-turn, and pair every far-away dog with great treats. Stay far enough away that your dog stays calm, and move closer one tiny step at a time.

Your first week page

What to get done this week

1. Make your dog's trigger list from Part 2.
2. Get a front-clip harness if your dog walks on a regular collar.
3. Cut up a bag of pea-size treats your dog goes crazy for.
4. Teach "yes," which is Practice 1.
5. Start the name game and "watch me" in the house, which is Practice 2.
6. Start the U-turn in the house, which is Practice 3.
7. Move your walks to quieter times and quieter streets.
8. If the barking and lunging started all of a sudden, or your dog seems to hurt anywhere, call your vet.

Every walk, in order

1. Before you leave the house, do a few "watch me" turns and a few U-turns with treats.
2. Grab more treats than you think you'll need.
3. Start with a few minutes of sniffing in a quiet spot.
4. Keep your eyes up. Try to spot other dogs before your dog does.
5. When you see a dog far away, and your dog is calm, do "see a dog, get a treat," which is Practice 4.
6. When a dog is too close, use the five moves from Part 4. Make room, block the view, get out calmly, reward the first look back, and change the rest of the walk.
7. When you get home, add anything new to your trigger list.

This week's checklist

- ☐ You made your dog's trigger list, with how close each thing was.
- ☐ You taught "yes" by saying it and then giving a treat, about 10 to 20 times.
- ☐ Your dog turns to look at you when you say its name in the house.
- ☐ Your dog does "watch me" in the house.
- ☐ Your dog follows you through a U-turn in the house.
- ☐ You walked at quieter times and on quieter streets all week.
- ☐ You didn't yank the leash or yell at your dog once.
- ☐ You did "see a dog, get a treat" from far away at least once.

Where to go from here

This guide gets you through the walk today and starts the routine that makes walks better. There is more to it as your dog gets better.

The full book is called "[the book's title]". It walks you through the whole plan, step by step, from the first lesson to a calm walk.

It also covers teaching your dog to settle and relax, walking on a loose leash so the pulling stops, the dog who wants to say hi to every dog it sees, building your dog's confidence, handling bad days and setbacks, and how to pick a good trainer if you need one.

For now, keep doing the steps in this guide. One walk at a time is plenty.