

# Managing Reactivity

**Managing prevents your dog from practicing undesirable behaviors while having great quality of life.**



It involves getting to know your dog, helping them to be as social as possible, and supervising them when necessary — with the goal of keeping your dog comfortable and safe for life. It's about setting up the dog's environment for success.

## Understanding Management

Every time your dog practices a behavior, they get better at it. If you allow your dog to continue practicing threatening behavior, you are putting yourself, the dog, and others in danger. In some cases, that behavior could ultimately cost the dog their life. Don't take that chance.

There are many ways to manage a dog and their environment, so they don't get the opportunity to behave in a way that could get them into trouble. Every dog and every home are unique, of course, so management strategies for each situation will vary.

You are your dog's best advocate and you have to be their voice to keep everyone safe. Dogs who are uncomfortable around children should not be forced to interact with them. Dogs who do not like to meet other dogs on a leash should not be forced to do so in public. Don't be afraid to tell people "no, sorry you cannot pet my dog," if it keeps your dog safe.

Some people are reluctant to consider using a muzzle, but it can be a great management tool to keep both your dog and others safe. Good dogs wear muzzles for a variety of reasons. Dogs are very good at picking up our emotional state, so if you are nervous about your dog biting, your dog will feel your anxiety and might be more likely to bite. By having your dog wear a muzzle during training, you will feel calmer, helping your dog to be calmer, which means training will progress faster.

Only introduce a muzzle with the help of a professional. If this is something you may need, please bring it up with your foster coordinators so we can alert our trainer.

## Some Management Strategies

- Erect physical and visual barriers, such as doors, X-pens, and baby gates, if necessary.
- Train your dog to use a crate as their safe place.
- When you are out in public with the dog, have them wear a vest that says "Dog in training" or "do not pet," depending on the situation.
- Train the dog to wear a basket muzzle.
- Use high-value treats (things the dog finds particularly yummy) to reward appropriate behavior



# Managing Reactivity II

## Working with your dog



Dogs are often fearful because they have had bad experiences or a lack of experience with whatever makes them uncomfortable; there can also be a genetic factor that can make a dog more prone to fearful behaviors.

After ruling out a medical cause for the behavior, start the training by teaching basic cues using relationship-based training methods. Basic cues help build a solid foundation for working with your dog. Be a kind, gentle, patient teacher. Don't expect your dog to know what you want; you'll need to teach them to focus on and learn from you.

First, work with your dog at home, away from any distractions. Teaching your dog in your home is going to help them know what you are asking for when you need your dog to focus on you in all other situations. Once your dog has mastered basic manners, you can start working in other locations, including places that have more distractions.

In every interaction with your dog, think in terms of building a trusting relationship. Give plenty of rewards, but have the dog earn them. Ask the dog to give you a "sit" or a "down" before you give a treat. Even though training is a serious thing, learning should be fun for your dog.

If at any point during training you feel that your dog might injure you, stop! Think about what you were doing. Keep in mind that progress takes time.

Back up to a place where the dog was having fun. Check your tone and emotion. Did you become frustrated or angry? Could the dog have felt threatened? Most medically sound dogs will respond to kind, gentle training by making steady progress.

Learning and using socialization skills is a lifelong process for the dog. Keep practicing and rewarding your dog for the rest of their life. Your goal is a relaxed dog who is comfortable in the world and can enjoy a wide variety of experiences while staying safe.

Reactive dogs aren't trying give you a hard time. They are having a hard time.  
Reframing how you look at reactivity can help how you react.

