



Reactive to Other Dogs

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG IS WORRIED OR FRUSTRATED WHEN ENCOUNTERING OTHER DOGS

It's wonderful that there are so many open public spaces that we can take our dogs out to enjoy themselves in, and walkies should be an enriching and fun time for them – however for some dogs the very presence of another dog in their immediate surroundings can make them feel very uncomfortable indeed. They might lunge, rear up, bark or even snap if they're very close to the other dog!

While we know that dogs are naturally social animals, there can be many reasons why a dog might feel uncomfortable at the sight of another dog.

They might not have had the opportunity, as a puppy, to learn how to interact with dogs of different shapes, sizes, breeds and ages. They might have had a bad experience when interacting with another dog or group of dogs in which they were frightened or overwhelmed.

Or they might have had way too much fun playing with other dogs, so they now expect to be able to play and interact with every single dog they see – so now they get really frustrated when they can't!

A worried dog might learn that lunging and barking is a good thing to do, because the other dog goes away, so they'll do that again next time they see a dog they are worried about.

Helping dogs out when they're worried, fearful or frustrated

Timing, routine and location - avoiding other dogs!

Have a walk around your local area, **without your dog at first**, at various times of day to discover those times and places when you are less likely to encounter other dogs.

Learn to recognise when your dog is starting to become aroused - whether worried or frustrated

Ask a friend to follow and film you walking your dog so that you can watch and learn how they change their body in response to things that are happening around them. Once you can recognise when they're starting to react you can step in to prevent them worsening.

Keep moving

Calmly and quietly keep moving and lead them far enough away from the other dog so that they can start to relax. Letting them know that they can trust you to lead them to safety will help their confidence grow as they are learning to behave differently. The sooner you can move them to a distance from the other dog at which their desire to go and interact with the other dog diminishes, the more relaxed they will become.

Remain calm yourself

If your dog is anxious then staying calm helps them out by showing them that you are not worried by anything that might be approaching. This helps them trust that you are in control and can get them out of the danger they feel they are in.

If they are frustrated and jumping up or even mouthing you then remaining calm means you won't risk arousing them further or confusing them about your relationship.

Keep the lead as loose as possible

Ideally, keeping the lead loose – which might take some getting used to – means that the dog doesn't feel any tightening around their collar or harness which might make them even more worried or frustrated.

Giving other dogs a wide berth

Help your dog out if you can by giving the on-comers a wide berth by, when safe to do so, crossing over the road so you show them that they can still avoid the approaching dog under your guidance and control. Try to do this before your dog starts to react to the approaching dog so they are getting out of the habit of simply reacting on sight.

Turn away

You can also help your dog achieve the distance they need between themselves and the on-coming dog by simply turning away from it and walking back along the street the way that you have come from. Turning away gives a clear signal to the other dog that your dog has no desire to engage or interact at all and gives your dog the opportunity to turn away from a situation they find difficult. You can either walk a different way or cross over when you find a safe place to do so further away from the on-coming dog.

Reward quiet, calm behaviour and relaxation

As soon as your dog has relaxed - and bear in mind this might initially be some distance away from the other dog - be sure to give them lots of praise. This should be something they really like, so it might be a fuss, some food or even a game with a much-loved toy – think about what they really enjoy!

Distracting your dog so he doesn't notice other dogs - give him something better to focus on

Practice scattering a handful of treats in the home, saying “treats” or “hoover-up” as you do, so that your dog has to put their nose to the ground and sniff them out to enjoy them. The more you repeat this game, you’ll find that as soon as you start to say those words they’ll start sniffing about, expecting a handful of treats to rain down for them to enjoy.

Support in other areas of life

Anxious or fearful dogs might benefit from having their confidence built in other areas of their lives as well, as there may be things besides other dogs that upset them.

Likewise dogs that are easily frustrated, and struggle to control themselves when life becomes exciting for them, might benefit from training focused on teaching them to be patient and calm, even when they’re especially excited.

If you feel that your dog would benefit from this, please contact your Post Adoption Support Team by emailing reception@dogstrust.ie for more information regarding different types of training.

Despite our best efforts and understanding, some dogs sadly continue to struggle with the sight - or even sound or smell - of another dog!

Professionally qualified and experienced behaviourists can create individually tailored programmes for owners to follow to change their dog’s behaviour. These aim to initially change the way a dog feels about other dogs, so they are no longer anxious, frightened or frustrated.

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog please email: reception@dogstrust.ie

For more information about Dogs Trust, to make a donation or help us in our campaigns please call 01 879 1000, write to: Dogs Trust, Ashbourne Road, Finglas, Dublin 11 or visit www.dogstrust.ie