REACTIVE DOGS

Nope. I can't write an article to fix your reactive dog.

However, I can give you some insight as to why dogs react and some things we humans can do to lessen the reactions.

Many dogs react out of fear. They have had bad experiences with other dogs and have learned the best way to keep other dogs away is to bark and lunge at them. Very few dogs will continue towards your barking and lunging dog, and any that do should cause you to be afraid because they are either loving the aggressive reaction or too unaware of your dog's posture.

Some dogs react because they have had no on-leash socialization with other dogs. All of their interactions have been off-leash. This means the leash is a barrier to their having fun, and they want to get off it and go play with the other dog.

Your reaction to their reactivity can be key in reducing the craziness of the interaction. Don't start to react before your dog does. If you see a dog that you believe your dog is going to react to, be proactive:

- Be vigilant. Stay tuned to your surroundings. If you're on your phone and a dog pops out between two cars and the mayhem begins, that's on you.
- Make space. Your dog does not want to meet any dog head-on. Cross the street. Move into a driveway to let the other dog pass. Let the other dog person know you are making space on purpose if needed. Most people recognize these moves.
- DO NOT tighten up the leash just because you see another dog. This can cause the reaction to start even if your dog hasn't seen the other dog yet. He knows you're nervous about something and he's now on alert.
- Keep your dog's attention if you can. This takes the most time in the training. Treats can be used, but are often pretty useless at the beginning of the training if the dog is highly reactive. A "watch me" command that is followed earns a treat. It'll be baby steps for most.
- Stay calm. If you start yelling and yanking on the leash, things will only escalate.

When I work with this type of behavior, there is a lot of quiet, calm talk to the dog. She needs to know that I am in charge of what's happening and I will keep her safe; she needs to trust me.

If your dog is reactive, find a good trainer and get some help.