

Let's cover classroom management as well as training advice for the reactive team.

First, what is reactivity? In my mind and experience? In yours?

Clinical definition: In her book *Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Small Animals*, Applied Animal Behaviorist Karen Overall, M.A., V.M.D., Ph.D., uses the term to describe animals who respond to normal stimuli with an abnormal (higher-than-normal) level of intensity. The behaviors she uses to ascertain reactivity (or arousal) are:

- Alertness (hypervigilance)
- Restlessness (motor activity)
- Vocalization (whining, barking, howling)
- Systemic effects (vomiting, urination, defecation)
- Displacement or stereotypic behaviors (spinning, tail- or shadow-chasing)
- Changes in content or quantity of solicitous behaviors

Practical definition: This is a broad list of behaviors that can be useful clinically, some of which would be disqualifiers to even take a group class. To narrow the focus to reactivity, as we'd likely see it as instructors, the common behaviors are more apt to be high levels of environmental awareness (the "alertness" from above), and barking, growling or even lunging at other dogs or at strangers. That last, the lunging, might also be a disqualifier for group class depending on intensity, size of the dog and available space. We do have to keep it safe. Safety and to a lesser extent your ability to monitor the reactive team and effectively instruct are two of the factors you as an instructor should balance when you decide whether a reactive team should be in your class. The final factor is whether the team themselves is benefiting or if it is just too tough an environment for them. If in doubt, involve the Training Director, who can advise you, give the team recommendations for private training, and approve a refund if needed.

Managing reactive behavior

1. Identify triggers
2. Provide space

In class: Providing space as possible is helpful, and you might use a barrier to block line of sight to reduce some level of arousal. Putting a reactive dog in a corner away from the ring gate can help as well. The puppy ring, with its outside door, is a great one for this situation. A couple of times I've fenced off that end of the ring before with the door open and had the team work in and out of the building as the dog's level of calmness required. I have only ring 1, so I just have to cope. I did have a team working in and out of the foyer and "audience" space one class. The dog was a very loud and bouncy Lab and clearly wasn't dangerous, but was very over-excited and a bit too much to have in one ring with nine other teams. You can also arrange teams to make sure that the calmest teams are the ones on either side of a reactive team.

Avoid making it worse: First, in general, punishment is never a good idea. Dogs are "reactive" for a variety of reasons, including being afraid of other dogs, wanting to greet

other dogs and being overwhelmed with excitement or frustration about it. Punishment just adds stress and increased the likelihood of a bad outcome. Keep your own demeanor calm and focus on helping the team. Eliciting supportive feelings from the other teams can be hugely helpful. It keeps the energy positive which helps the handler avoid spiraling into embarrassed frustration. All the students should want the best for each other, especially for the teams who are struggling the most. Each student should feel that the instructor wants them to succeed and that their progress should be measured only against where they have started, not against each other.

Standing on the leash is a huge management help in class. The leash should be just slightly slack if the dog is at the handler's side. If they lunge or leap, it keeps them safely in position. This allows the handler to pay attention to the lesson while keeping the dog under control. Great for just generally bouncy dogs as well. I use it all the time in class.

Final note on classroom management: I always do my first class with no dogs. This lets me ask each person where they are struggling and give them some useful tips for managing their dog in class so that they come prepared and I know what to expect. Things I cover with the teams are, as above, when (and how) to stand on the leash; "Doggy Zen" - to get the treat, you must ignore the treat, as a management approach for Barky Barkers (I can explain if this isn't clear); Peanut butter on the roof of the mouth or perhaps on a lick mat to also interrupt barkers so that students can hear me; keeping the dogs focus on the handler and not allowing them to interact with each other; and what to expect during week two when they bring the dogs. I also demonstrate how to start teaching attention and I assign that as their week one homework. The puppy instructors contributed bringing a mat for space management and having the teams bring something like a stuffed Kong or bully stick to offer to the dogs to keep them busy when they are not working.

At home: block the dog's line of sight to triggers. Dog comes in if outside is too exciting. Keep a sharp eye out and stay at large distance from triggers as possible: cross the street, change directions, go behind cars or bushes, walk at off-peak times...

Here's a good article from Pat Miller: <https://www.whole-dog-journal.com/behavior/causes-of-reactive-dog-behavior-and-how-to-train-accordingly/>
I've used some of her material below to frame the discussion.

Modifying reactive behavior (also known as training!)

Convince the dog that the presence of other dogs walking by makes something wonderful happen. Dog appears, feed, repeat. I've heard this called "Open Bar". You will know you're making progress when you see your dog notice a trigger, and, instead of getting tense, turns to you for a treat.

You can add a behavior to this and cue it. The "look at that!" game is good here – this involves teaching a dog to see the scary thing, but then turn and look away from it at the

handler for reinforcement. I like this approach even better than the one above, but you can also start with the open bar approach then shift to this as the dog gets less reactive.

You must stay calm yourself, and be patient

Counter-conditioning and training in general can require more patience, distance and calmness with a reactive dog. Don't give up! Keep your own energy level calm.

How about out in the world? Train a default behavior. If we always move to the side and sit while another dog passes, the dog has the comfort of familiarity. That's not the only appropriate behavior, but it is a common one; watch or look at me is another common one for dogs who are less space sensitive. I like to combine both, and in particular I also like the dog to sit in front of me while giving eye contact.

If the dog is afraid of other dogs, then moving away is a good reinforcement. Treats can also be good. Tossing small treats on the ground for the dog to sniff for and eat can add a nice calming element. At a safe distance from any possible interaction with the other dog, of course.

Did I say stay calm? Stay calm! Don't be embarrassed, focus on the dog. I cannot emphasize this enough.

If the dog wants to get to other dogs to interact and is barking because she is frustrated greeter, then increasing the distance between her and another dog is a punishment, not a reinforcement. For these dogs, you can teach the same "look at that" game to have the dog see the other dog, then look back at the handler, but the reward could be food as above, play with the handler, or even access to the other dog, but only carefully and only with dogs who are known to be safe.

UNDER THRESHOLD is a key here. Most people are more successful if they set up a dog so that it can see another dog, but is far enough away that reactivity isn't yet triggered. It is very helpful to arrange for someone with a non-reactive dog to help you out. But if you can't, you can take advantage of situations in which you know that you can control the distance between the dogs: calm neighbor dogs in a fenced yard; fenced dog parks at a good distance; etc. Just be sure to pick places where you know the other dogs will be on leash and you can be the one to control the distance between your dogs.

Come-fore or emergency 180 turn. Teach a solid come-fore and / or emergency pivot. Use it when you see a potential bad situation before your dog responds to prevent trouble. Be cheerful and reward if you can. Use it also to get out of a bad situation where you were surprised and your dog is already reacting. Stay calm. The key is to have practiced a fast turn and cheerful retreat, so that both you and your dog are conditioned to do it fast in an up-beat, happy way instead of being in a panic. Plan it out – what are your options for keeping your dog under threshold? Avoid choke points where you can't increase distance.

Final thing I brought up was avoiding equipment that adds stress. Please stay away from prongs or other stimulating equipment when dealing with a reactive dog. They are already over-aroused and do not need any more stress or stimulation added to the situation.

Here are about five thousand articles that are useful.

<http://careforreactivedogs.com/prepcare/>

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/aggression-towards-other-dogs>

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/help-for-reactive-dogs>

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/case-study-dogdog-reactivity-hailey>

The best explanation I've ever read of WHY a technique that is great for many dogs might not be the right one for a particular dog:

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/case-study-dogdog-reactivity-ceilidh>

The basics:

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/dog-dog-reactivity-ii-the-basics>

<https://petcentral.chewy.com/10-tips-to-teach-your-reactive-dog-to-stay-calm/>

Simple attention exercises

(note: mark means say "yes!" or whatever short word you have chosen.)

Encourage eye contact (attention):

Easy way – "Fido!" Once the dog looks at your face, immediately mark (say "yes!") and treat. Repeat. [this also works as practice for name recognition]

Medium way – wait for eye contact. Once the dog looks at your face, immediately mark (say "yes!") and treat. Repeat. You are teaching the dog to initiate the eye contact – this is golden!

Hard way - hold food off to the side away from your body and up high enough they don't jump at it. The dog will first look at the food. Once the dog looks instead at your face, immediately mark ("yes!") and treat. Repeat.

Once the dog "gets it" and starts to look more quickly at your face, try to hold the eye contact for a second or two, then mark and treat. Repeat a few times.

Gradually lengthen the attention sessions and start to look away and quickly look back. If your dog is still watching: mark and treat.

Remember to release your doggy ("okay!" or "all done!"); this cue tells the dog that the training session is done or that the behavior you asked for is ended.