BY CJ PUOTINEN

BEHAVIOR

Reforming a Reactionary

Resources and training tactics for reforming a reactive dog.

Does your dog suddenly "lose it" when she sees another dog coming down the sidewalk toward you, or behind a fence you are walking by? Start pulling and vocalizing like mad? Does she take a long time to calm down afterward? Then you, like the author, have some work to do! Don't worry, though; with proper guidance and practice, your dog can learn less-stressed (and less stressful!) behavior.

We've all seen them – those nightmare dogs who lunge, leap, growl, snarl, snap, bark, threaten, bare their teeth, act like bullies, and charge at other dogs. They ruin visits to dog parks and even walks around the block. They're out of control. They shouldn't be allowed!

It's only natural to feel angry or annoyed when you encounter a problem dog. That's scary enough – but it's worse when the out-of-control dog is *yours*.

Years ago, almost no one used "reactive" to describe these difficult dogs. They were called "aggressive," and most trainers applied physical corrections. Today "reactive" describes several related problem behaviors, and the emphasis has shifted from physical punishment to positive-reinforcement training.

Like many who have reactive dogs, I was not prepared. My first two Labradors, Samantha and Chloe, were calm, friendly, relaxed, and easy going. Neither ever chased a deer or a car. From time to time I heard about the rehabilitation of problem dogs but didn't pay much attention.

Now I'm making up for lost time. My crash course in reactive dog training began two years ago, when my Labrador Blue Sapphire was six months old. Blue would love to race after not only tennis balls but animals, skateboards, kids on bikes, motorcycles, joggers, and anything that moves. For months she erupted with ferocious barking as soon as she saw motion – a hiker, dog, deer, or bike – 50 or 100 yards away. No one meeting us would assume that this growling, barking, lunging terror was otherwise intelligent, affectionate, and a joy to live with.

Since then, in addition to working with talented local trainers, I've been studying books, DVDs, articles, and online classes devoted to reactive dogs. Blue is mastering impulse control and I'm learning a lot about training. Perhaps some of what has helped us will help you as well.

FIND SOME BOOKS... AND MAYBE A VIDEO

You don't have to purchase the library's worth of books I've invested in, but multiple descriptions can help you understand and implement effective training programs. Trainers presenting the same basic information do so with different examples and approaches, at least one of which may be a perfect fit for you, your dog, and your schedule. If you prefer video demonstrations, try some DVDs, webinars, or online classes.

It would be wonderful if these resources came with magic wands that transformed our dogs over-

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night, but alas, they don't. They offer tools that we have to master and practice in order to help our dogs develop patience, confidence, and good manners.

Some of you may be most interested in how and why dogs become reactive and what their body language means; you may find technical descriptions and the language of behavior modification fascinating. Others may be impatient to skip the technicalities and start training, or want to focus on the emotional and energetic bonds connecting dogs and humans. No matter what your approach, you will find resources that will help advance your understanding and ability to deal with your reactive dog.

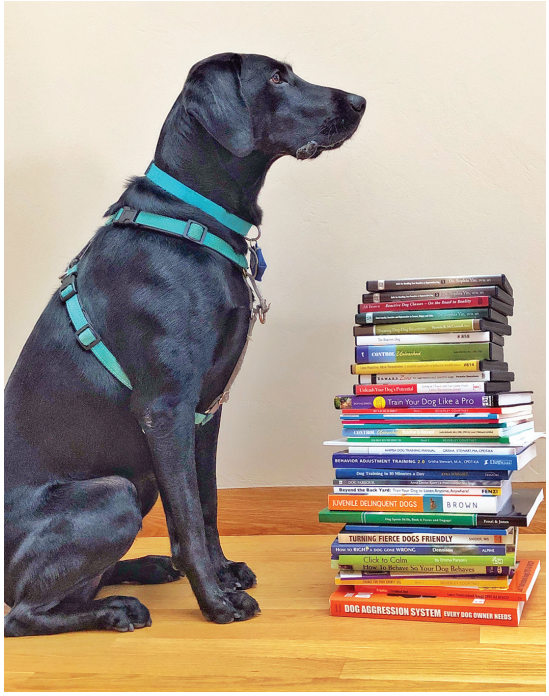
For a topic that barely existed two decades ago, reactivity has spawned a training industry. So far I've studied 40 books and more than a dozen DVDs from force-free trainers, some of whom live with reactive dogs and all of whom have helped inexperienced handlers change their reactive dogs' behavior.

DEFINING REACTIVITY

What exactly is a reactive dog? Reactivity describes a dog's over-the-top or excessive response to specific situations, such as seeing a person, animal, other dog, or unexpected object. Dogs are called leash-reactive when the frustration caused by a restrictive leash overwhelms them (see *Feisty Fido* by Patricia McConnell). Blue is a good example, for once she's off-leash on a trail or in a dog park, she plays well with other dogs.

In the training book *The Midnight Dog Walkers,* Annie Phenix says, "A reactive dog responds to normal events in his environment with a higher-than-normal level of intensity. Some of those overreactions include barking, whining, lunging, hypervigilance, panting, pacing, restlessness, and difficulty responding to his owner, even for well-known cues such as 'sit.'"

Aggression is usually defined as threats to harm an individual, whether human or animal, with attacks, attempted attacks, or threats of attack. Underlying causes of aggression include guarding or protecting territory or family members, guarding resources, prey drive, physical pain, and frustration. According to Pamela Dennison in *How to Right a Dog Gone Wrong,* aggression is a normal canine behavior, so it's important to channel a dog's natural aggressive instinct into socially acceptable activities. This can be done by identifying the dog's unique issues and redirecting her actions.



The training and rehabilitation of reactive dogs has generated dozens of books, DVDs, and other resources that help "over-the-top" dogs and their owners relax, stay calm, and enjoy life together using effective strategies, detailed instructions, and positive, force-free training methods.

The first time Blue leaped in the air, snarled, and lunged at another dog, I was too startled to think straight. When she did it again, I was upset and confused. To me – and I'm sure to the people who saw her in action – she looked aggressive and dangerous. In and out of the house she began reacting in the same noisy, alarming way toward anything unexpected.

We did well in the American Kennel Club's STAR puppy class, but when we took the Canine Good Citizen test, the neutral dog did us in. Here was a new dog! And a new person! It was all too much!

In addition to the training classes we took with Adele Delp at Canine Fitness (caninefit.com) here in Helena, Montana, I hired Jeff Lepley (happytrailsdogservices.com), who had recently completed Jean Donaldson's Academy for Dog Trainers certification.

It was Jeff who helped me understand that when Blue barked at distractions, she was frightened. At first I found that hard to believe because she looked so fierce, but the logic made sense. Yikes, there's a strange person/thing/animal/whatever! I'll scare it away! See? It worked!

THRESHOLDS AND TRIGGERS

Thresholds are borders at the edge of a dog's peaceful, comfortable state – the place or time when some stimulus causes the dog to experience stress, anxiety, or fear. A trigger is any stressor that occurs within the dog's threshold, resulting in reactive behavior.

When a dog is "over threshold," as Sunny Weber explains in *Beyond Flight or Fight,* "it means that the animal has lost control of logic and his brain is engulfed with stress hormones, making reasoned thought or learning impossible."

What is your dog's threshold? Blue's extended as far as she could see in any direction, but once a scary visitor was inside the house, she relaxed. For some dogs it's all about proximity – the closer the threat, the more intense the reaction. For others it's the unexpected. Inanimate objects like parked cars and plastic bags startled Blue if they appeared where she wasn't used to seeing them. Studying your dog's threshold is important be-

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cause with every repetition, a dog's reactive behavior becomes stronger and more established.

Canine body language offers plenty of clues if we train ourselves to notice them. Handlers whose attention wanders won't observe changes in posture, ear or tail positions, hackles, eyes, or facial expressions, all of which give important signals. When Blue was leaping in the air and barking her head off, subtle cues had already come and gone, but with practice I learned to recognize them and redirect her *before* she progressed into full reactive mode. One simple test is whether she'll take a treat. If not, I know we're already over threshold. If she takes it in a distracted way, I know we're close. Either response gives me options like changing direction, moving to a new location, getting her attention back, and practicing familiar commands.

Knowing how to interrupt a reactive response is worthwhile, but avoiding it is even better. As Sue Brown explains in *Juvenile Delinquent Dogs,* "The first step to changing your dog's behavior is to prevent it from happening in the first place.... Preventing a behavior is called 'management' and it is done by managing your dog's environment. You will save a lot of frustration, stress, anger, and energy if you focus on managing your dog's environment rather than reacting to your dog's unwanted behaviors."

Annie Phenix agrees. "If I could enforce a signed pledge that owners won't expose their dogs to the outside while they're enrolled in the Growly Dog class, I would surely do it," she says. "I ask for no walks during this time because it is critical to keep the dog under threshold (don't put him in a position where he barks, lunges, growls, etc.) while we are reframing what an oncoming dog or person means to your dog. We are rebuilding trust and communication between owner and dog as well. It's like a bank account built of trust. We spend four weeks building up that all-important account, and one scary incident can wipe out your savings, particularly in these beginning stages."

Pat Miller, whose training articles are familiar to WDJ readers, says in her book *Beware of the Dog,* "If something you're doing is triggering your dog's aggression, stop doing it. If something or someone else is triggering the aggression, prevent your dog's access to that person or thing, and prevent that person or thing from having access to your dog."

To this end, Miller and other trainers recommend blocking a reactive dog's access to windows, fences, and similar triggers. When left unsupervised, Blue monitored upstairs windows, watching open fields and hiking trails. If something moved, she'd go ballistic.

In *Help for Your Fearful Dog,* Nicole Wilde warns readers to keep reactive dogs away from "lookout posts." Because the barking that results is self-rewarding, she writes, it is likely to continue. "The problem is that with each incident, adrenaline and other stress hormones are flooding your dog's system so that her anxiety level spikes. The cumulative effect can be a dog who is perpetually stressed and on guard."

I'm embarrassed that it took me so long to appreciate the damage caused by Blue's lookout posts, but setting ground rules and maintaining them made an immediate difference. As Wilde recommends, I closed doors leading to upstairs windows and interrupted barking by calling her to me, praising her for coming, asking for different basic behaviors (sit, down, touch my hand, watch me, let's go), and rewarding her with favorite toys or treats. Whenever I leave the house without her, Blue stays in her crate or in a quiet room with closed curtains. Without the constant reinforcement of outdoor distractions, the indoors stays peaceful.

ACT LIKE A TRAINER

In 1993, Jean Donaldson videotaped dog trainers and dog owners to see what they did differently. As one would expect, all of the dogs performed better with professional trainers, but there was an even more important difference that Donaldson didn't notice until she rewound and fast-forwarded the tape while collecting data. In *Train Your Dog Like a Pro* she writes, "I was amazed to find that I could identify whether the person on the screen was a trainer or not with just a one-second sample or even a freeze-frame, based strictly on whether the person was attempting to train the dog at all."

Donaldson calls this difference "the perseverance gap." Typically, non-trainers tried something a few times, such as getting the dog to lie down, and then, whether successful or not, they stopped training and waited for the next activity. Once again they tried two or three repetitions

Through her favorite window lookout post, Blue spots a jogger and immediately whines, growls, barks, and leaps in the air. Blocking her access to lookout windows prevents her from practicing this unwanted behavior.

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Recommended Books About Training Reactive Dogs

Arthur, Nan Kene. ***Chill Out Fido! How to Calm Your Dog.*** Dogwise Publishing, 2009

Baugh, Laura VanArendonk. ***Fired Up, Frantic, and Freaked Out: Training Crazy Dogs from Over-the-Top to Under Control.*** A-Eclipse Press, 2013

Blocker, Pat. ***Taking the Lead Without Jerking the Leash: The Art of Mindful Dog Training.*** Barking Dog Publishing, 2014

Brown, Ali. ***Focus, Not Fear: Training Insights from a Reactive Dog Class.*** Direct Book Service, 2007

Brown, Ali. ***Scaredy Dog: Understanding and Rehabilitating Your Reactive Dog.*** Tanacacia Press, 2010

Brown, Sue. ***Juvenile Delinquent Dogs: The Complete Guide to Saving Your Sanity and Successfully Living with Your Adolescent Dog.*** The Light of Dog, 2012

Cohen, Eric Michael. ***The Canine Strategies Workbook: For People Who Love Their High-Energy, Fearful, Willful and/or Reactive Dogs.*** Independently Published, 2017

Courtney, Beverley. ***Essential Skills for Your Growly but Brilliant Family Dog: Book 1: Teach Your Fearful, Aggressive, or Reactive Dog Confidence Through Understanding. Book 2: Action Steps to Build Confidence in Your Fearful, Aggressive, or Reactive Dog. Book 3: Calm Walks with Your Growly Dog. Strategies and Techniques for Your Fearful, Aggressive, or Reactive Dog.*** Brilliant Family Dog, 2016

Dennison, Pamela. ***How to Right a Dog Gone Wrong: A Road Map for Rehabilitating Aggressive Dogs.*** Alpine Publications, 2005

Dennison, Pamela. ***You Can Train Your Dog: Mastering the Art and Science of Modern Dog Training.*** Shadow Publishing, 2015

Dolce, Jessica. ***The Official Guide to Living with DINOS (Dogs in Need of Space).*** CreateSpace, 2015

Donaldson, Jean. ***Fight!: A Practical Guide to the Treatment of Dog-Dog Aggression.*** Direct Book Service, 2004

Donaldson, Jean. ***Train Your Dog Like a Pro.*** (This book includes an instructional DVD.) Howell Book House, 2010

Fenzi, Denise. ***Beyond the Back Yard: Train Your Dog to Listen Anytime, Anywhere!*** Fenzi Dog Sports Academy, 2016

Ferrier, Jackie. ***The Dog Aggression System Every Dog Owner Needs: From Leashes to Neuroscience, A dog owner's journey through the treatment of dog aggression.*** K9Aggression.com, 2014

Finlay, Janet. ***Your End of the Lead: Changing How You Think and Act to Help Your Reactive Dog.*** Independently published, 2019

Gordon, Jay. ***Fight or Fright? A Reactive Dog Guardian's Handbook.*** Independently published, 2019

Gutteridge, Sally. ***Inspiring Resilience in Fearful and Reactive Dogs.*** Independently published, 2018

Gutteridge, Sally. ***Lessons from Your Reactive Dog.*** Independently published, 2019

Jacobs, Debbie. ***Does My Dog Need Prozac? Musings and Sound Advice on Living with a Shy, Anxious, Fearful, or Reactive Dog.*** Independently published, 2014

Jacobs, Debbie. ***A Guide to Living with and Training a Fearful Dog: Effective and Humane Ways to Help Fearful, Shy, or Anxious Dogs.*** Corner Dog Press, 2011

Kjaer, Anna Louise. ***Dog Parkour: Games-Based Dog Training That Boosts Confidence in Dogs and Helps Them Overcome Anxieties.*** 4 Paws Canine Academy, 2019

Killion, Jane. ***When Pigs Fly: Training Success with Impossible Dogs.*** DogWise Publishing, 2007

Mayes, Kim. ***Hyper Dog 101: Tricks and Games to Help You Communicate Better with Your Crazy, High-Strung, Wild, Strong-Willed Dog!*** Rockin' Dawgs Publishing, 2018

McConnell, Patricia. ***Feisty Fido: Help for the Leash-Reactive Dog.*** McConnell Publishing, 2003

McDevitt, Leslie. ***Control Unleashed Book 3: Reactive to Relaxed.*** Clean Run Productions, 2019

Miller, Pat. ***Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs.*** DogWise Publishing, 2016

Murphy, Shari-Ann. ***Positive Adaptation Wellness Strategy: P.A.W.S.- a Whole Life Rehabilitation System for Dog Reactive Dogs.*** CreateSpace, 2014

Naito, Kate, and Westcott, Sarah. ***Play Your Way to Good Manners: Getting the Best Behavior from Your Dog Through Sports, Games, and Tricks.*** Companionhouse Books, 2019

Parsons, Emma. ***Click to Calm: Healing the Aggressive Dog.*** Sunshine Books, 2004

Phoenix, Annie. ***The Midnight Dog Walkers: Positive Training and Practical Advice for Living with Reactive and Aggressive Dogs.*** CompanionHouse Books, 2016

Ramirez, Ken, editor. ***Better Together: The Collected Wisdom of Modern Dog Trainers.*** Sunshine Books, 2017.

Ryan, Terry. ***The Toolbox for Building a Great Family Dog.*** Dogwise Publishing, 2011

Sternberg, Sue. ***Out and About with Your Dog - Dog to Dog Interactions on the Street, on the Trails, and in the Dog Park.*** Great Dog Productions, 2009

Stewart, Grisha. ***The Ahimsa Dog Training Manual: A Practical, Force-Free Guide to Problem Solving and Manners*** (with expanded information on reactivity). Empowered Animals, 2014

Stewart, Grisha. ***Behavior Adjustment Training 2.0: New Practical Techniques for Fear, Frustration, and Aggression in Dogs.*** Dogwise Publishing, 2016

Sutherland, Amy. ***What Shamu Taught Me About Life, Love, and Marriage: Lessons for People from Animals and Their Trainers.*** Random House, 2008

Tellington-Jones, Linda. ***Getting in TTouch With Your Dog: A Gentle Approach to Influencing Behavior, Health, and Performance.*** Trafalgar Square Books, 2012

Von Reinhardt, Clarissa. ***Chase! Managing Your Dog's Predatory Instincts.*** Dogwise Publishing, 2010

Weber, Sunny. ***Beyond Flight or Fight: A Compassionate Guide for Working with Fearful Dogs.*** Pups and Purrs Press, 2015

Yin, Sophia, DVM, MS. ***How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves.*** Revised and Updated Second Edition, TFH Publications, 2010

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and then quit. In between, they chatted with anyone nearby, checked their watches (today they would check their cell phones), or petted their dogs. Most of their training time consisted of this "between-training" dead air.

In contrast, the trainers constantly watched their dogs while doing one repetition after another. Donaldson says this pattern was evident whether the dogs caught on quickly, were difficult to train, were already highly trained, or were unruly novices. "The trainers trained like bats out of hell," she says, "and the non-trainers were mostly on break time."

Count that as a breakthrough realization. No one had videotaped Blue and me in our classes, but if they did, we'd see a lot of between-training dead air. Following the advice to "fake it till you make it," I imagined Jean Donaldson observing us as we walked up and down stairs, practiced heeling in the living room, went outside, paused at gates, came inside, paused at doors, went to the dog park, practiced retrieves, practiced recalls, practiced basic obedience, and practiced tricks while Blue received undivided attention, rapid rewards, and enthusiastic praise.

My second turning-point trainer was the late Sophia Yin, DVM, whose DVD exercises revealed just how slow my timing was, how my posture was incorrect (bending over the dog, not standing straight), and how my reward delivery was vague and inconsistent. Practicing along with her workshop participants made my movements faster, more direct, more decisive, and easier for Blue to understand.

In her video workshops and in *How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves,* Dr. Yin focused on "sit" as an automatic behavior equivalent to "please," because insisting that a dog "sit for everything" helps one become a clearly communicating leader while changing the dog's perspective.

In addition, Dr. Yin recommended tethering, attaching dog to handler with a hands-free leash, and wearing a bait pouch containing not just a fraction of the dog's daily food allowance but all of it. In other words, during the early phases of training, all of every meal arrives one piece at a time from the handler in response to correct behaviors.

Because Blue's raw diet doesn't work well in a bait pouch, I loaded up on hand-feedable treats that could replace parts of her dinner. Tethering and keeping the bait pouch full improved my observation skills, helped me notice and reward every behavior I wanted to encourage, kept Blue motivated, kept her away from threshold-threatening windows, and reminded me to act like a trainer.

A third breakthrough author, Amy Sutherland, helped me appreciate force-free training from a completely different perspective. While writing a book on modern training methods, Sutherland spent a year with the Exotic Animal Training and Management program at Moorpark College in California. Her follow-up book, *What Shamu Taught Me About Life, Love, and Marriage,* focuses not on killer whales and other creatures but on humans struggling to master training fundamentals.

By applying modern training methods to every aspect of her own life, Sutherland changed herself, her husband, and all of her relationships. Several of the books listed here discuss challenges like unsympathetic observers, anger, and vocal criticism faced by those with reactive dogs, but Sutherland demonstrates how the versatile laws of behavioral training can transform handlers as much as the animals we work with.

FOUNDATION AND DEFAULT BEHAVIORS

Foundation behaviors are responses so thoroughly practiced and automatic (think muscle memory) that the dog does them without thinking. These are often basic obedience commands, and they provide alternatives to what-

Recommended DVDs About Training Reactive Dogs

Backman, Maureen. **"Less Reactive, More Responsive: A Mindful Approach to Behavior Modification."** Tawzer Dog, 2015

Broitman, Virginia. **"Teaching Impulse Control to Your Excitable Dog!"** North Star Canines, 2011

Dennison, Pamela. **"The R.E.W.A.R.D. Zone for Aggressive and Reactive Dogs (Realizing Excellence with Attention, Redirection, and Desensitization)."** Shadow Publishing, 2014

Dennison, Pamela. **"Teach the Leash: Loose Leash Walking."** Shadow Publishing, 2019

Killion, Jane. **"Attention is the Mother of All Behaviors."** Madcap Productions, 2014

McConnell, Patricia. **"Treating Dog-Dog Reactivity."** DogWise Publishing, 2010

McDevitt, Leslie. **"Control Unleashed: A Foundation Seminar."** Clean Run Productions, 2009

Parsons, Emma. **"Reliability for Reactive Dogs with Control Unleashed."** Tawzerdog, 2015

Parsons, Emma, and Julie Robitaille. **"TACT – Touch Associated Clicker Training – A Training Program for Dogs That Are Fearful or Reactive Toward People."** Includes training manual. Clean Run Productions, 2011. Distributed by DogWise.com

Sternberg, Sue. **"The Reactive Dog: Training and Management Tools While Out in Public."** Tawzer Dog, 2018

Yin, Sophia. **"Dog Aggression: From Fearful, Reactive, and Hyperactive to Focused, Happy, and Calm."** CattleDog Publishing, 2014

Yin, Sophia. **"Skills for Handling Your Reactive or Hyperactive Dog: A Workshop for Developing Focus and Impulse Control. Part 1: Essential Exercises. Part 2: The Next Steps for a Pleasant Walk."** CattleDog Publishing, 2013-2014

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ever a dog is doing (or about to do) that is other than what you want. Most of the resources listed describe how to teach, practice, and improve foundation behaviors.

In *When Pigs Fly: Training Success with Impossible Dogs,* Jane Killion calls automatic attention the mother of all behaviors and one of the first things we should teach our dogs. "There is no point in teaching your dog how to do things if he is going to ignore you when you ask him to do them," she says. "Attention is the foundation for any training program."

As Patricia McConnell explains in *Feisty Fido* and her DVD "Treating Dog-Dog Reactivity," the attention or "watch" cue has many advantages. "Teaching an incompatible behavior is a time-honored and elegant solution to a lot of behavior problems," she says, "and it works wonderfully with fidos who are a bit too feisty on leash walks. Additionally, by teaching your dog to look at your face when she sees another dog, you're teaching her what you want her to do, rather than hoping she'll figure it out for herself."

In addition to making eye contact, Pamela Dennison's essential behaviors include name recognition, heeling on a loose leash, accepting touching, accepting secondary reinforcers (rewards other than food), staying in place, coming when called, doorway control (when going in or out of cars or buildings), and remaining relaxed around objects, people, or places instead of guarding them.

In *Control Unleashed,* Leslie McDevitt adds the whiplash turn, which is a fast turn of the head away from something and toward the handler. "If the dog isn't looking at me," says McDevitt, "the first thing he needs to do is disengage from what he is looking at and orient toward me instead."

Her instructions include mat training, which involves independently going to a mat, lying down or sitting on the mat automatically, and staying on the mat without fidgeting until released. Blue responded right away to mats, which can be any-

Tellington TTouch

In 1975, horse trainer Linda Tellington-Jones studied the Feldenkrais Method with its founder, Moishe Feldenkrais. In this form of bodywork for people, gentle and non-habitual movements activate unused neural pathways to the brain. It is famous for helping people improve their athletic ability, increase their physical and mental function, and fully recover from injuries. First adapting its movements for horses, Tellington-Jones began experimenting with other animals. Tellington TTouch (pronounced tee-touch) is now a popular, hands-on therapy for dogs, cats, and even zoo animals.

TTouch improves communication between dogs and handlers, helps solve behavioral as well as physical problems, helps dogs adapt to new or different situations, enhances performance, and helps dogs recover from excitability, nervousness, thunder phobia, extreme fear, shyness, leash pulling, excessive barking, excessive chewing, jumping on people, and other out-of-control behaviors.

Although it resembles massage, TTouch is different, consisting of a series of light "touches" applied in 1 ¼ circles (like around the clock, from 6 o'clock to 9 o'clock). It has a calming effect on most dogs, and more importantly, it can help reactive dogs completely change their responses to triggers and other distractions. TTouch books, videos, webinars, online classes, and in-person workshops make it easy to study and practice.

TTouch trainers pioneered body wraps (see "TTouch Practitioners Explain Canine 'Body Wrapping,'" WDJ December 2002), which are simple arrangements of elastic bandages. They are said to help dogs feel more confident, feel less threatened by thunder and other loud noises, and reduce their reactive responses. In our 2002 article, Indianapolis neurobiologist Shereen D. Farber, Ph.D., explained how wrapping a dog can cause lasting behavioral changes. "Any type of trauma can damage nerve receptors, leading to exaggerated responses to stimuli," she said. "Applying constantly maintained pressure provides an unchanging, quieting stimulus that causes the receptors to adapt and modify their thresholds in a cumulative manner."

Blue wearing her Anxiety Wrap, a garment that applies gentle, maintained pressure and provides the maximum calming effect. See anxietywrap.com.

When Blue was at her most agitated, I tucked her into an Anxiety Wrap or wrapped her with Ace bandages, and within minutes her tight, taut, on-guard muscles relaxed. With and without wrapping, she responds to TTouches all over her body, including her ears and even around and in her mouth. The mouth TTouches are said to help with snapping, growling, and mindless barking.

Some TTouch webinars deal specifically with reactive dogs, but even general TTouch instructions make a difference.

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thing from a square of plywood on the ground to a towel, area rug, or bathmat on the floor. That's where she stays while meals are prepared and consumed, plus whenever the doorbell rings. Outdoors she runs to her plywood mat when we practice retrieves.

Emma Parsons' foundation behaviors in *Click to Calm* include watch (make eye contact), sit, down, heel on a loose leash, target (touch an object such as a hand or target stick on cue), stay, come when called, four-on-the-floor (no jumping allowed), kennel up (go into your crate), leave it, and hold an object.

In *Out and About with Your Dog,* Sue Sternberg recommends three essential skills for moving past dogs and other distractions: watch the handler's face without interruption, heel on the left side, and heel on the right. "The more treats you use and the more frequently you give them during the initial foundation training, the stronger your dog's behavior will be in the end," she says. "Don't skimp. Have many tiny treats ready in one hand and shovel them into your dog, one at a time, until he is looking at you and there is a constant stream of treats going into his mouth." Before you run out of treats, put the food away, walk away from your dog, and ignore him for a few minutes. "Leave him wanting more," she says, "while there's still more to be had."

Default behaviors are whatever responses come easily to the dog and which are stabilizing, relaxing, and comfortable. Leslie McDevitt defines a default behavior as one the dog commits to and maintains for the duration of a specific context. "The context is the cue to begin the behavior," she says, "and the behavior will continue until the context changes or you give your release cue." The default behavior is automatic and it gives the dog something to do (lie down and chill out, for example) when she isn't receiving instructions. McDevitt recommends letting the dog choose her defaults. Whatever the dog offers, such as a sit, down, or anything else, can be encouraged, strengthened, and lengthened with attention and rewards.

Studying your dog's inclinations can help you discover a canine sport for which he has a special aptitude or interest, such as dock diving, hunting/retrieving, scent tracking, herding, agility, rally obedience, nosework, flyball, disc sports, parkour, or trick training. As your dog becomes more confident and responsive to your management skills, any of these might become a perfect match. For inspiration, see *Hyper Dog 101* by Kim Mayes; *Play Your Way to Good Manners* by Kate Naito and Sarah Westcott; and *Dog Parkour* by Anna Louise Kjaer.

REWARD THE BEST, IGNORE THE REST

Behavioral trainers reward what they want to see more of. This simple strategy is the key to modern training, and it's based on research. In *You Can Train Your Dog,* Pamela Dennison describes three basic laws of learning:

- **Rewarded behavior is repeated.**
- **Ignored (unrewarded) behavior stops.**
- **Once a behavior is in place, random (variable) rewards will strengthen it.**

What do we mean by "ignoring" unwanted behavior? When a dog jumps on people, his rewards may include attention, physical contact, shouts of alarm, or an opportunity to run and chase, so the recommended response is to stand still, turn your back, look away, and ignore the dog's jumping. When jumping isn't fun any more, the dog will look for something else to do, and when sitting politely earns rewards and treats, that new behavior replaces jumping.

But what about self-reinforcing activities like barking, running fence lines, chasing bikes, or lunging at people and other dogs? Ignoring these behaviors won't extinguish them, and as long as they're rewarding to the dog, they will grow stronger. This is why it's important for handlers to manage their dogs' environment, plan ahead, avoid triggers, notice changes in posture, and become skilled at evasive maneuvers. Inattentive handlers and reactive dogs are a dangerous combination.

To the basic laws of learning, we can add three suggestions for motivating your dog from Jane Killion:

- **Identify the things that your dog loves.**
- **Gain control of them.**
- **Exchange them on a regular basis for behaviors that you want.**

And as Sue Brown adds, when training doesn't change your dog's behavior, one of three things is probably happening:

- **There isn't enough consistency.**
- **You have not given it enough time.**
- **What you are doing is not effective and needs to be changed.**

The most widely used reward is food, but whatever your dog finds valuable or fulfilling can work. Some dogs live for tennis balls, tug toys, an opportunity to run hard, or play dates with special friends. Verbal praise and physical petting may be appreciated, but they are seldom as rewarding as food, toys, or the chance to do something exciting.

The least rewarding food treat is your dog's regular kibble. Try filling your bait pouch with a variety of meats, cheeses, crunchy biscuits broken into small pieces, and other tasty handouts.

If your dog enjoys them, interactive puzzles can be amazing motivators. Whenever Blue (a puzzle addict) is almost but not quite reliable with something she is learning, I show her a Nina Ottosson puzzle and she suddenly seems to remember and understand exactly what I want

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from her and she does it with great enthusiasm.

Many trainers recommend documenting results on a printed form or in a training notebook because keeping an objective record of your dog's progress will help you move forward without the frustration and disappointment of setbacks.

"We want an ever-increasing level of difficulty without losing the dog by having him quit because it's too hard," says Donaldson. She recommends measuring the success of every step in a training session and not moving on until the dog successfully completes the behavior for five repetitions in a row.

When completing a practice set, be sure that all of the repetitions are identical. Don't change your location, position, the direction you're facing, your body language, voice, or other signals until you're ready for the next installment. Paying close attention to what you are doing helps prevent the accidental reinforcing of behaviors you would rather extinguish.

When the dog performs each action successfully five times in a row, she is ready to move on to the next, more complicated, assignment. If she can't complete more than one or two repetitions, make it easier by dropping back to a previous, simpler behavior. If she completes three or four repetitions, stay where you are and try another set of five repetitions.

The advantage to training in sets is that they clearly show your progress. Endlessly repeating a behavior that your dog already knows is inefficient and boring, and jumping ahead too quickly is inefficient and stressful.

Organizing training sessions helps us be "splitters" instead of "lumpers." In *The Toolbox for Building a Great Family Dog,* Terry Ryan explains that two of her mentors, the positive training pioneers Marian Breland-Baily and Bob Bailey, taught her these terms. Splitters break tasks into small, easy pieces, increasing the chances for success. Lumpers grow impatient, assume that the dog can move ahead faster, and focus on the desired end result while skipping in-between steps.

As Laura VanArendonk Baugh writes in *Fired Up, Frantic, and Freaked Out,* "If we lump behaviors – 'my dog has learned to sit in an empty room, so now I'll ask him to sit while the doorbell rings and guests walk in' – we're going to experience failure and frustration. Splitting can feel 'slow' to those not used to it, because it's many small steps instead of a few large ones, but in the long run training actually moves much faster!"

In support of good training, your definition of "jackpot" may need updating. I used to think that a jackpot, which is a special reward for something done well, would be an unusually yummy treat, like maybe a chunk of raw steak. But that's only part of it. A really rewarding jackpot isn't a single treat that's quickly swallowed, it goes on for as much as 20 seconds or more. That's a long time!

The other day as Blue and I walked to my car from the dog park, a commotion erupted on the sidewalk ahead. When I said, "Come front!" Blue spun around, sat with her back to the action, and ignored a leaping, snarling, on-leash German Shepherd exchanging words with a leaping, snarling, on-leash Lab. Blue's jackpot consisted of 30 small pieces of hot dog, cheese, freeze-dried liver, almonds, bacon, turkey jerky, peanut butter treats, and dehydrated bison tripe, delivered one at a time with decisive arm movements while I stood straight and praised her for being so awesome. The distracting dogs went their separate ways and Blue ignored them as we resumed our walk.

Blue works to find and eat the treats hidden in a food puzzle. She loves this activity, so the opportunity to play with one motivates her to pay close attention and respond quickly in a training session.

LIFELONG MANAGEMENT OF REACTIVE DOGS

If there's one thing the experts agree on, it's the importance of ongoing practice. For best results, reactive dog training never stops. Well-managed reactive dogs are often the best-behaved dogs in classes, competitions, at home, and in the great outdoors because their handlers' management skills are so polished and automatic.

In *Better Together: The Collected Wisdom of Modern Dog Trainers,* Ken Ramirez observes, "The most impressive changes have occurred with dogs that have had a lengthy break from exposure to triggers combined with lots of fun and advanced training as part of a stable program." When advanced training is not part of the equation, he says, most of the dogs he has worked with continue to have challenges.

Living well with reactive dogs requires commitment, patience, and a willingness to try new methods. It's an ambitious investment of time and effort. It's also one that, as I'm learning with Blue and the resources listed here, can pay a lifetime of dividends. 🐾

CJ Puotinen and Blue Sapphire live in Montana, where Blue passed her Canine Good Citizen test and has earned two American Kennel Club Tricks Dog titles. Her favorite activities are hiking, chasing tennis balls, and pheasant hunting with her trainer, Jeff.