



# REACTIVITY

## What is it?

Reactivity is an overreaction to a situation or stimulus. Dogs can be reactive to one or many things. They can be reactive to people, dogs, vehicles, or even different noises.

Having a reactive dog does not mean your dog is aggressive. While not aggressive, if left unaddressed, it could lead to an aggressive act. Most reactivity is fear based. Fear is a vast spectrum of responses. Most of us think of fear as a dog cowering, shaking, or shying away from what frightens him/her. Instead of those behaviors, some dogs will use their body language in a more assertive fashion to move things away that cause them stress, fear, or discomfort. More common signals of this behavior are barking, lunging, growling, snapping or even biting. These signals are used to create distance quickly and often, using these tactics are the only responses they know to use to achieve the results they need at that time.

Our reactive program is led by Heather Huff. Heather has over 15 years of experience in the field. She has developed an extensive program for reactive dogs that has changed the lives of countless dogs and their owners. She also works with shelters and rescues to develop plans for reactive dogs in their care.

In 2022, Heather Constiner joined the program. This allowed us to expand our program into our PA location and offer more availability in our Ohio locations.

Our approach with your reactive dog is different; we do not teach your dog avoidance, which is to never look at the trigger (**what causes the reaction**) or techniques to simply focus on YOU. Our experts teach your dog skills to address and cope with the issues at hand. Through these techniques of counterconditioning and desensitization, we work individually with you and your dog to customize the best plan. This provides a way for you and your dog to learn lifelong skills in the real world.

We offer many options to address your dog's needs. Every dog entering our reactive program is evaluated by one of our trainers skilled with expertise in reactivity. We do this so we can

observe your dog's particular body language in the presence of a trigger. This allows us to determine the best learning environment for your dog. Dogs learn when they are under threshold. Simply put, threshold is the environment or distance your dog can encounter a trigger without an emotional response (reaction).

Once an evaluation is complete, our experts will then create a training path for you and your dog through a variety of classes and/or individual one-on-one training.

We believe your veterinarian plays a crucial role in the physical and emotional health of your dog. Because of this, when appropriate, we provide your vet with a detailed plan and recommendation in a collaborating effort to achieve optimal results for your dog.

We understand and have lived with reactive behaviors in our own home. We know it can be frustrating and embarrassing, so we approach this with a true understanding of the realities of living with a reactive dog. We are here to help!

We use only positive, reward-based training methods. Why is that important to you and your dog? Dogs make an association very quickly, on average 1-1.5 seconds. We want them to relate these triggers to something they enjoy, not something that causes them pain, fear, or intimidation. These reward-based methods are crucial to helping your dog. Outdated equipment and methods like prong, choke, or shock collars or any other form of punishment increases the risk of dogs making the wrong associations and increasing the negative response.

Click the logo to learn more from the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior.



So, what is a reward? A reward is a motivator. Something your dog enjoys MOST in life. This ranges from things like treats, toys, praise, attention, and more. As we embark on this journey together, we will help you find your dog's primary motivator.

In short, your reactive dog never needs a heavy hand or harsh correction. To the contrary! Your dog needs a behavior-based trainer who understands scientifically supported methods. These proven methods focus on your dog's motivators and recognize his/her emotional responses to help guide you and your dog along the path to modify his/her behavior in the real world.

We look forward to working with you and helping to unleash your dog's potential!