

On-Leash Reactivity (OLR)



OLR often becomes a well-rehearsed bad habit for dogs. It's never too late to work on influencing their behavior, however, it does become increasingly challenging to extinguish a behavior the longer they've had to repeat it.

Start with Management

Manage your dog and their surroundings to reduce the number of opportunities they have to practice this bad habit. Management in this context means maintaining an adequate space buffer of physical distance between your dog and triggers of reactivity during leashed walks. This will keep your dog *sub-threshold*, not yet tipping over to the point of displaying OLR.

Training

While your dog is sub-threshold, teach them *incompatible replacement behaviors*, behaviors you'd like from them **instead** of the reactivity which are incompatible with OLR. Examples include: offering eye contact, walking on a nice loose leash, sitting, and lying down when asked. (Your dog can't possibly be sitting/lying down, offering eye contact with a nice loose leash while also lunging towards and barking at other dogs, joggers, bicyclists, strollers, critters, vehicles, etc. – so these behaviors are incompatible with one another.)

It's important to maintain the physical distance while training. Dogs are unable to form learning memories to build a solid foundation of obedience skills if we attempt to train during moments of OLR. (Also, dogs are often disinterested in treats during moments of reactivity, which can make training desirable skills using positive reinforcement slower, and more challenging.)

Preventing behaviors from occurring by distracting your dog is NOT training!

Dogs learn from making mistakes, too! Dogs must be responsible for their own behavior, and handlers are responsible for providing information (feedback) about that behavior!

It is only fair to expect dogs to stop the behavior they've been displaying once they have been taught what behaviors are expected of them instead.

Equipment for OLR

- Gentle Leader
- Head Halti
- * *Stimulation collars may increase reactivity (pinch, prong, electronic)*

Potential Risks with OLR

- Redirection (*turning on the handler*)
- Displacement (*biting anything within range*)

Change walking route/direction - Walking the same predictable route allows reactive dogs to build-up anticipation, becoming amped before even encountering any trigger.

Provide frequent off-leash socialization opportunities with other dogs - Appropriate physical outlet to reduce frustration can work towards reducing defense while on-leash.

Increase mental enrichment – Appropriate mental outlet to channel for anxious/excess energy.