



THE REACTIVITY REHAB BLUEPRINT

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO REHABILITATING YOUR
REACTIVE DOG



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THE REACTIVITY REHAB BLUEPRINT

In this guide, I'll walk you through every step of my system to successfully rehabilitate your reactive dog.

This is a tried and tested method, designed not only to stop your dog from reacting to their triggers, but to also completely change their mindset around them.



However, there's one crucial thing to note...

This is a system.

All of the components you're about to read are connected.

If you skip or rush through any sections, the system won't work as intended.

Think of it like building a house: if we forget to install the stairs, we'll never be able to reach the top floor.

This is why it's imperative that you take your time and complete each section of training before moving onto the next - *this is key for your success.*

SO, WHAT THE HELL DO I KNOW ABOUT REACTIVITY?

Let's rewind to around 8 years ago, when a young ambitious dog trainer got a job at the local rescue centre.

The rescue centre in question had many different stations, a cattery, small animals unit, a rabbit unit, etc... Naturally, I found my home on the kennel block. 25 separate kennels manned by 3 people.

I'm sure you can do the maths there and work out that we didn't have much time to spend on each dog, especially after cleaning the individual kennels, preparing food and medication and then implementing an exercise routine for the dogs separately.

So if a dog came in that wasn't reactive, we'd quite quickly find them developing some sort of behavioural issue - which is a crying shame and something I'm on a mission to try and help (we'll cover that another day).



Anyway, back to the point; the types of dogs we'd get at the rescue centre...

Staffie crosses, Shepherds, and Bull Lurchers just to name a few...

The majority came in reactive. This meant I got to try and test many different methods, I saw what worked and what was complete nonsense.

Not only that, I got to work hands-on with hundreds of dogs, transform their behaviour, and even get to help send them to their forever home! This was **EXTREMELY** rewarding and it's why I hold reactivity so close to my heart.

BEFORE YOU DIVE INTO THE SYSTEM, YOU FIRST NEED A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF REACTIVITY...

When we talk about reactivity and aggression in dogs, it's important to understand that not all aggressive behaviours are the same.

There are three main types:

- Reactivity
- Offensive aggression
- Defensive aggression

Knowing the difference between these can help you better understand your dog and manage their behaviour effectively.



REACTIVITY VS AGRESSION

Reactivity is quite different from aggression.

A reactive dog might bark, lunge, or growl, but it's more about an exaggerated response to something in their environment, rather than a desire to protect or confront.

Reactive dogs can be jumpy or overly excited, and their reactions might be triggered by things like other dogs, people, or loud noises.

While reactivity doesn't always stem from aggression, it can still be stressful for both you and your dog.

The goal in managing reactivity is to help your dog stay calm and relaxed, especially in situations that might typically set them off.

DEFENSIVE AGRESSION

Defensive aggression, on the other hand, is all about self-protection.

A dog might growl, snap, or bite, not because they want to confront someone, but because they feel scared or threatened.

You'll often see dogs displaying defensive aggression with their body language — ears back, tail tucked, and a lowered stance.

It's their way of saying, "I'm uncomfortable, please stay away."

While defensive aggression is more likely to be fear-related, it's not always about fear. Sometimes, dogs will defend themselves or their space without necessarily being scared—they just want to create a safe distance from something they don't like.

OFFENSIVE AGRESSION

Offensive aggression is when a dog takes a proactive stance.

This means they are acting confidently and assertively, often to protect something valuable to them, like territory or a favourite toy.



A dog showing offensive aggression might stand tall, with their ears up and tail stiff. Their actions are deliberate—they might growl, snarl, or even bite to achieve a specific goal, like keeping a perceived threat away.

Some dogs are naturally inclined to show offensive aggression due to their genetics. Certain breeds have been bred over generations to be protective or to guard, which can make them more prone to this type of behaviour.

A SHIFT IN THE WIND...

Now just to throw fuel onto the fire...

Your dog may not always be locked into just one way of reacting. Just like us, they adapt and change how they respond to the world around them.

Let's say your dog starts off a bit defensive, maybe barking or growling because they feel threatened (this is defensive aggression).

Buts here, complicated over time, with a bit of experience and maybe a dash of confidence, your dog might start becoming offensive.

Instead of just reacting out of fear, they could begin to confront whatever's bothering them head-on.

It's like they've figured out that their actions can actually control the situation.

This shift doesn't happen overnight.

Sometimes it takes months, sometimes just a single moment, but the key thing to remember, is that dog behaviour is never static.

They're constantly learning, adapting, and even changing their approach based on what's worked for them in the past.

So, if you notice your dog's reactions evolving—whether they're getting bolder or more defensive—it's all a part of their journey.

Understanding this can really help you tailor your approach and support them in the best way possible.

But more importantly, it's why it's crucial that you get on top of your dog's reactivity right away, before it gets out of hand.

Here's my protocol on how to do it...

THE PROTOCOL: STEP 1

BUILDING FOOD MOTIVATION

Whether you like it or not, building food motivation is absolutely vital when it comes to dog training, especially when dealing with reactivity.

I hear comments like these so often: “My dog isn’t a massive foodie” or “My dog won’t take food outside.”

Whilst I fully appreciate some dogs aren’t going to be receptive to food rewards, there are certain things we can do to build their food motivation.

In fact, I recommend doing this even if your dog is already food motivated, just to get more bang for your buck out of training.

Before we dive into it, I just want to hammer home the benefits to building up your dog’s food motivation.

You see, without proper motivation, we won't get the effort we're looking for from your dog (*I doubt you'd come to work if I only offered you a pat on the head instead of money*). Building food motivation provides us with is:

- Longevity of results
 - MUCH faster results once the reactivity training starts
 - The ability to effectively use positive reinforcement.
-

Here’s the absolute truth that people will side step: If you fail to build up adequate food motivation, you’ll find yourself having to use more pressure in the form of punishment.



However, constantly punishing your dog for reacting isn't going to work in the long run, because to punish is to simply suppress a behaviour, it doesn't do anything to change your dog's emotion towards the trigger.

That's why we need to be able to effectively reward our dog... and I mean c'mon, it's fun!

So let's dive into the methods of building up food motivation.

TEA THROUGH ME

The first thing you need to do is start hand-feeding your dog their meals.

You'll have heard this being called "ditch the bowl" or "essential feeding."

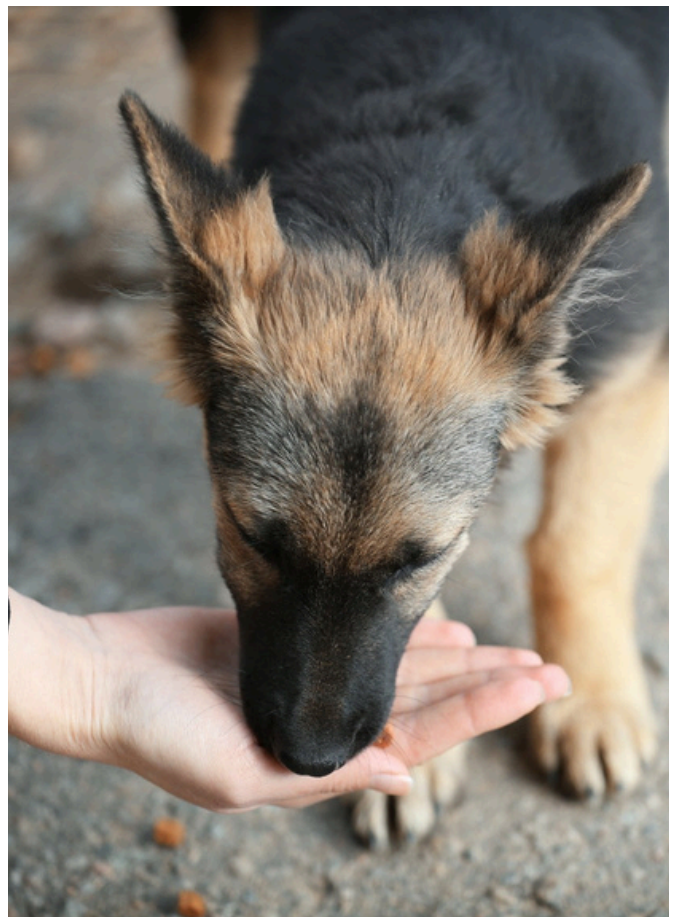
I like to call it "tea through me" (*just because we're a little different here at 3D Canine Academy*).

But it is literally just that - no more feeding your dog out of the bowl.

But also, just to drop a curve ball on you - absolutely no more treats, no more human food, no more "finishing off the plate."

Not while your dog is still reactive at least...

The reason for this, is a fussy dog will hold out for a good while if they know you're going to give in and supply them with that tasty goodness.



And you'll take away the value and necessity of working for their food which will impact the overall system.

Don't worry, you're still going to be able to provide your dog with a "high value" treat...

But we're going to be smart about it (I'll be covering this in a different section).

So for the next few days (or however long it takes for your dog to start accepting food off of you), you're going to hand-feed them.



I recommend that you split your dog's daily food allowance into 4 feeding sessions per day, (you may also do 3 if you can't manage 4).

If your dog refuses to eat all of the food for that session, just pop it back into their food bag and try again with the next session.



THE 3 STAGES OF BUILDING FOOD MOTIVATION

I've split this system into 3 stages for you. Before progressing to each stage, ensure that the previous stage has been completed effectively!



Refer to pages 12-14 to track your dog's daily food intake throughout the 3 stages and make records of any notes you need to help you and your dog progress!

But before that...



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I NEED YOU TO CHECK THIS OUT...

You'll be amazed at how many well-known dog food brands are full of sh*t! Quite a lot of them are unbelievably low in essential nutrients, and are padded out with unhealthy fillers that have massive effects on your dog's behaviour and energy levels (*it's the equivalent of feeding your kids a Big Mac everyday!*) So before getting started on hand feeding, check your dog's food and make sure it's hitting the recommended nutrient ranges while still fitting your budget. Here's what to look for:

NUTRIENT	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACCEPTABLE RANGE
PROTEIN	<p>Prioritize named animal proteins like chicken, beef, or salmon. Avoid terms like "meat meal."</p> <p>Remember: Quality over quantity – animal-sourced proteins are always best!</p>	<p>30% in dry food; 5-8% in wet food</p>
FATS/OILS	<p>Look for named sources like chicken fat or fish oil. Avoid labels like "animal fat."</p> <p>Balance Omega-3s (like fish oil) and Omega-6s (like chicken fat) for optimal results. Good fats keep the coat shiny and the brain sharp!</p>	<p>9-14% in dry food; 2-4% in wet food</p>
FIBER	<p>Go for natural sources like beet pulp, pumpkin, or chicory root.</p> <p>Keep it simple, keep it natural. Fiber makes for a happier tummy! Well-balanced dog food will do this for you!</p>	<p>No recommended range</p>

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: [HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTDOGFOOD.CO.UK](https://www.allaboutdogfood.co.uk)

HAND-FEEDING TRACKER



Use this chart to track your dog's food intake and training sessions when hand-feeding in Stage 1:

STAGE 1				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:

STAGE 1				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:



PRINT ME!

HAND-FEEDING TRACKER



Use this chart to track your dog's daily food intake and training sessions when hand-feeding in Stage 2:

STAGE 2				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:

STAGE 2				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:



PRINT ME!

HAND-FEEDING TRACKER

Use this chart to track your dog's daily food intake and training sessions when hand-feeding in Stage 3:

STAGE 3				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:

STAGE 3				
DATE:	DAILY FOOD INTAKE	TIME	AMOUNT EATEN	NOTES
	PORTION 1			
	PORTION 2			
	PORTION 3			
	PORTION 4			

TOTAL AMOUNT CONSUMED:



PRINT ME!

After successfully completing Step 1, it's now time to move onto...

THE PROTOCOL: STEP 2

CONDITIONING YOUR MARKERS

If there's one thing that you should take away from this guide, it's how important markers are in dog training.

I mean, who doesn't want to literally be able to tell their dog exactly when they've done something right?

Now, what happens with a marker is that your dog becomes conditioned to what happens after the marker has been said.

This could be the delivery of food, a good old tug of war, or maybe even a throw of a ball...

Before we dive into how to condition your marker, I have a funny little story for you, and by the end of it, you'll know why I use more than one marker.

You see, in my early days of dog training I just used one marker for everything.



So after a training session with my first little cocker spaniel, Jess, I sounded my marker one final time, "YES!"

I reached into my pocket to give her a well-deserved treat and instead found that my arm was being detached from shoulder, as she thought she was going to chase the ball.

Jess taught me the importance of clarity. So now, I use a different marker for food and toy rewards to avoid mistakes, confusion and disappointment (as your dog will definitely have a favourite).

SO LET'S DIVE INTO CONDITIONING...

FOOD MARKER

Step 1: completely still with the food in a hidden place (like your pocket).

- It's really important that your dog can't see the food on display as this will slow down the conditioning phase (they'll be hyper-focused on the food and not the sound thus no conditioning will happen).

Step 2: Remaining completely still, say your marker word ("YES") and then proceed to feed your dog.

- The reason it's important to stand still, is because if you move while speaking, your dog will only register one of the two, and with them being the masters of body language, they'll most likely ignore your word and instead focus on the movement.

Step 3: Repeat this process until you see a noticeable response from your dog when you've said your word.

- This could be a head tilt or moving a step closer to you.

TOY MARKER

For your toy marker it's essential that your dog knows how to let go of the toy (if they can't let go, we can't use it within training).

When I'm conditioning a toy marker, I repeat the exact same process as the food marker.

However, I typically let the dog have a 10-15 second play before I "out" them and repeat the conditioning process.

For those of you looking for a toy marker word... "Supaaaa" is often my go-to and most satisfying to say (*my academy members will get it*).

Once you've successfully managed to condition your markers you're ready to move onto Step 3.

THE PROTOCOL: STEP 3

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Breaking the cycle is exactly as it sounds. It's the practice of management.

When it comes to reactivity if we have no management in place, you may as well throw away all of your hard efforts.

So what exactly do I mean by breaking the cycle?

Well, first of all, we're going to stop your regular dog walks, right away.

The reason for this is because there are certain aspects of your dog's reactivity that make it beneficial for them to behave the way they do.



Quite often when your dog is reacting, it's because it gets them something they want. This could be:

- Distance created from their trigger.
- Being removed from a situation. Just the thrill of
- booting off another dog or person (*Yes, this is a thing, and it's more common than you think*).

But don't worry we're not leaving your dog stuck inside all day, that wouldn't be beneficial at all...

Instead we're going to take them to a place where there aren't many distractions, and we're going to teach them a series of skills all while burning their energy off.

We'll come onto the functional skills later down the guide, but for now...

WE NEED TO COVER SOME REALLY IMPORTANT POINTS...

First and Foremost - Fulfillment

Fulfillment is a really important aspect of your dog's life. A lot of trainers will always harp on about, walk to heel this, and place command that...

(Which is all important stuff, don't get me wrong).

However, it's all about balance, it's about your dog doing what you ask, when you ask them, but it's also about allowing your dog to be a dog!

And ~~important~~, ~~of~~ ~~maybe~~ ~~it's~~ ~~about~~ letting your dog express their genetic tendencies in a safe manner.

In a nutshell - if we suppress all of our dog's desires by constantly having them in heel, place, or in a crate we'll be doing a superb job at creating a ticking time bomb. A **REACTIVE** ticking time bomb...

It's so important that we give our dog some down time. In fact, I highly recommend you be a part of this!

This is how we create a deep, meaningful connection with our canine friends.

Here's what you can do to fulfill your dog - I recommend doing these whilst you're *breaking the cycle*:

- Play - with a ball/rope/tug toy/flirt pole
- Just let your dog explore
- Scatter feeding their food
- Scent games
- Playing Tag (Sounds a little mad but just try it, it's super fun!)



This will provide your dog with the satisfaction they need whilst we work on their reactivity but as I mentioned before, balance is essential.

Why is Active Rest essential for your dog's reactivity journey



You see, just as fulfillment, exercise and play are important, active rest is also important.

But what exactly do I mean by active rest?

I'm sure many people will be able to relate that not all dogs come with an "off-switch".

And if you've got a dog that's constantly pacing the house, demanding attention or just never seeming to settle down, it's very important that we teach them how to.

So why implement active rest?

Well, within this guide we're changing our dogs' entire routine, but most importantly, their mindset around the world, and also around us.

We are to become their loving leaders, which means no demanding/attention-seeking or restless behaviour.

An overly tired dog is never a good dog to train, it's also a dog I'd expect to react.

I mean how do you feel after a terrible night's sleep knowing you've got to go to work?

(Not great).

That's why I always recommend crate/place training and utilizing the crate or place mat for at least 1 hour after play time or any training sessions.

THE PROTOCOL: STEP 4

FUNCTIONAL OBEDIENCE

Functional obedience is exactly what it sounds like...

Obedience you can rely on in everyday life. These skills need to be built up, but don't take very long to train.

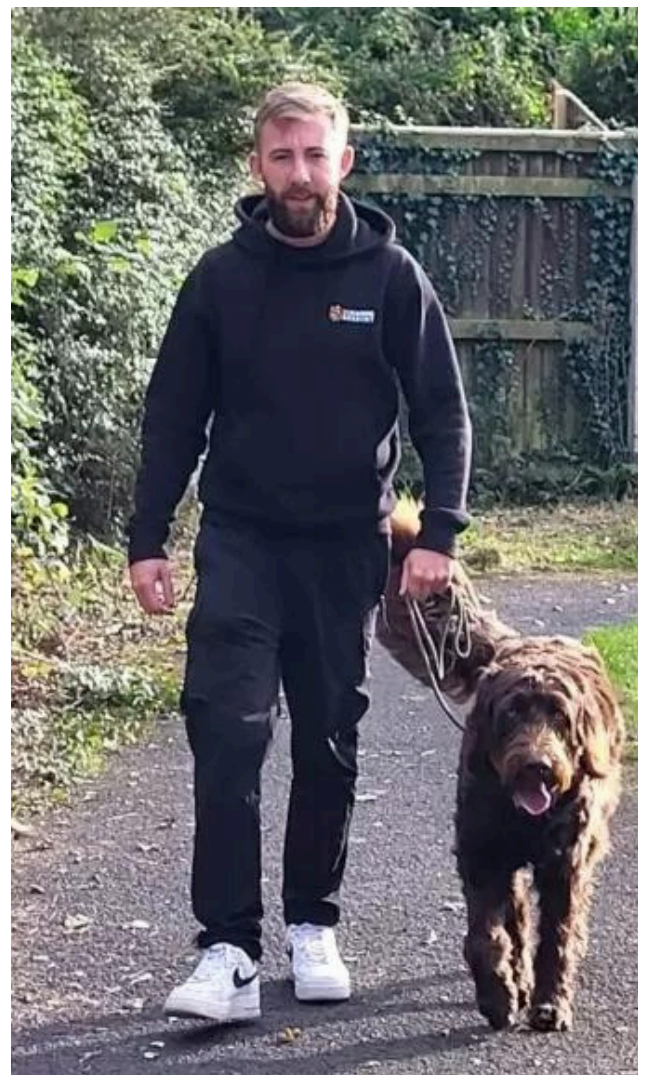
You'll need four key pieces:

1. LOOSE LEAD WALKING

My loose lead walking formula is a 2-step system:

- First, we build up your dog's ability to maintain a loose lead while having the freedom to sniff and explore—without causing you to dislocate a shoulder!
- Once you understand this, we focus on building up duration within the heel position (your dog being directly by your side).

Personally, I dislike having a dog constantly in the heel position. There needs to be a balance between allowing them the freedom to sniff, and having them walk to heel when instructed.



2. DISENGAGE

A good disengage is a game-changer.

Don't get me wrong—this isn't used to “distract” your dog, but rather to break fixation (intense stare at their trigger).

Once the fixation is broken, you can alternate between having your dog look at the trigger and then look away before a reaction happens.

Before you know it, your dog will be able to look at what makes them uncomfortable for longer periods without reacting.

3. STRUCTURED SNIFFING



The ability to find food in a grassy area. People don't give this enough credit. It's our main weapon for counter-conditioning.

~~Imagine every time~~ ~~you looked at something~~ that scared you, you got rewarded instead of something bad happening—your opinion of it would change quickly.

4. AN “OUT/DROP” COMMAND

~~This allows us to engage our~~ dog with play-based training.

If you follow me, you're probably tired of hearing me talk about play in training.

(Good—I hope I've drilled that message in).

Play is the most effective way to reward your dog, build a bond, increase engagement and provide fulfillment—the list goes on...

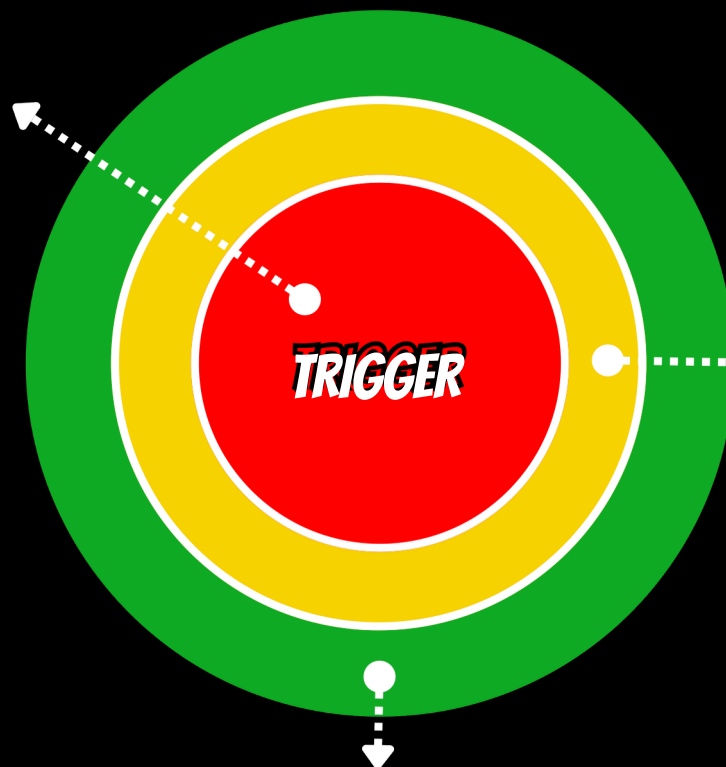
SO HOW DOES THIS SYSTEM ALL FIT TOGETHER?

We're nearly done I promise, but first I need you to understand your dog's thresholds and arousal levels.

First, let's explain what I mean by "thresholds." In simplest terms, a threshold is the point where your dog goes from chill, to full-on "reactive mode."

I usually break these zones down into Red, Amber and Green Zones

**YOUR DOG IS OVER THE
THRESHOLD AND
REACTING—TOO
CLOSE FOR EFFECTIVE
LEARNING**



**YOUR DOG IS ALERT
BUT NOT YET
REACTIVE—THIS IS
THE CRITICAL
MANAGEMENT ZONE**

**YOUR DOG IS CALM AND
WELL BELOW THE
THRESHOLD—NO
REACTION HERE**

People typically mistake arousal with excitement. In reactivity, your dog will be alert and ready to react as their arousal levels will climb quite quickly the closer they move towards the red zone.

HOW THE PROTOCOL REDUCES THRESHOLDS

(While managing arousal!)

Remember when I told you we're going to be saving high value special treats for a moment? Well, this is it!

At this point, you'll have taught your dog all of these skills using their daily food. Well... we're going to flip the script on them now!

Whenever you are working around your dog's trigger, you are going to use the highest value food you can give them, and they will not receive this food under any other circumstance! *(This is incredibly important!)*

This will double the speed of your training. As the only way your dog can access this tasty food is by behaving around their triggers!

Our protocol works by gradually lowering your dog's thresholds and managing arousal, allowing them to handle triggers without reacting.

Let's break this down:

1. DISENGAGE

The first step is to determine your dog's zone distances.

Start by breaking your dog's fixation with a "disengage" cue.

Note: *When your dog locks eyes on a trigger, arousal builds quickly.*

By teaching them to look away, you stop that build-up. But we're not *just* distracting them—once the fixation is broken, we let them look back at the trigger, gradually increasing the time they look.



When starting, I recommend disengaging your dog in the **amber** zone. Keep them there for about 10 seconds, then retreat to the **green** zone. This teaches your dog that they don't need to react when approaching their trigger.

Even better, when they remain calm, we will create more distance for them! And as you progress, these zones will get smaller and smaller until your dog is no longer reacting!

2. COUNTER-CONDITIONING WITH SNIFFING

We immediately follow up with "structured sniffing" (finding food in grass), which not only reduces arousal but also starts the process of counter-conditioning.

Instead of associating a trigger with fear or anxiety, your dog begins to associate it with something positive—like finding tasty food.

Over time, this reshapes their emotional response.

3. DESENSITIZATION THROUGH GRADUAL EXPOSURE

The trick with exposure is to start in an easy environment.

If you have a friend with a relatively calm dog, this would be the first step.

However, I like to quickly move onto harder environments. I first like to start in car parks then move onto busy 'dog places.'

The reason for this is because people tend to have their dogs on a lead there, so there's a lower chance of being rushed to by off-lead dogs.

After an environment, you need to progress onto busier parks.

You'll be amazed at how fast you can do this with all of the above steps in place.

4. FUNCTIONAL OBEDIENCE IN REAL-LIFE SCENARIOS

We're not just stopping at desensitization...

We actively practice functional obedience — like loose-lead walking and play based training, eventually moving onto things like sit & down stay's around triggers.

This helps your dog learn to behave appropriately, even in the presence of what used to set them off on a frantic outburst.

PROGRESS TRACKER

Use the following chart to track your dog's arousal levels and how close you are able to get to their trigger with each attempt:

ATTEMPT	TYPE OF TRIGGER	DISTANCE FROM TRIGGER	REACTION (YES/NO)	NOTES
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				



PRINT ME!

THE PATH TO A CALM, CONFIDENT DOG



Reactivity training is not just about stopping your dog from barking or lunging; it's about fundamentally changing their emotional response to the world around them. Through disengagement, structured sniffing, desensitization, and functional obedience, we're not only reducing their arousal and thresholds but also reshaping how they view their triggers.

By the end of this training, you'll have a dog that is not only well-behaved, but also calm, confident, and capable of navigating the world without fear or aggression. This journey transforms your dog from reactive to relaxed, helping you both enjoy a peaceful, stress-free life together.

I hope this blueprint was helpful to you. If you'd like to join my paid programme where I show and guide you through this exact system, from start to finish, with an extremely reactive Doberman, then see the page below.

Give your dog a pat from me!

Ross,

NEED MORE HELP?

Join The 8-Week Reactive to Off-Lead Transformation

The 8-Week Reactive to Off-Lead Transformation is a structured coaching programme designed specifically for reactive and high-drive dogs.

This isn't a DIY course.

You work directly with me.

You get weekly coaching calls, daily WhatsApp access for questions, and personalised video feedback so you know exactly what to adjust and when.

If you're serious about building reliable off-lead control – not just managing behaviour – then apply for a call below.

We'll look at your dog, where you're currently stuck, and whether this programme is the right fit.

BOOK A CALL HERE!





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