

FINDING A TRAINER FOR YOUR REACTIVE DOG

Finding a trainer who is competent at diagnosing and modifying the behavior of a reactive dog is not always easy. Finding a trainer, in general, is hard enough, but this is a guide:

<https://pawsforpraise.wordpress.com/2013/07/21/finding-the-right-dog-trainer-harder-than-you-think/>

FIRST, IDENTIFY TYPE OF REACTIVITY

If you have a reactive dog, you may be able to find someone based on whether your dog is reactive due to fear/aggression, or due to excitement/arousal/barrier frustration, aka “frustrated greeter.

[Muzzle training](#) is advised when you don’t know the dog’s bite history.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FABgZTFvHo> and <https://muzzleupproject.com/>

Fear-based reactivity - Desensitization helps the dog feel safe. Counter-conditioning is used to help the dog actually LIKE the formerly scary trigger. Positive reinforcement training of behaviors is used lastly, to give the dog things to do so that he remains under control in the environment.

Unsure - If you don’t know what your dog’s play or off leash history is, then you must opt for safety. Then, a systematic desensitization to the dog’s triggers, combined with counter-conditioning, is the likeliest helpful protocol.

“Frustrated greeter” - If your dog has a history of being fine off leash – playing with lots of other dogs, and being generally friendly to people, too, then it’s likely your dog is just excitable. So, in that case, you’d be looking for a force free trainer who can help you with skills trained through operant conditioning (OC), such as: go to mat, stay, watch me, etc. In other words, teaching the dog some behaviors which are incompatible with barking & lunging, to use as defaults, or which can be performed on cue.

OPERANT VERSUS CLASSICAL CONDITIONING

We employ classical conditioning in the form of counter-conditioning (CC) for upset dogs (fearful/aggressive) and operant conditioning for non-upset dogs (excitable). LAT or “Look at That” is a proprietary protocol that employs operant conditioning.

WHAT TO AVOID

We do not advise protocols that employ negative reinforcement, or that suggest that “adding distance” is the same as positive reinforcement. Those catch phrases show a basic misunderstanding that is not really the subject of our work on this page. Suffice to say we don’t agree on BAT or CAT as being particularly helpful, and we think in many cases they can be harmful.

WHAT TO EXPECT

A force-free trainer that is qualified to develop and help you initiate a behavior modification plan will conduct a functional assessment.

<https://ppgworldservices.com/2018/04/17/whats-a-functional-assessment-in-dog-training-and-why-you-should-care/>

SOURCES FOR FORCE-FREE TRAINERS

We recommend that you use experienced force-free trainers, especially those familiar with CARE principles. Sad fact: dog training is a completely unregulated field, so skill levels and philosophies vary widely. Remember, a trainer can have credentials and certification and still not have a skill level with which you are comfortable.

You are likeliest to find a qualified force-free trainer by searching these sources:

Pet Professional Guild

<http://www.petprofessionalguild.com/>

PPG members may not use choke, prong, or shock collars.

Pet Professional Accreditation Board

<http://credentialingboard.com/Professionals>

Academy for Dog Trainers

<https://www.academyfordogtrainers.com/find-a-trainer>

ACCREDITATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND DEGREED PROFESSIONALS

Professional Canine Trainer - Accredited (PCT-A) are trainers who meet the independent psychometrically sound criteria set by the Pet Professional Accreditation Board.

Certified Dog Behavior Consultant (CDBC and Associate CDBC) are those who have demonstrated competency via the process required by IAABC - International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants.

Certified Professional Dog Trainer - Knowledge Assessed & Skills Assessed (CPDT-KA/CPDT-KSA): Has passed an independent exam set by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers.

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB) or Associate (ACAAB): This certification requires an advanced degree. There are fewer than 60 certified behaviorists in the US.

Veterinary Behaviorist (DACVB): A board-certified veterinary behaviorist has met criteria set by the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. Veterinary behaviorists and dog trainers often work together on implementing treatment plans. There are also many veterinarians who have a special interest in behavior but are not board certified.

Selecting a trainer

REMEMBER---credentials are only as good as the person who has them. This is why observing a trainer is important. One CAN be credentialed and still not have good mechanics or skills.

What to look for:

- * clear statements about what training methods are used.
- * Photos of dogs in flat collars, harnesses, martingales
- * Evidence of education/credentials, organizational affiliation with positive reinforcement based organizations
- * Breadth of experience
- * Trainer pictures and biographies readily found
- * Trainer is insured
- * Evidence of ongoing professional development with organizations and professionals in the field who are recognized experts in the use of counter conditioning and reinforcement based training.
- * Willingness to let you visit a class, interview the trainer.
- * Trainer is not just open to the use of medication, but encouraging of it.
- * Trainer has a lengthy behavioural questionnaire to be filled out by owner
- * Trainer displays a high rate of reinforcement to dogs that is rapidly delivered.

Warning signals:

- * Trainer is vague about the methods used. Implies that different dogs/breeds require different training methods
- * Website shows an online store that sells aversive equipment or supplements with no science supporting them
- * Trainer uses terms such as dog psychologist, behaviouralist, behaviourologist
- * Dogs on the website all seem to have bandanas around their necks for no discernable reason
- * Trainer suggests warning vests/collars/leashes.
- * Trainer talks about dominance, rank reduction, alpha status or handling your dog "like a mother dog would" or "as the pack would".
- * Trainer offers a guarantee of success
- * Trainer talks about working with Red Zone or Level 10 dogs
- * Trainer says they succeed where all others have failed.
- * Trainer encourages ONLY group classes or ONLY board and train.
- * Trainer uses proprietary protocols not recommended by Reactive Dogs group
- * Trainer states they don't use food or describe food use as "bribing"
- * Trainer sees using food for behavioural rehab as "rewarding bad behaviour"

Questions to ask:

- * Can I sit down with you and ask some questions?
- * Can I observe a class?
- * Who are your mentors? What trainers/behaviour experts do you learn from and respect?
- * How will you keep my pet, other people and other pets safe?

- * What dog training equipment do you use when training a dog or do you recommend I use?
- * What happens in your training program when the dog responds in the way you want him to?
- * What happens in your training program when the dog responds in the way you do not want him to?
- * How will you punish the dog or advise me to punish the dog if he gets something wrong or exhibits a behavior I do not like?
- * How do you ensure that my dog is not inadvertently being punished?
- * How do you know that the type of reinforcement you have selected to train my dog is appropriate?
- * How will you know or how will I know if my dog is stressed during the training?
- * Which professional dog training associations are you a member of?
- * Will you guarantee your training results?
- * How do you think a dog's behavior should be addressed if the dog is growling or snapping at people or other dogs?