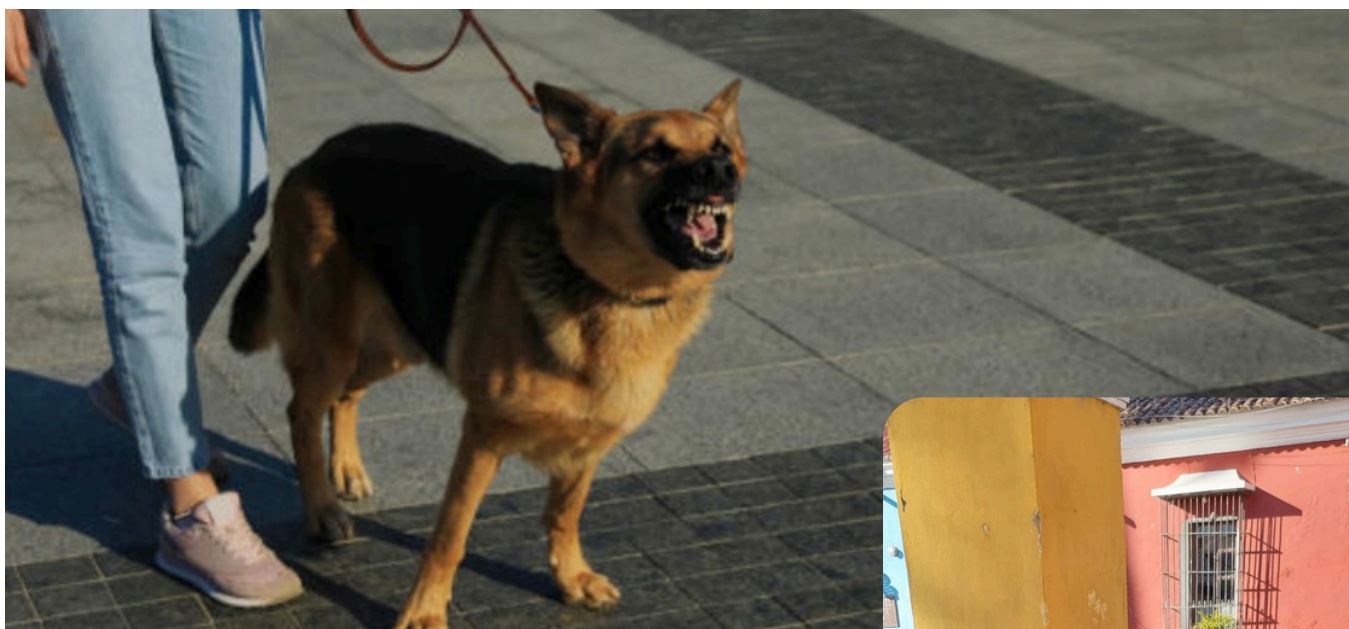




Dogs Decoded  
— Simply —

# REACTIVITY RESCUE GUIDE



A simple guide to help you with  
your dog's reactivity

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from

**DOGS DECODED SIMPLY**



# Why is your dog reactive?

It is easy to feel embarrassed or frustrated when your dog is barking and lunging at the end of a leash. You might think they are being "naughty" or trying to dominate the situation.

But scientifically, that's not what is happening. Your dog isn't choosing to misbehave; their brain has simply been hijacked by a survival reflex.



## *important tip*

Never punish your dog when they get reactive. Do not shout, yell or hit them, nor pull the leash back.

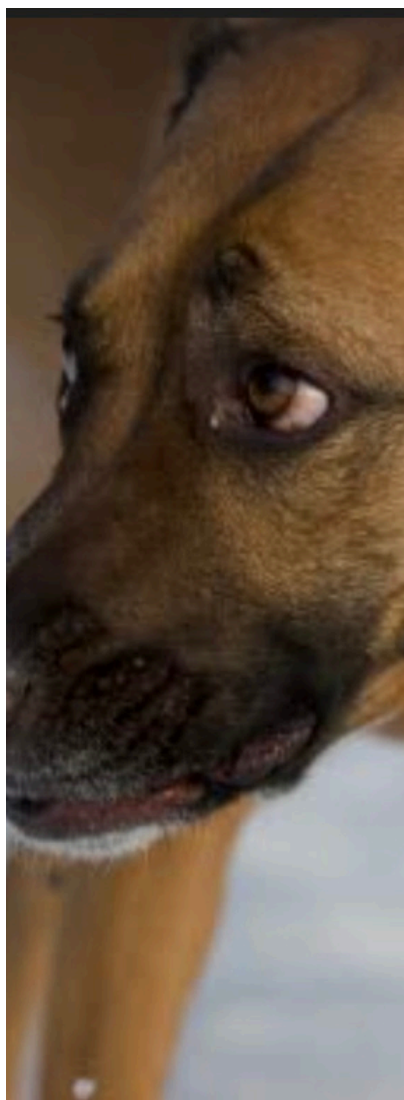
Imagine you are walking through your house and a masked intruder jumps out from behind a door. You might scream or even hit them before you realise it's just a friend playing a prank. In that split second, if someone asked you to "stay calm," you couldn't do it. You aren't "choosing" to be dramatic; your brain has simply switched into survival mode to protect you.

For a reactive dog, that other dog/human/bike/van etc. across the street feels like that "intruder". They aren't ignoring your "sit" command or you're telling them to "calm down"; they literally cannot hear you in that moment because the logical part of their brain is currently offline.

Your dog isn't giving you a hard time; **they are having a hard time.**

They are "flooded" by emotion, and their barking is just a reflex to make the scary thing go away.

# The 3 mistakes owners make that accidentally make reactivity worse



## 1. Telling your dog off

When we scold a dog for barking or lounging, we are trying to turn off the smoke alarm while the fire is still burning. Imagine you are terrified during a turbulent flight and the person next to you shouts at you to "Stay calm!" You are not suddenly less scared; you are still scared AND now even frustrated because your "I am scared" signal was ignored and/or ridiculed.

## 2. Exposure flooding

We often think that staying at a busy dog park or exposing the dog to busier environments will help a dog "get over it." This is like forcing someone with a phobia of spiders to sit in a room full of tarantulas. Instead of learning to be calm, the brain just goes into a deeper state of panic, confirming that the world is a terrifying place.

## 3. You being anxious makes them anxious

When you're anxious, you release hormones that your dog can actually smell. You being anxious about their reactivity makes them anxious as they are mirroring the tension they feel coming from your end of the lead.

# How to help your dog's reactivity?

## Step 1: Lower their baseline arousal levels

Imagine your dog has an internal stress bucket. Every delivery truck, loud TV show, or squirrel sighting adds a cup of water to that bucket. If the bucket is already 90% full before you even clip on the leash, it only takes one tiny "drop"—like a neighbour's dog barking—to make it overflow. Lowering the "baseline" just means starting the walk with an empty bucket. Here is how to drain it:

### 1. Protect Their Sleep

Puppies and elderly dogs need 18–22 and adult dogs need 14–16 hours of rest, but many spend all day doing 'something'. Make sure they have a quiet spot where nobody (kids, other pets etc.) bothers them.

### 2. Swap "The Gym" for "The Library"

High-intensity exercise like endless ball fetch or thug-of-war games keeps adrenaline pumping for hours. Instead, try a "Sniffari." Let your dog lead the way and sniff every blade of grass or give them a snuffle matt with some treats inside. Sniffing is nature's yoga; it lowers the heart rate and calms your dog.

### 3. Turn Off the "TV"

If your dog spends all day looking out of the front window and barking at passersby/cars/dogs, their stress bucket never empties. Cover the window so they can't see the "threats," and their brain can finally come off high alert.

### 4. Ditch the Food Bowl

Eating from a bowl takes thirty seconds. Using a lick mat or hiding treats around the room takes many minutes of brain power. Problem-solving release "feel-good" chemicals that naturally soothe a stressed system.

## Step 2: Identify their threshold and work beneath it

Imagine there is an invisible line between your dog and the thing that upsets them. This is the threshold. On one side of the line, your dog is in "Yellow Zone" mode: they see the other dog, they might get a little stiff, but they can still take a treat and hear your voice. On the other side is the "Red Zone"—where their 'flight or fight' response takes over and their "thinking reasonably" mode is switched to offline mode.

### How to Spot this?

You'll know your dog is approaching their threshold when they:

- Stop sniffing and stop taking treats from you
- Stare intensely without blinking
- Move slower, like they have turned into a statue.

### Why "Pushing Through" Fails

If you try to train while your dog is already barking, you are wasting your time. Once they cross that line, the part of the brain that learns new things has literally shut down to prioritize "survival." Pushing a panicked dog closer to a trigger is like trying to teach someone algebra while they are being chased by a bear. It doesn't work; it just makes the bear feel even more dangerous.

### Try This: The "Observation Deck"

Find a spot (like the back of a parking lot or a far corner of a park) where you are so far away from other dogs that your dog notices them but doesn't react. When your dog looks at a distant trigger, say "Yes" or "Look" in a happy voice and immediately feed them a high-value treat. Turn and walk 5 meters in the opposite direction.

You are teaching your dog's brain that seeing a "threat" is actually a signal to check in with you and get a snack.

## Step 3: Build new emotional associations

Our goal is to change your dog's internal monologue from "Danger!" to "Snack time!"

This is called **counter-conditioning**.

Think of it like being terrified of spiders. If every time you saw a spider from a safe distance, someone handed you USD/GBP 500 note, eventually you'd start looking for spiders. The fear is replaced by a positive feeling.

### The Golden Rule: No Flooding

This only works if you stay at a distance where your dog feels safe. If you throw a bucket of spiders on someone, the amount of money will not matter—they're just traumatised. That is flooding.

Always look at your dog's body language: tucked tail, barking, stiffness: you are already too close. Move away and try again another day.

Progress in reactivity training should look "boring", for example:

- Your dog seeing a trigger and looking at you instead of lunging
- A shorter recovery time after a "glitch."
- Your dog being able to sniff the grass while a bike/dog passes 10 meters away.

It feels slow because you are physically re-wiring your dog's brain.

Remember: You aren't "rewarding" the bad behavior. You are changing the bad emotion so the behaviour isn't necessary anymore.



# What to do when all of this is not enough on its own?

If you have allowed your dog to sniff, sleep enough, have enrichment and tried all the quiet zones, the treats, the distance, but your dog still spends their life in a state of panic, it is important to know one thing: **You have not failed. Your dog has not failed.**

Think of it like a person struggling with severe clinical anxiety. They can practice breathing exercises and sleep lots, but if their brain chemistry is constantly screaming "Danger!" those tools are almost certainly not enough to use. Sometimes, that person needs a doctor or a therapist to help balance their internal chemistry so the therapy actually has a chance to work.

For some dogs, the "fire alarm" in their head is simply too loud for them to hear you, no matter how many treats you have. In these cases, it's time to call in a professional, like a dog behaviourist. We don't just look at behaviour; we look at the "hardware" of the brain. We can help determine what extra support your dog needs to finally lower that baseline stress.



## “I am still stuck!”

Living with a reactive dog can feel incredibly isolating. You are doing the work, carrying the treats, and constantly scanning the horizon for dogs, motorbikes, people... whatever it may be that triggers your dog: it is exhausting for both you and your dog.

Sometimes, even when you understand the science, you just need a calm, experienced set of eyes to help you navigate the real world. This is where I can come in. Working with me is not about "quick fixes" or "corrections." It's about building a language between you and your dog so you can finally enjoy your walks again. Whether you're feeling stuck or just want a clear roadmap, I can help you lower that stress bucket—for both ends of the leash. There's no pressure to have it all figured out. You're already doing a great job by seeking to understand your dog's brain and heart.



*Thank you!*

Using modern, science-backed methods, I replace fear with trust, ensuring your dog feels safe and understood throughout the process.



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FREE (of charges and obligations) consultations are available, book via the website or simply send me a message