

3 COMMON MISTAKES MADE WHEN TRYING TO FIX LEASH REACTIVITY





ABOUT ME

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What is 'reactivity?'

reactive: readily responsive to a stimulus*

When we refer to reactivity, we are actually speaking to an over-reaction: the dog is responding to a stimulus in a way that we consider over the top, too much, excessive.

- lunging
- barking
- growling
- snarling
- snapping
- biting

Stimulus can be anything that the dog is able to perceive: person, dog, car, bike.

*Merriam Webster Dictionary definition



WHAT DOES REACTIVITY LOOK LIKE?



WHAT DOES REACTIVITY LOOK LIKE?



My journey with reactivity:



Meet Kaslo:

- Had no negative experiences with dogs as a puppy.
- Decent amount of exposure to novel dogs as a puppy.
- Presented with lunging, growling and snapping at dogs encountered on leash at 18-months of age. Generalized to lunging/growling at dogs within a 15-20 foot radius.

Working through Kaslo's reactivity I developed a passion for working with these dogs who are often misunderstood and mislabeled. I have been working primarily with reactive dogs for the past 3 years.

Owning a 'reactive' dog:

A roller coaster of emotions:

- frustrated
- embarrassed
- sad
- alone/left out
- anxious/fearful

My reactive dog initially took a big toll on my life, our world, and mental health. It took some time before I was able to stop and logically determine what my dog needed from me in order to be happy and successful, and to come to terms with what that picture looked like!





Reactive Rover Classes

- I developed an online reactive dog program so that I would be able to help more dogs and owners of reactive dogs.
- wanted to create a safe, introductory learning environment where owners can feel comfortable tackling their dog's reactivity without feeling at risk and exposed.

Private Consulting

- For clients who are struggling with multiple issues, not just reactivity, or who seek a more personalized training experience
- The vast majority of my training clients are dealing with reactivity in some form - this is not an uncommon behavior problem for dogs to display!

3 mistakes owners are making when trying to fix reactivity:

01

Attempting to re-socialize.

02

Working over-threshold.

03

Correcting unwanted behavior.



A photograph of two dogs on leashes standing on a cobblestone path. The dog on the left is white and fluffy, wearing a blue harness and a blue leash. The dog on the right is black and fluffy, wearing a black collar and a red leash. They are facing each other, with the white dog's paw near the black dog's face. A teal text box is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

MISTAKE #1: ATTEMPTING TO RE-SOCIALIZE

Oversaturating your dog with other dogs.

MISTAKE #1

Attempting to re-socialize

- owners often think the presentation of reactivity is a sign that their dog is 'under-socialized' and needs more dog exposure.
- dog's optimal socialization period is between 6-14 weeks of age, and usually we are noticing reactivity occur later in life than this.



Attempting to re-socialize

- most dogs are not reactive because of their lack of social skills.
- Reactive dogs are often: frustrated, excited, or trying to increase distance between themselves and the other dog (or whatever it is they are reacting towards.)
- If your dog is trying to gain space, "re-socializing" them is actually the opposite of what they are trying to accomplish with their behavior, and can result in *more frequent or intense reactivity.*





Why this is damaging to your training:

- Repeated, prolonged exposure to a trigger can result in flooding.
- *Flooding:...the individual is exposed directly to a maximum-intensity anxiety-producing situation or stimulus, either described or real, without any attempt made to lessen or avoid anxiety or fear during the exposure**
- can result in increased fearful and aggressive behaviors, or can result in a dog who 'shuts down.'
- Shut down dogs often misinterpreted as 'compliant' or 'calm,' when really this is the exact opposite.

*APA Dictionary of Psychology definition



**MISTAKE #2:
WORKING OVER-THRESHOLD**

MISTAKE #2

Training over-threshold

- Threshold = magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction to occur.
- Training in an environment that is too overwhelming/over-stimulating, too close to the trigger, for too long, or with a trigger who is too intense can cause your dog to go over-threshold.



Training over-threshold

- With any training we need to find a starting point - the point where our dog can be comfortable, successful, and able to learn
- where dog is 'under-threshold,' perceive the trigger and are not worried about it.
- Over time, you will find the distance your dog needs from the other dog will get smaller, and they will be confident working around a trigger at different intensity levels.





Why this is damaging to your training:

- Training 'over-threshold' is going to result in prolonged stress (flooding)
- When a dog experiences conflict their parasympathetic nervous system kicks on and they have three options: fight, flight, or freeze.
- dog may feel it has no other choice but to react (or avoid), thus giving it another opportunity to rehearse the unwanted behaviors
- not using it's 'logical brain' and therefore is not in a good place for learning to occur.



**MISTAKE #3:
CORRECTING UNWANTED BEHAVIOR**

MISTAKE #3

Correcting unwanted behavior(s)

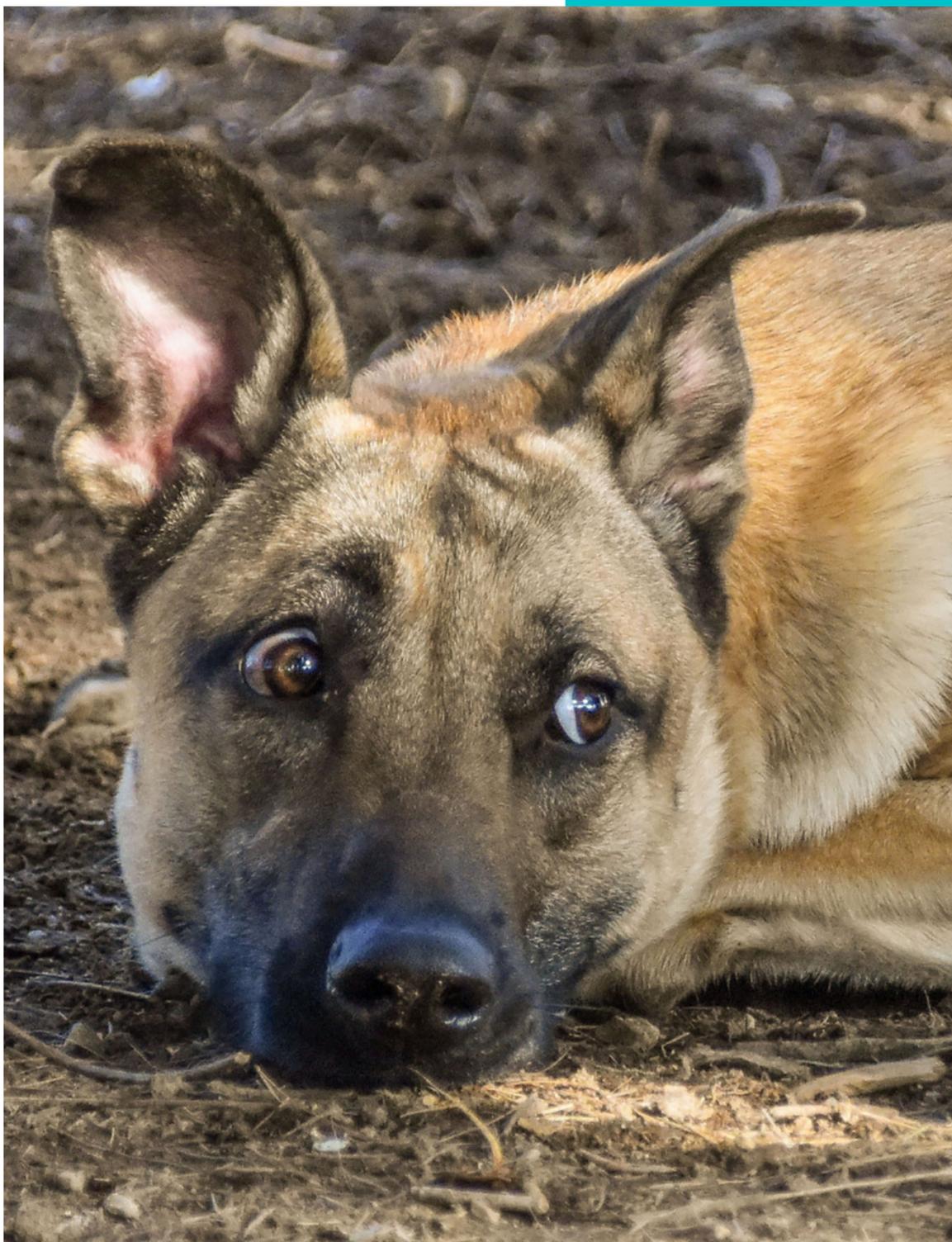
Correcting unwanted behaviors might look like: yelling, hitting, collar corrections/'pops', "No" etc. Punishment has been studied extensively and has a hefty fallout associated with it's use.



Correcting un-wanted behaviors

Imagine you are scared or upset by the presence of something in your environment. Then imagine someone slapped you for expressing your fears/insecurities. Does this make you feel better about the thing you were afraid of? Likely not.



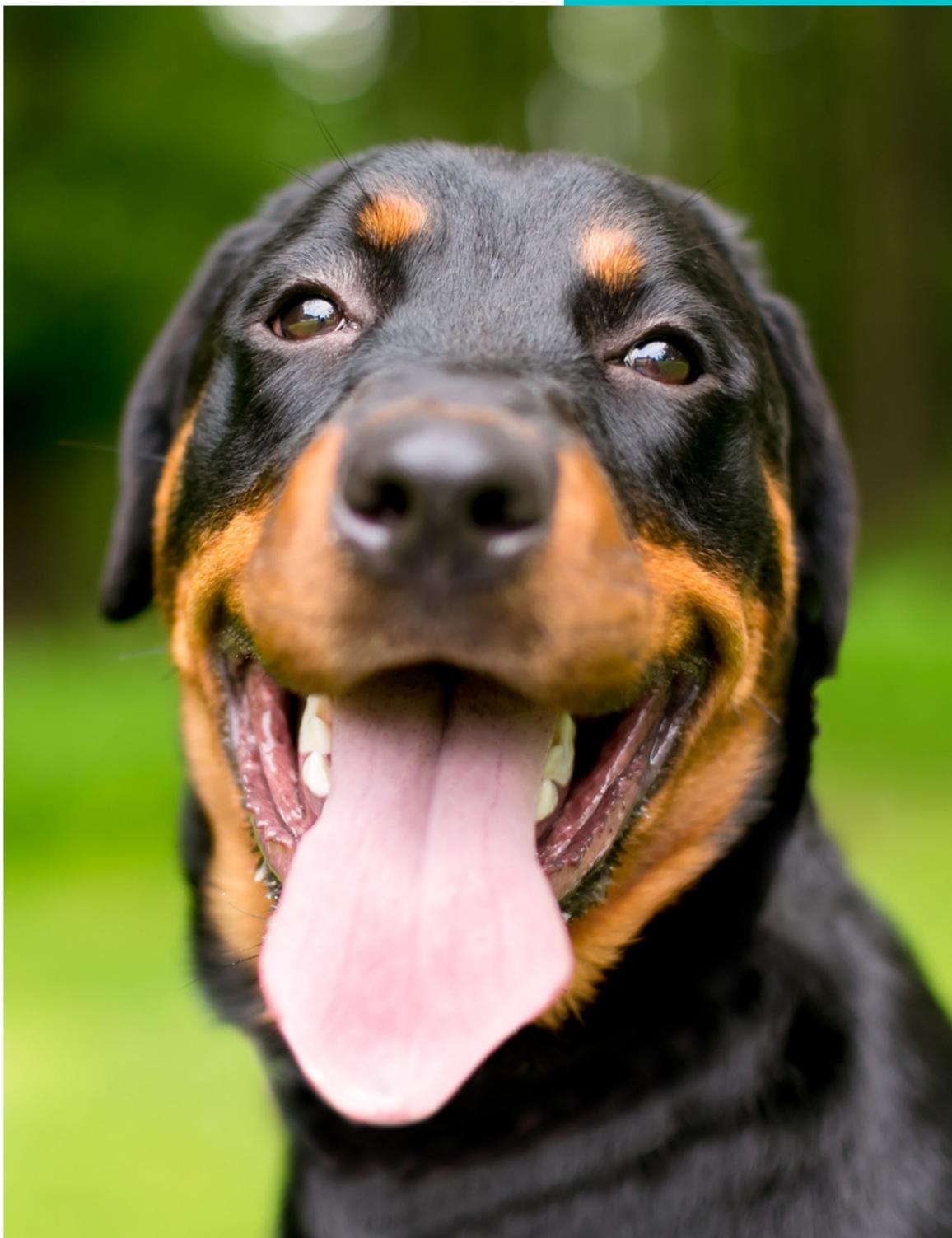


Why this is damaging to your training:

- Correcting your dog every time it reacts towards another dog can result in your dog associating the pain/fear of that correction with the dog

"Every time a dog shows up, my collar is popped and it hurts me. This is the dogs fault!"

- result in increased fear or aggression towards dogs, can suppress your dog's original 'warning signs' (growling, snarling).
- You're likely not helping the dog feel any better about that dog, rather the opposite.



Corrections don't teach the dog what to do.

- Corrections suppress behavior, but gives no information about what you want it to do in that situation in the future.
- You haven't given the dog any clue as to what it should be doing when it sees another dog, or how it should behave in order to avoid another correction.
- This is stressful for our dogs!

**ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE STRESS
OUT OF YOUR WALKS?**

**WE CAN
HELP!**



Reactive Dog Classes

- owner's of dogs who are struggling with on-leash reactivity, whether it be to other dogs, people, bikes, or cars.
- managing and preventing unwanted behaviors, to stop their occurrence
- teaching our dogs new behaviors to perform when they encounter their triggers.
- how to set their dogs up for success every step of the way.
- live and virtual classes - location is no boundary, safe and comfortable learning environments for your dog

What we'll cover:

Management

Stopping the rehearsal of the problematic behaviors is not only critical to our training success, but also imperative for your dog's mental health.

New Behaviors

Teaching your dog new, incompatible skills with their current reactivity will give them a new 'job' to perform when they encounter their triggers.

Adding triggers

So you've taught your dog new skills, now what? We work through how to gradually re-introduce your dog's triggers in a controlled manner that ensures you are both successful.

Support

Being a reactive dog owner is hard and lonely. Not only will you have ongoing support and coaching from your instructor, you will be welcomed into our amazing force-free community.



Sign up today and you'll get:

- 5 live, interactive virtual classes
- Video modules for each class
- PDF handouts of each training exercise covered
- Access to our private Facebook support group
- Ongoing instructor support/feedback during the 5 week program
- **ADDED BONUS:** "How Dogs Learn" webinar



Thank you for joining!



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