



# Reactive dogs that like others sometimes

Most dogs' reactivity is not completely homogeneous. They do not exhibit the same reactive response in every setting. How much (or if at all) they react depends on the type of trigger, who they are with, where they are at and other factors.

If you have a reactive dog that *sometimes* likes others and sometimes not, it is very tempting to allow your dog to do too much on the assumption that he will be fine. I have actually found that the most slip-ups and escalations happen with dogs that sometimes like others and sometimes not. For owners of dogs that are just really reactive, all the time, there is no question whether they can trust their dog or not - they just know that they always have to use management and keep situations safe.

But for dogs that sometimes are ok, owners tend to use less stringent management which quickly leads to accidents.

Whether or not you can trust your dog who sometimes likes other dogs or people will come down to the question of whether it's predictable or not.

Some reactive dogs are very predictable in their triggers. For example, they might love all family members but they are rather reactive towards any people outside the family. This sets us up for easy management: Obviously, this dog is allowed to spend time with and love on everyone at home, but needs to be kept on a leash and at a safe distance from people outside the house.

Or (a very common scenario) you have a dog who loves to go to daycare, but is really reactive towards dogs he meets during leashed walks. Again, the management of this is very straight-forward: This pup should definitely be allowed to go to daycare and play with all his friends there, but needs to work on counterconditioning in on-leash settings.



For some dogs though, it is not as predictable. Some dogs have triggers that seem to not make sense to us at all - they might only react to ½ of the dogs you come across, or they might really flip out when some people come to your house but not others.

These are the dogs that actually are the most likely to be involved in any escalations because owners are tempted to assume they will be fine in a given situation (and then the dog is definitely not fine and lashes out).

I would love to be able to give you some magic formula to determine what will trigger your dog and what won't, but there is none. If you have a dog with unpredictable responses to triggers, you will always have to err on the side of caution.

This means if your dog reacts to 20% of dogs he meets, you need to be prepared for him to have a reactive response with any dog you come across.

Or if your dog reacts to 1 out of 10 people who comes to your house, have management in place for every single visitor who comes over. Yes 9 out of 10 cases this will not be necessary, but for the 10th case you will really be glad you had it.

As mentioned in our audio segment on redirection, some dogs also can have positive and negative reactions towards the same other dog based on the situation they are in. So your dog can like another dog half of the time and be reactive the other half - based on the setup.

Going back to our daycare example - maybe your dog plays really well with a certain dog at daycare, but when encountering this dog on a leash he might flip out because of strong underlying leash reactivity.

Again, you do not want to assume that your dog will be fine. These are the setups that are the most dangerous because we trust our dogs too much. If your dog's responses to triggers seem to vary and are predictable, you always have to assume he is going to react.

To wrap this up, I have an interesting story for you about Brodie which shows that even when you have known a dog for a while you cannot assume you absolutely know all of their triggers.



As you know, Brodie was very reactive towards other dogs, but he actually also had quite some issues with people. And it took me a while to gain his trust. I was watching him one time while his owners were on a trip. Every day, we would play and do some tricks and training, and one day I decided I was going to teach him the trick of jumping over my arm. I have taught that trick many times, to all of my dogs, in my tricks classes ... I really didn't expect any kind of difficulty.

So I sat down and extended one arm to the wall and tossed a treat over it (like I had done many many times before), and Brodie jumped over it and ate the treat and then he FLIPPED OUT. At first I thought that he had seen something through the window or heard something I couldn't hear. So I helped him calm down with some scattered treats and we tried again. Tossed a treat over my arm, he jumped and ate the treat and once more he FLIPPED OUT.

At this point I knew this had nothing to do with any kind of external trigger and only with the current setup. So I very carefully once more turned around and extended my arm ... and he had another reactive response.

For whatever reason, being behind a sitting person who had their arm out to the side was an intense trigger for him. I had no idea about this before that encounter, and I definitely had never known this to be a trigger for any dog before. But, every day you learn something new working with dogs.

I would not expect a dog who loves all people in general to suddenly show you a hidden trigger like this, but for Brodie, since he had really a bunch of different issues, it made sense that there were triggers we just had not uncovered yet. Very specific, situation-based triggers.

So, if you have a dog who seems to be unpredictable in what triggers him when and where - always err on the side of caution. It will keep your dog and everyone around safe, and it will help you make the fastest progress by preventing your dog from crossing his threshold.