



Taking care of yourself

If you are listening to this and working through our course, I know that you are a very committed dog owner who really wants to see their dog improve and work through reactivity.

And a trap that very committed people with big goals can fall into is that they do not take enough care of themselves in the process.

It is really important to not see the training process only as a time in your dog's life that you "want to get over with". Do not stress yourself to a point where the light at the end of the tunnel is a month or two months away when finally your dog gets better.

I completely understand how stressful and frustrating it is to own a reactive dog. But it's really important to take care of yourself, find joy elsewhere (not just in a well-behaved dog) and to just value the present moment.

Of course, you should have training goals - they are what keeps you committed and working on reactivity. But please do not start to define yourself mostly through the training. If your general mood, your attitude and your happiness depend on how your dog behaved in his last training sessions - it is really time to take care of yourself.

Come up with a list of things you enjoy doing that have nothing to do with your dog's issues. Maybe going on a bike ride or reading a good book or going to the movies or sewing or fishing or ... whatever. The more emotionally involved you are in the training process, the more important it is to also find happiness in things that have nothing to do with your dog's problem behaviors.

Sometimes I get messages from owners who are so desperate with their reactive dogs. I am thinking of one in particular who told me that when she comes home from work, she spends essentially her entire afternoon and evening researching reactivity, watching training videos, reading books on reactivity and training counterconditioning with her dog. I can only imagine the stress she was under and the pressure she felt. The first homework I gave her was that she was only allowed to do a maximum of 30 minutes of reactivity-related activities each day. This included reading, watching videos, researching and training her own dog around triggers. Just half an hour in total.

And the rest of the time, she had to do something fun.



Now, the fun thing can definitely be something purely enjoyable with your dog. If you enjoy doing agility or teaching tricks to your dog or going hiking - perfect. But you need to stop letting your dog's problem behavior define your own wellbeing.

Of course, your dog obviously has an issue with being reactive - that's why you are in our class. And I want you to work on that. But do not go overboard. You watch a lesson, you train your dog for 5 or 10 minutes and then you move on with your life. Do not make reactivity an obsession or something that stresses you out even when you're not with your dog.

Do something fun for yourself, every day. Never think that you don't "deserve" to do something good for yourself because you have not yet trained or your last session went poorly ... you definitely deserve to take care of yourself every single day. That is not contingent on how your dog behaves.

And if YOU are happier and less stressed, you WILL be a better trainer as well.

So - as you are listening to this, ask yourself when the last time was that you had fun or did something just for yourself that you really enjoyed. If this did not yet happen today or at the very least yesterday, I want you to do something for yourself before you go and train your dog or study more training material.

Does not need to be a big deal - it could be just having a cup of coffee and reading the paper for 20 minutes before you go and train.

I guarantee that if you are in a good mood, you will make faster progress in training your dog and you and your dog will have a better time.