



## Your dog is NOT his reactivity

When we are working with a reactive dog, it is easy to fall into the trap of mostly viewing our dog through the lens of this behavioral issue. Our dog is “the reactive one”. When we think or talk about our dog, we mostly focus on the progress (or lack of) in counterconditioning training.

I really want to encourage you to not forget to view your dog as the complex being he or she is. While reactivity can seem like it’s at times dominating the relationship you have with your dog, it does not have to be that way.

I already talked a lot about finding the balance of being committed to training but not becoming absorbed by or obsessed with it. This is a fine line to walk, and most owners will find themselves going to either extreme every once in a while. We either do not train enough or slack off on consistency and management, or we become so absorbed in the training that we invest not only time, but way too much nerves and emotions into it.

A good way to prevent being “sucked in” by the black hole that owning a reactive dog can be is to actively make space for the other sides of your dog.

Your dog is NOT just a reactive dog. Your dog is also a food-crazy dog or a dog that loves to play ball or one who enjoys massages or trick training. Every dog has so many different levels to their personality - just like people! Really make an effort to see and appreciate all of it.

Building little routines throughout the day can work wonders for this. Maybe you keep treats in a special jar in your kitchen. Randomly call out “treat time!”, race your dog to the jar and hand him a cookie. Soon his eyes will light up when you call out “treat time” and he will try to beat you to the kitchen.

This just takes just 30 seconds but will create a predictable, fun routine for you and your pup.

Maybe your dog also enjoys trick training or our Indoor Games or Slow Down exercises. Only 5 minutes of working on this with him every day will create a space where your dog is not “the reactive one”. He can be the smart one, the problem solver, the trick champion ... because he is so much more than just “a reactive dog”.



If you watch TV at night, give your dog a little massage during it. Again, just 5 minutes are plenty of time. The value lies in the repetition and the routine it creates. How long each session is really does not matter much. In fact, just massaging your dog for 2 minutes every day will be much more beneficial than massaging him once a month for an hour.

The idea behind this is that repeating actions and emotions creates pathways in our brain. The reactivity of your dog has already created a bunch of unpleasant pathways in your mind. You probably dread certain triggering situations and might even have a negative CER for just hearing the term reactivity! Many owners of reactive dogs have come to me and told me they actually don't even like their reactive dog that much anymore, because all they can think about when it comes to their pup is reactivity.

This is why we want to actively create settings in which we can form positive associations for ourselves. You see - the same training we use for our dogs we also need to apply to us.

You need to take care to basically train your brain to not just see a reactive dog. And the more reactive your dog is, and the worse you feel about it, the more care you should take to create these situations in which you can see him in a positive light.

Of course, this also applies to YOURSELF as well.

Your dog is NOT his reactivity, and you are not just the owner of a reactive dog. You are also the owner of a silly dog, a dog that loves to bite the garden hose, a dog that has a funny haircut or a dog that loves to steal cat food.

AND you are so much more beyond a dog owner in general! You are a spouse, a parent, a friend ... you should never define yourself through dog training.

I know that it is difficult to not identify with the training this much. You are putting a lot of effort into it, and we tend to see the outcomes of our effort as a direct reflection of ourselves. But that's really not fair to yourself.

Even with the best effort, you can have really bad training sessions. A loose dog can run up to yours and completely ruin a session. Or maybe you just didn't evaluate the trigger intensities well and your dog crossed his threshold multiple times.

It is so important in these situations that you do NOT turn the training outcome into your general opinion of your dog or yourself.



You can have really bad training sessions and STILL feel good about yourself and your dog - IF you take care to create the positive routines I described.

I know it's so easy to go deep down the rabbit hole of feeling sorry for and bad about ourselves and our reactive dogs. But we also have the ability to not do this already inside us. We CAN acknowledge our dog as yes, a dog that is reactive - but also one that has so many other layers to his personality.

And if you do this, not only will it give you a deeper appreciation of your dog - but it will also make you happier as well.