

Dropping The Head To Defuse Reactive Behavior

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When on leash, you can manually change the dog's head and body position to preempt that moment when your dog's eyes and body "lock" onto an approaching dog. You will change your dog's high head carriage by sliding your hand down the leash getting under the dog's chin, lowering the dog's head with your hand under the chin and making a U-turn while continuing to lead the dog by his head. Your goal is model a different body position and to turn his attention away from the stimulus dog.

How to do the drop & turn:

When you see your dog's body stiffen because he sees an approaching dog, mark your dog's reaction with the word marker of "OOOPS", then slip your left hand down the leash to where it clips to the collar. (works best with Gentle Leader/ or head collar). Your leash hand will be grasping the collar or leash buckle just under the dog's chin. Gently guide the dog's head DOWN - think of dipping his head. Simultaneously, as you dip his head make a U turn - keeping the dog as the pivot point of the turn. You are always on the outside of the U-turn and your dog is always on the inside. You should remain between your dog and the oncoming stranger dog. When you finish the U-turn, and have walked a few steps back the way you came, you can then ask your dog to sit and give you eye contact, then reward. If your dog is still stimulated by the stranger dog, don't stop but instead continue to walk away to a distance where your dog can be calmer before asking for the sit. In other words, don't stop till you are sure your dog can hear you ask for the sit and then take and enjoy the reward. Sometimes after completing the U-turn start you start running using an encouraging playful voice, which will both motivate and distract your dog from what has made him reactive. When you stop, ask for the sit, and then treat.

Just make sure the dog you are turning away from is also on leash.

Because your dog is reactive, you have to help him put his head in a more approachable, "calming signal" position - head up is aggressive, head down is calming (non-threatening). If you physically help your dog repeat this response to another dog enough times, your dog may start to offer the head down behavior in anticipation when it sees another dog. If it is rewarded enough, then he may begin to do it automatically.

Practice this in safe situations with out any other dogs around to start rehearse this exercise walking toward the dog food bowl or a much want toy or family member then eventually where the oncoming dog is being controlled and non reactive. Your dog might become a bit depressed at first but as soon as it realizes that it can get rewarded for offering the behavior it will enjoy the exercise.