



## INTRODUCTION

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**OK.** So your dog lunges at people and other dogs when he's on the leash. He goes ballistic when people come to the door, snarling and throwing saliva everywhere. The smallest sound is enough to get him going for hours...well, OK, 10 minutes. But it still drives you crazy! Or he alternatively hides and barks at visitors to your home. You can't take him anywhere because he makes such a scene. People walk the other way when they see you and Rover coming. They don't want to be anywhere near that frothy animal! And heaven forbid someone should turn the corner quickly on your walk and suddenly appear...he might get nipped or bitten. This is not what dog ownership is supposed to be! **HELP!!!!!**

I can do that for you! Actually, *with* you...

## STRESS PUPPY

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So...how DO we help our dog?

Hold on tight...we'll get to that...but first we need to understand a little bit about physiological responses to stimuli in the world around us. That goes for both humans and canines.

Let's say that you are driving and have a near-accident. Whew! That was close! But now your adrenaline is pumping through your system. You feel shaky, jumpy, and perhaps a little queasy. In about 20 minutes that icky feeling will go away, but in its place your body will produce **glucocorticoids** (we'll call them **stress hormones**) that will remain in your body for 2-7 days. The main purpose of those stress hormones is to put the proverbial "eyes in the back of your head", so you can see that next near-miss coming. As each day goes by, and it seems that you are farther from the possibility of that 'Bad Thing' happening again (this is pure survival instinct), those hormones dissipate.

But two days after that first near-accident, you actually see an accident happen some distance away. BAM! There goes that adrenaline again...and, more stress hormones are produced. And another 2-7 days on top of the first bunch of days. Now you're starting to jump at the sound of a backfiring car, or the rumble of a truck on a distant highway. You seem to be jumpier than normal. Welcome to the world of stress hormones! But after about 5 days more, you are feeling much better...until a bird flies into your bay window. BAM! More adrenaline, and more stress hormones. Now you are heading toward chronic stress. Every little thing sets you off. You feel like you are constantly on alert. It is off-putting and exhausting. <sup>2</sup>

This is life for some of our dogs. They can't seem to find a calm moment. Some of this is unfortunate circumstance. Some of it is genetics. Some of it is reinforcement history. Some of it is nutrition

a fixation with water towers and those balls on high-tension wires, and her barking is quite obsessive in these cases. She barks at little else. My Belgian sheepdog barks only at other dogs while she is in the car.



*Ruff lays calmly in his crate. When the hatch is closed, he is completely covered and can't see out the windows. It also provides him with a safety measure in the case of a short stop or accident.*

While you are crating and covering your dog in the car, you are teaching him to be quiet while riding. You are also helping to diminish those glucocorticoids. But we can enhance the process if we can classically condition the concept of being quiet in the car by feeding treats while riding in the car. This can be difficult to impossible to downright dangerous for some circumstances, and you may need to move the crate around or lift part of the cover to access the crate, or even have someone ride with you at first. This activity is so important, however, that I have had some students make next to no progress with their dogs for weeks and months until they finally broke down and tried the covered crate in the car. At that point, the dogs' ability to learn skyrocketed.

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to say, “Happy” and feel grumpy or angry!! It doesn’t work, does it? Part of changing your dog’s name involves a start on your part to feel positive emotion for a dog who may have had you frustrated, angry, embarrassed, and/or upset for a long time. It’s time to change that habit and to get out of that rut.

The goal of Stuff-a-Dog is not just for you to get your dog’s attention, but also to classically condition your dog to come to you when he hears his name. You really want this response to be like a knee-jerk response. However, in order to achieve this goal, you need to start doing your Stuff-a-Dog in the house, and then do it in the car, on your walks, and everywhere you go. Do just a little bit here and there, until it’s really pervasive in your dog’s life. Once you’ve reached your 5000-repetition criterion, you can do fewer repetitions, but you do still want to always do some.

## YOU’LL HAVE ‘EM EATING FROM YOUR HAND

There is no rule which states that a domesticated dog must eat from a bowl. It’s funny how we become so embroiled in our own expectations of life.

The suggestion that I feed my dog out of my hand and not out of a food bowl was met with much resistance. Once I had time to think about it, I agreed to do so, and I ended up doing just that, twice a day, for nearly a year. The manner in which I did this varied. Sometimes I did a bunch of Stuff-a-Dog, using several pieces of kibble at a time, and sometimes I hand-fed her while I was doing other training. Once in a while I was in too much of a rush and I fed her out of her bowl, or part of her meal out of a bowl, or even off the floor. A few times I broadcast her food in the backyard and let her forage for it. It gave her something to do and helped her burn off some extra energy. Whatever you decide to do, try to be as open-minded as possible when it comes to training activities for your reactive dog.

The reason for hand feeding is that you want your dog to learn that all good things come from you. Every treat, every meal, access to outside and to the car, access to toys and walks, petting and scratching come from you. All good things come from you. This is another



*In this series of photos, you can see that I see a person and dog approaching and move Acacia off the path so that she can pay attention to me and get good things from me as the dog passes. She has learned, through repetition, that a dog in the vicinity means treats. What a good thing!*

## IN A CLASS BY ITSELF

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There are so many reactive dogs in this world. Why is that? I believe it is because we have so many more people, so much more breeding of dogs and therefore more stretching of genetic material, more crowding and stimuli in general, more pollution and poorer ingredients in dog foods. Dog laws in most communities do not encourage concepts such as early socialization and the acceptance of dogs in the general population.

Do you disagree with this statement? Think about it. In the USA, dogs are usually not allowed in restaurants, schools, grocery stores and shops in general. Many parks don't allow dogs. No dogs are permitted in any of our fine National Parks except for the parking areas. Leash laws exist in nearly every community, and most of us with dogs either have or want fencing in order to easily contain our dogs when they need to go out and relieve themselves. Many of us wouldn't be caught walking our dogs. And then there's the electric fencing. Many owners who install this equipment place it in their front yards, right down to the sidewalk! Their dogs have lots of opportunity to see things, but can't get to any of them. What a tease! Worse yet, people and dogs on the outside of the fence can tease them. They can see it but can't get to it. How, then, do they get the socialization necessary for proper adjustment to their world? Veterinarians often tell their clients to avoid taking their puppy anywhere until they have completed their entire set of vaccinations. That's at age 16 weeks...the end of the prime socialization period!

Some of the worst cases of canine reactivity that I've seen have been dogs who live in apartment complexes. These dogs are subjected to a constant array of stimuli. All day long, they hear people coming and going, walking around upstairs, slamming doors, people talking or shouting. They hear and smell other dogs, and cats as well. They