

Scaredy Dog! Understanding and Rehabilitating Your Reactive Dog

by Ali Brown

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Having to turn off the chiming clock every 15 minutes at my sister's house to keep Sweetie (aka Sweetie Goddammit!) from barking, and also watching Beamer (aka CH Copper Creek's Amber Sunbeam) shudder in terror over flying fall leaves, I figured it was time to revisit this book, since I seem to be owned by two reactive dogs. The introduction describes this book as appropriate for anyone's dog who lunges at people; barks or shrinks at every sound, movement or visitor; gets hysterical over changes in the environment; hogs the sofa; etc.

After a discussion of pack behavior and the ways in which dogs differ from us (220 million scent receptors to humans' paltry 5 million, for example), the author goes over training basics. These include extinction (how to get the dog to stop undesired behavior by rewarding only alternative, desired behavior), positive reinforcement, and the problems with using positive and negative punishment (i.e. presenting anything aversive to the dog vs. removing something good after undesired behavior) without creating anxiety, aggression or learned helplessness in the dog.

Besides suggesting adequate exercise and a vet and food check (because behavioral issues are frequently related to physical health or allergies), there is a discussion of positive vs. negative reinforcers, finger and hand targeting, and the

proper use of a clicker to condition the dog to do what you want. There is a good discussion of calming signals and calming touches for reading or soothing when the dog is stressed. It also describes how to diagnose your own body language as the dog sees it. The use of equipment such as crates, leashes, and long training lines is examined. Then the author goes through ways to recondition a dog using these methods in common situations such as confronting another dog, watching and barking at someone approaching the car, home visits by other people, etc. All of these situations are well illustrated with photos of the author's own dog.

Best of all, the author does not offer false promises, she makes clear that reactive dogs are that way for life, but that they can be trained and managed with consistent attention. I am inspired to try again, thanks to this book.

