

BIG FEELINGS

on a short leash

Understanding and Addressing Leash Reactivity in Dogs

a Calmer Together Canines Guide

Leash reactivity is incredibly common - and it doesn't mean your dog is aggressive or "bad". It usually means they're having big feelings on a short leash.

- **Leash reactivity is about *feelings*, not behavior.**

Fear, overwhelm, and excitement are common feelings behind leash reactivity.

- **The Leash makes emotions LOUDER**

When dogs can't create space or move naturally, their feelings have nowhere to go - so they bark, lunge, or freeze.

Step 1: Identify Triggers



- What sets your dog off?
- Look for patterns

Step 2: Manage Environment



- Keep your dog under threshold - more space, fewer triggers
- Dogs can't learn if their emotions are too big

Step 3: Teach Foundational Skills

Pattern games (choice-based calming):

- Check-in = treat
- 1-2-3 Game: Predictable steps reduce anxiety

- Focus cues: Reward the moment your dog chooses *you* instead of the trigger



- Center: Safe space between your legs
- Touch: Redirects movement and brain

Step 4: Desensitization & Counterconditioning



- Under threshold: Trigger = treat
- Slowly decrease distance over multiple sessions
- Keep sessions short and end on success

Step 5: Supportive Equipment



- 2-point leash
- Front-clip harness
- 6-10 ft leash
- Treat pouch

Step 6: Consistency Builds Confidence



- Reactivity doesn't improve overnight
- Progress isn't linear
- Short, frequent sessions > long, stressful ones