

The 3 Pillars of Preventing & Treating Reactivity

A Guide from Riley Kennel & Farm



Introduction: Understanding Reactivity

Is your dog a perfect angel at home, but a lunging, barking mess on walks? Do they overreact to other dogs, people, or even squirrels? This is **reactivity**, and it's one of the most stressful behaviors for dog owners to manage.

Reactivity is not aggression. It's an **overreaction** to normal stimuli. It stems from anxiety, fear, frustration, or over-excitement. The good news is that it's treatable.

At Riley Kennel & Farm, we believe in a leadership-based approach. It's not about force or punishment; it's about clear communication, building your dog's confidence, and establishing yourself as a calm, consistent leader they can trust.

This guide will introduce you to the three foundational pillars we use to prevent and treat reactivity. By mastering these concepts, you can begin to transform your relationship with your dog and enjoy peaceful walks again.

Pillar 1: Excitement Abatement

The Problem: Many reactive behaviors are fueled by a simple, yet powerful, force: uncontrolled excitement. A dog that is constantly in a high state of arousal is a dog that is more likely to make poor decisions. They can't think clearly when their brain is flooded with adrenaline.

The Goal: Teach your dog to exist in a calm state of mind, even when exciting things are happening.

How to Practice Excitement Abatement:

1. **The Place Command:** This is your most powerful tool. Teach your dog to go to a specific spot (a dog bed, a mat) and stay there until released. Start with short durations and gradually increase the time. Practice this during moments of household activity, like when you're cooking dinner or when guests arrive. The dog learns to observe excitement without participating in it.
2. **Thresholds:** Teach your dog to wait at doorways (front door, car door, crate door). Before going through any threshold, ask for a calm sit. They only get to proceed when they are calm and focused on you, not on what's on the other side. This teaches impulse control at a critical moment.
3. **Calm Greetings:** When you come home, ignore your dog for the first few minutes. Wait for them to calm down before offering calm, quiet affection. This prevents the daily ritual of your arrival becoming a peak of frantic excitement.

***Key Takeaway:** A calm dog is a thinking dog. By lowering your dog's overall level of excitement, you create a foundation for better decision-making in the face of triggers.*

Pillar 2: Boundaries

The Problem: In many homes, the dog runs the show. They have free access to everything, they demand attention whenever they want it, and there are no clear rules. This lack of structure creates anxiety for many dogs. They feel like they have to be in charge, which is a stressful job they are not equipped for.

The Goal: Create a clear, consistent set of rules that your dog can understand. This structure reduces their anxiety because they know what to expect and what their role is.

How to Establish Boundaries:

1. **No Free Roaming:** Your dog should not have unsupervised access to the entire house. Use crates, tethers, or baby gates to manage their space. This is not a punishment; it's a way to prevent them from practicing unwanted behaviors (like window barking) and to help them learn to relax.
2. **Permission-Based Affection:** You decide when petting and affection happen. If your dog nudges you for attention, gently guide them away. A few minutes later, call them to you for affection. This small shift teaches them that you control the resources, which reinforces your leadership.
3. **Structured Feeding:** Your dog should work for their food. This can be as simple as asking for a sit-stay before you put the bowl down. They eat when you say it's okay to eat. This reinforces the concept that all good things come from you, the leader.

Key Takeaway: Boundaries create a predictable world for your dog. This predictability reduces their anxiety and their perceived need to control their environment, which is a major driver of reactivity.

Pillar 3: The Ability to Follow

The Problem: A reactive dog is a dog that is making its own decisions, and those decisions are based on fear and anxiety. They are leading the walk, scanning for threats, and deciding how to react. You are just holding the other end of the leash.

The Goal: Teach your dog to willingly follow your lead. They need to learn that you are in charge of navigating the world and that they can relax and trust your judgment.

How to Build the Ability to Follow:

1. **Structured Walk:** The walk is not for sniffing and exploring; it's for following. Use a structured heel position (your dog's head is even with your leg). This is not a lifelong command, but a tool to teach focus. Use a slip lead or prong collar (when fitted and used correctly) to provide clear communication. The walk should be a mental workout, not just a physical one.

2. **Engagement is Key:** Your dog should be more interested in you than in the environment. During your walk, practice random turns, stops, and changes of pace. Reward your dog with praise when they stay focused on you. If they get distracted, use a quick leash pop to redirect their attention back to you.
3. **Advocate for Your Dog:** It is your job to protect your dog from situations they can't handle. If you see another dog approaching, create space. Cross the street, turn around, or place yourself between your dog and the trigger. When your dog sees that you are proactively handling the situation, they will learn that they don't have to. Their trust in your leadership will grow.

***Key Takeaway:** The walk is a conversation. By teaching your dog to follow your lead and trust your decisions, you remove the burden of responsibility from their shoulders, allowing them to be a calm, happy follower.*

Your Next Step

These three pillars are the foundation of the **Reactivity Reset** program at Riley Kennel & Farm. While this guide provides a starting point, true transformation comes from hands-on coaching and consistent application.

If you're tired of stressful walks and ready to build a better relationship with your dog, we can help.

Call us today for a free consultation. We'll discuss your dog's specific issues and create a plan for lasting success.

 (765) 848-0956

Riley Kennel & Farm *Home of the Reactivity Reset*