

Take the Drag Out of Your Walk

Q My dog does great with other dogs at daycare and off leash at the dog park, but she is very leash aggressive while out for neighborhood walks. What can I do?

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

WHEN I SEE A GROUP OF DOGS AT A DAYCARE facility, or in a dog park, I notice dogs that are overwhelmed, tired, want to be left alone or need a private place to rest. Dogs that practice running up to every dog they see are likely to become aggressive when they are restricted by a leash. If your dog is allowed to play rough all day, and then is restrained by a leash, the more you try to hold them back, the more aggressive they become.

Dogs need to spend time supervised by their humans and the human should be the role model, not other dogs at a daycare. Your dog must be taught to walk on a slack leash using positive, reward-based tactics. Once your dog knows how to walk on a leash, without distractions, then it's time to be proactive by spotting the approaching dog before your dog has a chance to react. A good starting threshold is when your dog sees another dog, but it's far enough away that you can easily get your dog's attention back on you, deliver a reward so they make a positive association with an oncoming dog.

If your dog is fearful and goes nuts toward another mutt on a walk, do nothing, don't react until they stop. Then the second they stop—even the smallest head turn or yawn, or when the ears go from pinned back to erect or tucked into a neutral middle position; the second you see your dog display one of these appeasement behaviors is the second you mark it with a click or a "good dog," turn and go for a walk the other way, deliver a treat and praise.

Your dog will soon learn to ignore other dogs and be more interested in you. 🐾



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ALAS, MANY OTHERWISE WELL-MANNERED dogs do transform into barking, lunging and snarling beasts in certain leashed situations.

It's important to put yourself in the mind—and position—of your dog during these encounters. For starters, your dog is leashed, tethered to you with no opportunity to escape. It's the classic fight-or-flight time and the flight option has been removed. Some timid dogs will become master actors, pretending to be suddenly full of bravado in an attempt to keep the approaching dog at bay. Dominant-minded dogs have little patience for dogs who show no canine etiquette by rushing up to them face-to-face to greet.

Secondly, it is vital to acknowledge that dogs are very attuned into our emotions. When we tighten our grip on the leash or pull our dog closer to us in the misguided effort to avert a barking-lunging display, our dog interprets our action as the need to become vigilant and protective of his most important person on the planet—you. Many will immediately shut their mouths, stare, shift their weight to their front paws as they ready themselves for a canine confrontation.

I can certainly relate to this seemingly Jekyll-Hyde display as my dog, Chipper, a Husky-Golden Retriever mix, is relaxed when off leash and mingling with other dogs in dog parks or other safe enclosed places. But her body tenses and her hackles rise during forced, confining dog-to-dog introductions when on a leash.

My advice: Know your dog and set him up for success. Inhale and exhale a deep breath. Remind yourself not to tightly grip the leash as a person approaches with her dog. Calmly and quickly position your body between your dog and the approaching dog to block them and prevent eye-to-eye stares. Politely but firmly explain to the other person that your dog prefers his introductions off leash and give a polite greeting as you and your dog keep moving past. Be sure to keep your dog on your side farthest away from the other dog. 🐾

