



Dog Reactivity Training: Emergency U-Turns

Dogs who bark, lunge, pull towards, and growl at other dogs on leash can be challenging to walk. But with a few tools in your toolbox (along with some management strategies) you can help walks go from stressful to stress free!

See our *Canine Reactive Behavior* handout and *Dog Reactivity Basics webinar* for management strategies (and video examples!) that will set you and your dog up for success.

We've all been there. You are walking along, your head on a swivel, constantly making sure the coast is clear and your dog is far enough away from triggers to feel comfortable. Suddenly, someone walking a small, excited dog pops out from behind a car. They're way too close, and you know your dog is about to lose their mind. ACK! If you and your dog have already practiced for this situation, it doesn't have to turn into an incident. Enter:

The Emergency U-Turn

Our goal is to train your dog to be waiting for the *cue to turn and happily move quickly away with you, regardless of what is happening around them.*

The steps

- Pick a word or sound that you will *consistently use as the cue for this behavior*. Examples might be “turn,” “let’s go!” or even “RUN!” You can also choose a sound, like a whistle or a squeaker.
- Make sure you have some VERY high value treats on hand (like lunch meat, hot dog, cheese, a favorite toy, or whatever your dog loves best).
- Start walking with your dog on leash, in a neutral, controlled environment like inside your home, or in a yard.
- As you are walking with your dog, loudly and enthusiastically say your cue, ex. “TURN!” Then, using your treat hand, lure your dog around you in a tight U-turn with your dog to the outside, and begin moving quickly *in the opposite direction* from where you were initially headed.
 - IMPORTANT! As your dog follows, **encourage them along with happy excited voice and posture**—we’re having fun, make it a party! Shy dogs might be intimidated by too much excitement, so choose whatever you think will make your dog the most enthusiastic to follow you. Don’t be afraid to get silly!

For more information or to request behavior assistance, visit eastbayspca.org/behavior.

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- MARK the moment they catch up to you (such as with a clicker or consistent verbal marker like “yes!”), and then stop to deliver your treats! We want the dog to know they won’t get the treat until they “catch” you.
- If your dog is consistently turning with you, you may begin to fade the food lure out of the picture and simply run together for a short distance before marking and treating.

The goal is that when your dog hears this cue, their muscle memory of “this is the fun running game!” means that they are already turning away to run with you before they have time to react to the trigger. With practice, this game can be an amazing tool to help make distance easily while out on walks!

Some tips to set you up for success as you train:

- **Train at home first. A LOT!** The time to learn is not when you’re already in hot water. *You want your dog to be really good at this in a home, yard, or other controlled environment before taking it on the road!* Practice this in safe, easy environments to develop the muscle memory needed for you and your dog to perform the behavior with little to no thought. And employ the management strategies in our Reactivity handout in the meantime!
- **Make this a FUN game for your dog!** If they enjoy the game, and they begin to play it around their “triggers,” it can help to change the conditioned emotional response to seeing the triggers themselves.
- **Make sure you practice the U-Turns under LOTS of contexts** once your dog knows the game, and that it doesn’t ONLY happen when the trigger is present. You want to build up a strong history of positive experiences with the U-Turn game, so that it has the impact you want when you are in a sticky situation.