



Three Common Mistakes Keeping Your Dog Reactive

And What to Do Instead

Written with love for you and your dog by
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Welcome!
I'm so glad you're here.

If your dog barks, lunges, or shuts down on walks...

You're not a "bad owner" or dealing with a "bad dog." Reactivity is often rooted in overwhelm, stress, or unclear communication rather than disobedience.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning owners accidentally make reactivity worse without realizing it.

Here are three of the most common mistakes I see, and what will actually help you and your dog succeed.



My dog Brody, who sent me head-first into the world of training and behavior.

If you're reading this, you know what it's like when your dog pulls, lunges, barks, or has huge reactions to everyday triggers. It's scary, frustrating, and even embarrassing. We can help.

Mistake #1: Trying to “correct” the behavior in the moment

When your dog reacts, it’s tempting to:

- try to interrupt or punish them
- yank them away quickly
- try to stop the behavior in a way your dog doesn’t understand

But by the time your dog is reacting, their nervous system is already overwhelmed and you’re just doing damage control. By this point, they’re unable to learn new skills but are *rehearsing unwanted behavior*.

What to do instead:

Focus on *proactivity and awareness*, not just reaction.

Start noticing:

- how close triggers are when your dog reacts
- early signs of tension (stiff body, staring, closed mouth)

Your goal is to intervene *before* the reaction, not during it.

PRO TIP:

Make a list of your dog’s triggers (other dogs, people, squirrels, birds). Strategically work through each of these triggers, managing exposure until your dog has the skills to handle organic exposure.

Mistake #2: Doing too much, too fast

Many owners try to:

- walk in busy areas
- “socialize” more
- expose their dog to lots of triggers

hoping they’ll “get used to it.” For reactive dogs, this often leads to *more stress*, not less (for both you and your dog).

What to do instead:

Think in terms of thresholds and regulation.

A reactive dog needs:

- space
- slower exposure
- time to process

Flooding your dog with exposure to triggers hinders progress and damages their trust in you. Changing big, emotional reactions happens through *safe, controlled experiences*.

PRO TIP:

When working through reactivity, being aware of distance and intensity of triggers is crucial. Before expecting your dog to be calm when 10 feet from a trigger, master it at 100 feet away, then 50 feet, and so on.

Mistake #3: Focusing on obedience instead of communication

Teaching commands like “sit” or “heel” can be helpful...

But they’re only a small piece of the puzzle and don’t address *why* your dog is reacting.

If your dog is anxious, overstimulated, or unsure, obedience alone won’t change their emotional state.

What to do instead:

Shift your focus to:

- understanding your dog’s emotional state
- building engagement and trust
- creating clarity in your communication
- fulfilling your dog’s specific needs (physical, mental, rest, etc.)

Behavior change happens when your dog feels safe, understood, and guided.

PRO TIP:

How do you communicate to your dog that they’re making a good choice? How to you help them feel safe and calm? If you’re unsure, your dog is absolutely unsure and confused, too. Start here before stacking triggers.

What Actually Creates Change

Real progress usually comes down to a few things:

- Awareness of your dog's triggers and thresholds
- Being proactive rather than reactive yourself
- Supporting your dog's emotional regulation before expecting performance
- Consistent, clear communication over time

There is no magical “quick-fix” to lasting behavior change. The time will pass anyway, so why not use the time to build a deep relationship and strong, lasting skills?

Want Support With This?

If you're tired of managing reactions ready to take a more structured, guided approach to your dog's behavior:

I offer coaching programs designed for committed owners who want real, lasting change. Visit www.Kay9Mentor.com for more information.

Keep Growing



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in the work to be the best human
for your dog! Connect with
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