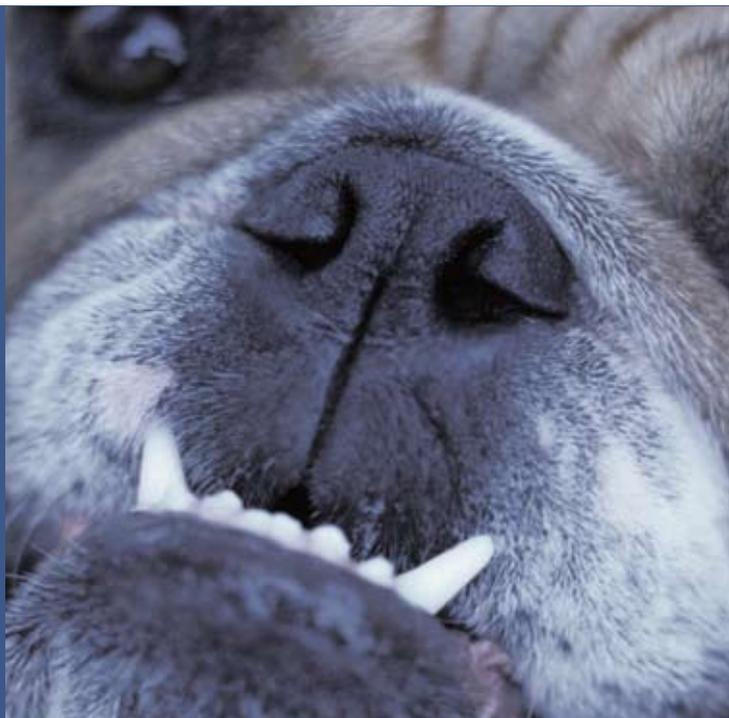


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# Feisty Fido

Help For the Leash-Reactive Dog

SECOND EDITION

PMC

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## INTRODUCTION

Every neighborhood has at least one “Feisty Fido,” and he can cause a lot of chaos as he barks and lunges at every dog in sight. It’s bad enough to have someone else’s dog terrorizing the neighborhood, but it’s harder still when your own dog is the trouble maker. Just because you want your dog to be polite doesn’t mean you know how to make it happen, so many people with reactive dogs find themselves avoiding walks altogether. It becomes a vicious circle—with a lack of both exercise and stimulation leading to a dog who is harder to handle when he is taken on walks. So of course, the walks continue to decrease, and the problems increase. Oh dear...this might be one of the times that a dog owner is wondering why she ever got a dog in the first place.

The most common problem behavior we see in dogs who are reactive on leash is barking and lunging, so that’s what we mention most often throughout this booklet. We know though, that your particular dog may react in a different way, perhaps by whining, growling, spinning, biting whatever is closest, shaking, stiffening, salivating, cowering or leaping. (Hopefully not all at the same time.)

If you have a dog who fits this description, take heart. There’s a lot of good news for owners whose dogs misbehave when walking by other dogs. First of all, if your dog is barking and lunging at other dogs when he’s on leash, know that you’re not alone. This is a very common behavioral problem, even in dogs who “play well with others” when running free at the dog park.

Although it can initially cause no end of trouble, on-leash dog-dog reactivity is one of our favorite behavioral problems, because it has such a high rate of successful treatment. Almost all dogs who bark, lunge or behave problematically at passing dogs can be taught “street manners,” turning what used to be stress-filled walks into relaxing strolls.

Be clear, though, that this little booklet isn't designed to create dogs who are good with all other dogs in all situations. If your dog is dog-dog aggressive off leash, the ideas in this booklet won't turn him into the dog everyone loves at doggy day care. What you can get from this booklet is the ability to leash-walk your dog around others, whether it's down the sidewalk or at the vet clinic, knowing that your dog will walk politely by another dog, rather than causing a scene.

## **Why is My Dog So Rude?**

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We can't say definitively why so many leashed dogs become rude and reactive when walking by other dogs, but we can make some educated guesses. Some dogs probably feel trapped when they're on leash and are approached by another dog. There's nothing like feeling vulnerable if you're nervous in the first place, and dogs on leashes know they aren't free to run away. Dogs who explode at other dogs for this reason are behaving as though their best defense is a good offense—using the time-honored “I'll get you before you get me” strategy.

There are many reasons why dogs might be nervous about other dogs approaching. Direct approaches to unfamiliar dogs are avoided by polite dogs, but are often forced by virtue of neighborhood sidewalks. Some dogs may have been traumatized by another dog and are now afraid of approaching dogs. Perhaps your dog never had a chance to be properly socialized around unfamiliar dogs, and is only comfortable with familiar dogs. Some dogs may be naturally shy around any unfamiliar dog, even though their owners have provided them opportunities to socialize. Genetics plays an important role in all aspects of canine behavior, and shyness is highly heritable, causing even some well-socialized dogs to be nervous around unfamiliar dogs. Whether driven by early experience or genetics (or most likely, both) it's important to understand that dogs who are leery of approaching dogs can respond by barking and lunging toward a dog that frightens them. Just because a dog looks scary to others doesn't mean he's not scared himself.