



Maplewood Dog Training

353 N Main St – Sharon, MA 02067

781 806 5707

www.maplewooddog.com

Safety Cues for Reactive or Aggressive Dogs

By Katrin Andberg & Lisa Hirtle

Here are 3 cues to teach your dog that will help you decrease your dog's stress when you meet a trigger.

Guidelines for teaching your dog these cues successfully:

- Use treats/food that your dog rates 10 out of 10 "MY FAVORITE TREATS EVER!"
- Begin teaching these cues in a place of low distractions, such as inside your home or in your back yard.
- As you start increasing distractions, do so at a distance from the distraction or trigger where your dog is comfortable- he knows the distractions are there but, he is able to work with you and not react negatively or aggressively.
- Keep the training sessions short, using only 10 treats each session (count them out ahead of time).
- Always end when you and your dog are successful- doing the behavior correctly and below threshold.

Emergency Escape Cue for Unexpected Triggering Situations- "Quick"

- This is a cue to teach your dog to happily follow you whenever you say "Quick" in a positive, fun and no stress manner
- This cue is to be used when an unexpected trigger appears on a walk or outing and you need to get your dog out of the situation to prevent a reaction or salvage a situation
- "Quick" should never be done with either you or your dog in panic, and should be a classically conditioned (always paired with food) cue that teaches your dog that coming and running away with you is a fun game
- To teach this cue:
 - Start in an area of low distractions and no triggers
 - Bring the best food reward according to your dog.
 - Begin teaching this cue with your dog on a six foot leash; as your dog begins to understand and anticipate the cue, you will work up to practicing the cue with a twenty foot lead/ long line.
 - Walk forward with your dog until he stops paying attention to you, and he looks out ahead
 - Say, "[Your dog's name], Quick!" in a happy, upbeat manner
 - Turn and jog away
 - As your dog turns to jog and catch up to you, praise **enthusiastically**, (your dog should be thinking you are having a *terrific party* that he absolutely wants to join in on!)
 - After happily running with your dog for 15-20 feet, stop and feed your dog the best treats ever for 15-20 seconds, praising the entire time
 - Running away should never have an element of panic or fear, it should always be a fun, happy party
 - **Practice this cue daily, 2-4x/day, for 2wks in 4-5 different areas of no distractions/triggers**
 - Wait to change the distraction level until you have your dog turning and running to catch up to you 100% of the time on the cue "[Dog's name], Quick!"
 - When you increase the leash length (distance), decrease the level of distractions

The “Look at Me Game”

- This cue teaches your dog to turn his head towards you whenever you say his name, giving you the ability to break his stare at a trigger and reorient him to focusing on you.
- This exercise is again a classically conditioned one (paired with food) and should always be done when you have a food reward to pair it with- Never Lie to your Dog! It lessens the value and effectiveness of this cue!
- To teach this cue:
 - Begin in an area of low distraction and gradually work up to places of higher distractions.
 - Wait for your dog to be looking out ahead of you
 - Say your dog’s name and take reach a treat in front of his nose
 - As you get his attention, turn his head back to facing you (luring his head to turn), breaking eye his forward eye contact
 - Repeat the name-lure-feed facing you 3 times
 - On the 4th repeat, say his name and pause for a ½ second
 - If he immediately turns his head towards you on his own, immediately reward him for doing so
 - If he doesn’t, help him by luring him with the treat on his nose and then repeat the name-lure-reward three times again
 - Continue the pattern of name-lure-reward 3 times, then attempting to prompt with only name and no lure, but rewarding if he turns his head on his own, until the dog can successfully turn his head towards you, breaking forward eye contact without the lure, only on the cue prompt of his name

The “Look at That Game”

- This game was labeled so by Leslie McDevitt in her book Control Unleashed (excellent book for any owner of a reactive dog to read)
- This exercise/game is used to decrease your dog’s stress at viewing and looking at triggers
- This exercise teaches your dog the behavior pattern- look forward at a trigger, stay below threshold, look back to my owner for a treat
- This exercise also teaches your dog that staring for a prolonged period of time at a trigger (and causing himself to go over threshold) is not reinforcing but that making socially appropriate glances at triggers and outside situations is reinforcing
- To teach this game:
 - Start at a distance from a low level trigger that you dog is comfortable just looking and not reacting
 - As your dog moves his head to look forward, click or say ‘Yes’
 - Your dog should then move his head back to you, breaking his stare and eye contact
 - Reward the head turn back to you with a high value treat