

Hi Trudi,

I am having a terrible time walking my dog and am hoping you can help! Jackson is a 2 year old Jack Russell X and is pretty good most of the time – that is until I bring the lead out to walk him. The minute he sees the lead he goes nuts, jumping and spinning and barking around the house. It takes a good 5 minutes just to clip the lead onto his collar and most of the time it has to be done under force. He then pulls and barks and spins on the end of the lead until we get to the top of the driveway where he drops the barking and the spinning and just continues with the pulling. As unpleasant as all of that is, it is NOTHING compared to his reaction if he sees another dog on our walk. He goes absolutely insane, barking and lunging in a maniacal manner as if he is going to eat the other dog alive. I pull him in close and try to avoid the other dog but this just seems to make him worse. I don't understand it because he is fine with other dogs in the park when he is off the lead, he only seems to act like this when he is on the lead. I am at the stage where I just simply don't want to walk him anymore because the whole ordeal is just too hard.

Hoping you can help,  
Sue Hails

Hi Sue,

Sure sounds like walking Jackson is a job and a half but there are a number of things that you can do to make your life (and his walks) easier. Firstly, the walk begins from home. Don't forget that the state of the dog you have on the end of the lead inside the house is the state of the dog that you are just about to take onto the street. Dogs learn by repetition and association and so by repetitively bringing the lead out and walking the dog it won't take long before the dog simply just has to see the lead, associates it with going for a walk and the excitement starts there. Typically with excitement comes frustration and anxiety and before you know it, you have a jumping, spinning, barking canine just at the sight of the lead, BEFORE he is even attached to it. To begin with a calm dog in the house, you need to desensitise him to his lead. Grab Jackson's lead outside of the times that you are going to take him for a walk and just walk around with it. Do this again and again so that you break the association between the lead and going out. This way, you avoid all of that craziness that is activated by the sight of the lead.

Being a puller, I would also strongly recommend a more appropriate piece of equipment to walk him on other than his collar. A Front Attach Harness can be very effective on dogs that pull because the clip is on the front of the harness at the chest (rather than at the back) and therefore works with the dog's opposition reflex.

Don't use force to attach his lead; this will only raise his anxiety levels even higher. Get him to calmly sit and engage him in a treat with one hand whilst calmly attaching the lead with the other hand. Now you have a calm dog on the other end of the lead ready to go for a walk. Take treats with you on your walk to assist with getting his focus and maintaining a calm disposition. I would recommend really high value treats like BBQ chicken to start so that you can keep his attention. Walk calmly out the front door and have him sit so that you can close the door behind you. Walk a couple of steps and then have him sit again, continue this all the way up the driveway treating each time so that he is listening to you and not pulling and spinning wildly till you get to the top. If you do this consistently every day he will learn to walk and focus on you. If he starts pulling once you get to the top of the driveway just simply stop and wait until he releases the tension on the lead. Once he releases the tension, move forward again. If he pulls, stop again until he releases the tension so that he starts to understand that if he is pulling he doesn't get anywhere, if he doesn't pull he can move forward. If by chance he doesn't release the tension on the lead, simply turn around and walk the other way and repeat this again and again so that he learns that pulling doesn't get him anywhere. Spend 5 minutes a day and do this outside of the times that he needs to be exercised as it can be time consuming. In the meantime, take him to the park to run around so that he still gets his exercise – as I'm sure you know, a tired dog is a happy dog!

Now you have a dog that is under better control and is calmer to walk it is time to work with the reactivity on lead when he sees another dog. Dogs that are happy to play with dogs off lead, but are reactive on lead is usually born of frustration in the beginning but due to owners reactions, develop into reactivity over time. A lot of the time reactivity on lead is either conditioned or exacerbated by the owner through their own behaviour. Typically you're walking along the street, you see a dog coming, you know that your dog is going to react so you pull him into you which puts tension on the lead and sends a clear signal down to the dog that you are concerned so they in turn become concerned. You do this every time you see another dog and through repetition the dog learns to become concerned and anxious every time they see another dog and then it's like a vicious circle. In counter conditioning (or changing) this behaviour the key here is to always work under Jackson's threshold so that you can maintain control of his actions. Once again, arm yourself with BBQ chicken to assist with focus and attention. When you see another dog coming toward you either step off to the side of the pavement (or cross the road if stepping off to the side is still too close) well before the other dog is near. Get Jackson to sit and hold the chicken right on his nose so that he is concentrating on that rather than the other dog. Wait until the other dog passes and when there is no reaction from Jackson, give him the chicken. Do this repetitively until dogs can walk past with no reaction from at all. Once you can do this at a distance, start slowly moving in closer and closer. Take your time and don't rush it. Another really good place to do this exercise is near a high dog traffic area like a dog park where you can have him on lead and pick your distance so that you can rehearse this exercise again and again at Jackson's pace so that you are setting him up to succeed every time.

It may be a little time consuming to start these processes, but you have Jackson for the next 12 or so years so investing a little time into getting this behaviour right now will be extremely worth it in the long run.

Trudi 

# Sit Happens

## Tips and Techniques with Trudi Thorpe



Photo by Animax

Trudi Thorpe runs dogLOGIC Dog Training based in Sydney and specialises in Individual Behavioural Strategies, Puppy Pre-School and Adult Dog Classes. She is an AABP Professional Dog Trainer, Accredited Delta CGC Instructor, Accredited Delta CGC Assessor and a Certified Dog Behavioural Trainer. She is a member of the Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association, The Association of Animal Behaviour Professionals and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

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