

LEAD AGGRESSION TRAINING

A step-by-step programme for helping your dog stay calm around other dogs

THE GOLDEN RULE

Work **under threshold**. Your dog should be able to notice another dog without becoming overwhelmed. Reward calm behaviour and create distance before your dog reacts.

BEFORE YOU START

Use a comfortable, secure harness or well-fitted collar and lead. Carry exceptionally high-value treats. Choose quiet locations initially. Establish your dog's threshold — the distance at which they can see another dog while still taking food and responding to you.

Signs you are too close: hard staring, stiff body, freezing, whining, barking, growling, lunging or refusing food. Calmly increase distance if you see these signs.

WEEK 1 — ATTENTION & ENGAGEMENT

Days 1–3: Indoors

- Say your dog's name → when they look at you → reward.
- Practise a hand target ('touch').
- Reward voluntary check-ins.
- Keep sessions to 3–5 minutes, 3–4 times daily.

Days 4–7: Quiet outdoor areas

- Repeat the exercises in the garden or quiet area.
- Take short, low-distraction lead walks.
- Reward frequently for walking with you and checking in.

Goal: Your dog readily responds to you around mild distractions.

WEEK 2 — SEEING DOGS FROM A DISTANCE

Choose a location where dogs can be seen safely from a distance.

DOG APPEARS → 'YES!' → HIGH-VALUE TREAT

Feed while the other dog is visible. When the dog disappears, the treats stop. Start with only a few seconds of exposure and aim for 3–5 successful encounters per walk.

If your dog stares, stiffens, barks or lunges, you are too close. Calmly turn away or move further back.

Goal: Your dog sees another dog and begins to look back towards you.

WEEK 3 — GRADUALLY REDUCE DISTANCE

Only reduce distance after repeated calm sessions. For example: **50 m → 40 m → 30 m → 25 m → 20 m**. Your dog may need several sessions at each distance.

For each encounter: **1.** Dog notices another dog. **2.** Mark the moment. **3.** Reward. **4.** Keep moving or calmly turn away. **5.** Give your dog a break.

Use parked cars, hedges and changes of direction to help manage difficult encounters.

WEEK 4 — REAL-WORLD WALKING

Begin practising realistic situations while keeping enough distance for your dog to remain calm:

- Dogs passing on the opposite side of the road.
- Walking behind another dog at a comfortable distance.
- Passing dogs on wider paths.
- Briefly stopping while another dog passes.
- Calmly turning away when necessary.

Do not aim for close passes yet. Success means your dog can notice another dog and remain able to think, eat and respond to you.

TEACH AN EMERGENCY U-TURN

Practise your cheerful '**This way!**' cue when no dogs are around: say 'This way!' → turn 180° → your dog follows → reward generously. Once learned, this gives you an easy escape route when an unexpected dog appears too close.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Don't punish barking or lunging.
- ✗ Don't force your dog to sit and stare at another dog.
- ✗ Don't allow greetings with every dog you meet.
- ✗ Don't deliberately approach dogs to 'socialise' your dog.
- ✗ Don't repeatedly expose your dog to situations they cannot cope with.
- ✗ Don't continue walking towards another dog when your dog is already over threshold.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Look for gradual changes: **lunging** → **barking** → **staring** → **watching calmly** → **looking at you** → **ignoring the dog**. Progress is rarely perfectly linear. A difficult walk does not mean the training has failed — reduce the difficulty next time.

SAFETY & PROFESSIONAL HELP

If your dog has bitten another dog or person, redirects aggression onto you, or has severe or unpredictable reactions, seek help from your vet and a suitably qualified, reward-based behaviour professional. Avoid deliberately testing your dog's limits.

CALM • DISTANCE • REWARD • REPEAT

The aim is not to make your dog love every dog they meet. The aim is to help them feel safe and learn that they can calmly move on.