



WATCH ME (HELP FOR THE LEASH REACTIVE DOG)

The idea of this training is to help teach the reactive dog an alternative reaction. When owners teach their dogs a different response to barking, lunging etc, many dogs are happy to use it and gain some relief as it decreases stress and fear.

For example, by teaching your dog to react to looking at you when they see another dog instead of over-reacting by jumping, snapping, etc the problem is controlled. However this simple concept takes time, consistency and reward based training.

Getting Started

1. Be prepared with suitable equipment: Ideally use a nylon or leather leash that is approximately 6 feet in length with a double clip. For most dogs, harnesses can work well, provided they are not designed on the old traditional ones. I like the touch harnesses as they have 2 points of contact and fit nicely.
2. I advise that appropriate desensitisation training is carried out to help your dog accept a harness. Avoid using collars that often have a learned association between the approach of a dog/person and tightening of the collar.
3. For cases where aggression has been a problem it is advisable to carry out [muzzle training](#). Although it is not necessary to use one in controlled training situations at home or the garden, it is essential once training is stepped up and dogs are in closer proximity to people, other dogs and in public places.
4. Great tasty treats are essential to motivate your dog so remember to commence training before feeding so that they will work harder. Keep them small and extra tasty – i.e. cooked chicken, liver, sausages or cheese (no bigger than the size of a pea).
5. Keep treats in an accessible place. A bum bag around the waist works well.
6. If your dog is not motivated by food (some breeds such as Border Collies are much more motivated by toys) then find something that they will work for. For example squeaky toys or retrieving a ball are some alternatives.
7. Remember to only keep favoured toys and treats for training sessions as this increases their value.

Training “Watch Me” At Home

Start teaching “Watch Me” in a quiet place without any distractions. In the house is usually the best place, gradually moving to the garden. You can commence without the lead as this often represents going out so it is likely that your dog will lack concentration as they think they are going for a walk. But it can work well once you have returned from a walk with the lead still in situ. The reason for keeping the lead on is explained later*

1. If you have other dogs put them in a separate place so your dog can concentrate.
2. Wait until your dog is looking away from you and then say in a clear animated voice “Watch Me”. Do not sound angry or shout – you want your dog to be motivated to look at you.
3. If your dog turns to you immediately reward (or click if using the clicker) and back up with a yummy treat. Don't worry if he/she doesn't actually look at you, this can be shaped as training progresses. Turning to you is enough in the early stages of training.
4. Another method is to hold a treat in a closed fist, letting them know it is there. Initially they will sniff around your fist but ignore them. Eventually most dogs will look at you to see why you haven't opened your fist.
5. Immediately when they do this open the fist and let them have the treat (preferably from the other hand).



6. Repeat this exercise until they are starting to look at you without sniffing your fist.
7. Once they are consistently looking at you, then add the cue "Watch Me"
8. * If your dog is distracted this is when the harness with 2 points of contact can help to back up the cue: GENTLY pull the head turns towards you.
9. Extra help in the early stages is sometimes necessary. For some dogs luring with a treat can help get them started.
10. The main aim is to get your dog to understand that Watch Me means turning their head away from the fear inducing stimuli and looking towards you. We then reward for that chosen option.
11. Keep training sessions short – no longer than 3-5 minutes maximum. Gradually build on training to get your dog to look at you when you say "Watch Me".
12. Once he/she is consistently turning, wait until they turn and actually look at you (even if only for a split second) and then give an extra yummy treat with lots of praise.
13. The idea is then to build on the dog turning and looking at you until you give a command to free them – so keep their attention for a second (by holding the treat in your hand for a little longer) and then reward, building up the time GRADUALLY AND SLOWLY.
14. Once he/she is turning and holding eye contact, use a release cue such as "off you go" or "free" so that your dog knows that he can stop looking at you.

Working Up To Real Life

- 🐾 Start asking for "Watch" in mildly distracting situations i.e. the garden to begin with and over time build this up to more challenging environments.
- 🐾 Remember to make it easy for your dog to be successful! Do not be tempted to progress to the park where there are lots of other dogs and people as this is a recipe for failure!!
- 🐾 During training avoid going to places where your dog is going to be bombarded with situations that provoke reactivity.
- 🐾 In the short term walk in quiet places and think about re-directing energy to other activities in the house/garden like scatter feeding and using interactive feeders.
- 🐾 Soon, with lots of positive reinforcement training, your dog will be watching you when you give the cue.
- 🐾 At this stage it would be a good idea to get some help to set up stooges and I usually strongly suggest you seek the help of a trainer who is familiar with this type of training and can provide a safe, controlled environment.
- 🐾 Try to anticipate the moment before your dog is about to turn its head toward the distraction and use your command word "Watch Me" – The goal is to set up situations where your dog sees another dog at a distance far enough away so not to provoke a reaction and they will still listen to you.
- 🐾 This training uses the techniques based on [desensitisation and counterconditioning training](#)

Emergency U-Turns

- 🐾 There may be times during training and whilst out on walks when your "Watch" command is not going to work. For example, a dog suddenly appears from somewhere unexpectedly.

In these circumstances do not set your dog up for failure by using your "Watch Me" cue.

- 🐾 It has been shown that some dogs are happy to be helped out when confronted with an overwhelming situation and giving them an alternative to having to confront things can build trust and reduce stress.
- 🐾 If you know a situation is more than you can both handle follow plan B but, as before, you need to train this beforehand.



Plan B

- 🐾 With your dog on a lead, walk forward and on your cue – “This Way” turn instantly 180 degrees and move in the opposite direction.
- 🐾 Make this like a game during training and remember to reward immediately when your dog follows you.
- 🐾 Bend your knees as you turn and have a treat/toy in your hand to act as a lure.
- 🐾 As before, do this in places where you are free from distractions and build up SLOWLY. The aim is for your dog to turn when you give the cue rather than being physically forced away by you.
- 🐾 Build up training so that your dog moves a few more strides with you before being given the reward.
- 🐾 This action can then be put on cue whenever you anticipate there may be a problem. Try and pre-empt the situation if possible so that the problem doesn't escalate.
- 🐾 The idea of this cue is to get you out of a problem situation and should be used if your dog is going to be too aroused to do a “Watch Me” or has already started to stiffen or bark/lunge.

📌 These two techniques are based on those described in an excellent book “**Feisty Fido**” Patricia B McConnell & Karen B London (available through [APBC website](#)).



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