



### Reactive Behaviour in Dogs

Dogs that overreact to certain stimuli are classed as reactive. Reactive behaviour can include (but not limited to) growling, barking, lunging, fighting with other dogs and biting (people or other dogs).

Dogs are more commonly reactive to other dogs, people or children. Normally the reactive behaviour that we see is the escalation of previous warning signs. Most people fail to see the early warning signs which indicate there is a problem.



The other reason that the dog may not show early warning signs is that they have become well practiced at the behaviour and as a result of being over threshold (and stressed) they react much more quickly. Punishment of the behaviour may also make reactive behaviour worse. When dogs act in a reactive way they are communicating a problem. If they are punished for this behaviour they may stop giving the warning signs and just bite.

According to the dog act (1976) everyone who is a dog owner has a responsibility to ensure that his or her dog is well looked after. In addition, it is important that dog owners respect other people in the community. This can be achieved by keeping dogs adequately confined on their properties, on a leash in public places, preventing aggressive behaviour and controlling excessive barking.



Legally it is our responsibility to have control of our dogs. If a bite or attack occurs it's taken very seriously. If your dog attacks another person or animal you will be held responsible even if you are not there at the time. Penalties can range between \$3000 and \$20,000 and/or potential imprisonment.

### **So what can we do?**

Prevention is critical; training and appropriate socialisation should start young and continue on as the puppy develops into maturity. By starting young we mean 10 weeks of age, not 6 months of age! If you are having problems with reactive behaviour at a young age it is critical that it is addressed by a professional. Dogs will not grow out of it.

For dogs that are already exhibiting reactive behaviour it's very important that your dog is kept safe as well as others involved. Seek professional help from a veterinary behaviourist or a qualified trainer (if in doubt, ask your vet for a referral).

Management is critical in the early stages to prevent this from getting worse. We want our dogs to change their behaviour without changing our behaviour or their environment. How is this fair?

For a dog to change its behaviour we must set them up to succeed and to provide them with the right environment in which to learn. Dogs will not learn when stressed so although medication may be required from the vet, it's important you use this in combination appropriate training program.



[www.clevercreatures.com.au](http://www.clevercreatures.com.au)  
[training@clevercreatures.com.au](mailto:training@clevercreatures.com.au)  
Phone: 08 9525 1553  
PO Box 427 Byford Western Australia 6122

[www.clevercreatures.com.au](http://www.clevercreatures.com.au)

