



Working Reactivity at Windhaven Dog Park

Stimuli Frequently Present

- People walking dogs
- Families walking dogs
- Large and small dogs inside the dog park with multiple movement types
- Dogs and people coming and going on leash into dog parks
- Joggers
- Bicyclists
- People on scooters (the park has them available)
- Many kids screaming and playing
- Families with strollers
- Kids running haphazardly in park
- Sudden environmental change of any of these

Summary of the path

I have practiced the pathway that is marked on the image below hundreds of times with reactive dogs. Walking a full pathway indicated by the numbers on the picture (1-20) is for a dog approaching the end of reactivity training. This is because the dog will be exposed to triggers in the number of 50 upwards on a busy day at the park. The triggers will include sudden environmental change if you work the full pathway, especially at point 19.

To reduce difficulty, only work on one type of trigger or work a beginning segment. The beginner level segment that also functions as a warm up is segment 1 to 2. You will still have kids, dogs, bikes, scooters and people but you will have a significant distance to manage threshold. You can also increase distance by moving further from the #2 point into one of the fields.

Relief Points

When on a trail, you will be faced with fast and slow approaching stimuli of different types. You can use adjacent forest as a relief point by doing a treat scatter into the edge where the grass meets the trees. To appropriately condition these difficult stimuli, wait until your dog notices the stimuli. It doesn't have to be a look, it can be an ear flick or a body orientation. Then, name the stimuli "yes, that's a person" or "person and dog" or "kids" and then say "scatter!" and do the treat scatter at relief location. Step on the leash on the ground with the leash being loose. Wait until the stimulus has passed and then continue walking.

Human Body Orientation

We are going to use our body as signaling to the dog. Do not turn your torso to any approaching stimuli. Our dogs watch us better than other humans. Your body language means everything to the dog you're walking. A square up is prep for a threat, so we don't want to signal that the stimulus is threatening. You can look by turning your head but make it nonchalant. Keep your side body or you back to approaching stimuli. If you have your back to the stimuli, make sure your dog isn't squared up to you so that s/he is facing the stimuli. We want both ourselves and our dog to be sideways to it.

People and Kids Touching Your Dog

Do not ever let people or kids touch your dog. This is about their safety, but it is more about your dog's state of mind. They need to know that just because they see a stranger, it doesn't mean they are going to come over and touch your dog.

Labeling Triggers

Label triggers (Mr. Rogers Hack) after your dog has noticed them with any, even subtle, behaviors. Don't label if your dog blows up.

Reactions

If your dog is tense or low level stress signals are increasing in frequency, back up to point 2 then restart.

If your dog is still stressed at 2, go home. We don't want to sensitize your dog and we don't want to practice reactive behaviors. It's better to try another day than teach your dog things that are stressful.

Photo Labels

Some key points on the photo below:

1. Park where there are fewer cars so you don't jump right in to too many dogs/people
2. Move this point away from the pavilion if the pavilion is bustling with people (this is a warm up step, so it should be easy)
3. At this point you have fields on both sides of yourself, so use them to manage distance from triggers. Your dog's body language will tell you at what distance to be.
4. Sounds of kids are going to be getting louder here.
5. Kids will be around and this is a junction point for all kinds of stimuli. Use relief points when needed
6. In this triangle, you can pause and take in stimuli and plan for the continued walk. Always be aware of where you can get more distance or use nature for a relief point.
7. You can approach the kids park at this point. It is a high side, so you will be able to look down and see kids running, screaming and playing. Be vigilant here and ready to jog back to point 8 if needed. Do not let any child pet your dog.
8. Remember to use relief points
9. This is a sudden environmental change point. At this point, kids will be on your left, and bikes, scooters, people, joggers etc. may be approaching from up to 3 directions.
10. This is a break point. Walk across the mulchy area into the forest and let your dog have a break from all the things. There will be some passive visibility and sounds from the large dog park here.
11. This is a tight space point, so use your relief points strategically when necessary.



12. This is a sudden environmental change point as well as a visual barrier point to the large dog park. Use it to work SEC or dogs!
13. Hug the dog fence here if possible – fast approaching bicycles frequently pop out from the right.
14. Work the dog park here, using the relief points as necessary or desired.
15. This is a high stimulus spot. You will be between both dog parks and have small and large dogs running. The curve on the large dog side is one of the busier ones.
16. This is a decision point - you can leave an walk through the parking lot to get to the ultimate goal of position 19 or you can continue to hug the small dog park if you are working small dogs. I prefer the parking lot route.
17. This will be a highly trafficked area with a lot of sudden environmental change. Dogs and people will be popping into and out of cars. If your dog is over stressed go ahead and leave. Don't force a push to the next stations unless your dog's body language is relaxed.
18. High traffic point, heavy with kids.
19. Station point near restrooms. This will be where you can work dogs coming and going on leash. This is the point of key difficulty for dogs with leash barrier frustration.
20. Walk to one of the smaller trees across the path. This is more difficult than 19 because it's closer to both dog parks and closer to the path.
21. Walk to the light post. This is a very difficult position. You are at the busiest point of the large dog park (water station), you are very close to small dogs too. You will have dogs barking on leash approaching the dog park and calmer dogs exiting the dog parks.

When you are done, take your time in making it back to your car. Your dog has been through a lot of stimuli and the goal is to have a relaxing walk back to the car by maximizing distance from triggers. Continue to label triggers after your dog subtly notices them.



