

## **In-House Behavior Modification Protocol** **On Leash Fear Related Reactivity to People**

*Protocol to be used on shelter dogs that exhibit negative behaviors (barking, growling, lunging, snapping) towards people when being walked on a leash. This behavior usually stems from a lack of socialization to people or past bad experienced with people, or both. Someone who has bonded with the dog should perform this work.*

1. The dog should be properly fit with and desensitized to wearing a gentle leader head collar before any work can be done to modify the behavior.
2. The dog should be clicker charged (know that the sound of the clicker predicts a treat) and know that he can make the click happen by performing a behavior.
3. Take the dog for a walk using the gentle leader and a regular leash (not a retractable). Have your clicker and plenty of special treats in pocket or treat pouch.
4. Do not let the dog get too close to people. We want to start 'below threshold' (the point where he/she starts to react to the sight of people) so we use distance.
5. AS SOON as the dog looks at a person at a distance – start to mark (using the clicker) any non-reactive behavior followed by the delivery of the treats.

\*If he/she doesn't take the treats – you are either too close to the person or you need better treats.

The idea is for the dog to learn (over time) that looking at a person at a distance PREDICTS treats. This will help to change his/her emotional response to people from negative to positive.

6. If/when the dog starts to react to the sight of a person – gently pull up on the leash so that the two loops of the gentle leader tighten. This is NOT a correction – you should not jerk the leash. We are simply trying to humanely suppress the negative reaction so that it is no longer reinforcing to the dog.

Hold up on the leash with gentle pressure until the dog stops reacting (do not say a word). AS SOON as the dog stops reacting - release the tension and start clicking and treating again.

Do this EVERY time the dog reacts to a person.

Over time the dog will learn that the negative behaviors of lunging, barking, growling, etc. are not worth doing (because you stop them immediately) and that staying calm in the presence of a person is more rewarding.

You must do this over and over – slowly moving the dog closer to people as his/her behavior improves. This process will take a while (weeks) so be patient.

It is important to understand that every time the dog is “allowed” to “practice” the negative reaction, the behavior gets stronger and is much more difficult to modify. It is very important that the dog is worked every time he/she is exposed to people. If only one out of five people who walk the dog does the counterconditioning exercise, the dog's behavior will not improve.