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Reactive or Aggressive Dog Protocol

Because working with an aggressive or reactive dog can be very scary, depressing and frustrating, I work with you and your dog in a very structured and careful manner.

The first week is **always** without the dog. (Even pet dogs, so don't take it personally <g>) It is imperative that we are all on the same page as to positive methodology as well as teaching you to learn to read your dog properly. If you can read your dog and know how to react with record speed, many aggressive outbursts won't happen in the first place.

In addition, I will be giving you a standard Beginners booklet, however, that is just an outline; every dog I meet has different issues and needs as do their owners. Each and every aggressive and reactive dog I work with are taught some of the same behaviors, but not all. Each subsequent lesson is designed specifically for you and your dog. I also need to get to know YOU and your personality, expectations and background - just as you need to get to know me. My objective is to have us be a team working together toward the same goals and also that you fully understand that I personally know what you're going through because of my relationship with my human aggressive dog Shadow.

Foundation behaviors are taught, starting with solid attention from the dog to you and vice versa, name response and come response. I start out with this for many reasons;

It is vitally important to your safety, my safety, and the safety of others that you and your dog have a good relationship based on positive methods. By practicing these simple behaviors between lesson one and two, your dog will most likely not react to my presence when I meet him/her the first time because you will have worked on building a reinforcement history and relationship.

Even if your dog is friendly with people, the above steps are all important. Without them, basic and advanced training won't happen. And until those behaviors are learned, we can't introduce your dogs provoking stimuli.

Solid attention will help you in starting the desensitization process, because one simply can't "just get the dog to stop aggressing" at whatever their triggers are - they need to be taught multiple alternate and incompatible behaviors (to aggressing). Every behavior I teach you will have a real life reason. I rarely train anything that isn't useful!

Once your dog has a few behaviors intact, I will also be working with you and your potential reactions. Working with an aggressive or reactive dog is not all about the bottom half of the leash. You may have become sensitized to your dog's provoking stimuli and part of our lessons will be addressing those reactions. I will also be teaching you how to think fast and react appropriately when those stimuli are present.

The desensitization and counterconditioning process is not a short one. While my sessions are six weeks (one hour per lesson for six lessons), that doesn't mean to imply in any way that your dog will be "fixed" in six weeks. It just won't happen that quickly, although I wish it would! Trust (from the leash up and from the leash down) needs to be earned and specific behaviors need to be implemented and that can take some time. I can't tell you how long it will take, just as a psychologist can't tell you how long until you feel better.

The re-training process is based on many factors, many of which are within your control--how well you follow the instructions, how much time you can devote to training, what kind of area you live in, how much down time you can give your dog, how much practice your dog has had in aggressing or reacting and many more.

Group class

No one is ever allowed in the group class specifically designed for aggressive dogs without doing an unspecified amount of privates with me first. I can't tell you how many privates you'll need before "graduating" to the group class. Some dogs and handlers are ready after 6 weeks, some take longer.

Working with an aggressive and reactive dog can be trying sometimes, but is usually worth it in how much you and your dog can enrich each other's lives. Many of my students have reached and surpassed their initial goals and their dogs now allow people to pet them, don't have to be managed in the household, some are now passing by people and other dogs without so much as a peep and some are competing in a myriad of dog sports.

For the first set of 6 weeks, the first class is ALWAYS without the dog and the remaining five weeks are with the dog. **This does not imply in any possible way that your dog will be "fixed" in only 6 weeks.** If you and your dog need additional privates, then all of the lessons in each additional set of 6 are with the dog.

I start out with privates for many reasons;

- 1) So I get to know you and your dog, your strengths and weaknesses as a team.
- 2) So I can teach you a million incompatible and alternate behaviors to aggressing. Those will include but not limited to: eye contact, name response, come, heeling, loose leash walking, sit, down, stand, stay, animal husbandry, heeling games to get you out of Dodge when you need it. And to teach you POSITIVE training methods - which is NOT just about tossing cookies.
- 3) In addition, you will learn how to remain calm when presented with your dogs provoking stimuli and I will help you with your timing.
- 4) The booklet I will give you and the behaviors listed above are a basic outline - we will be adding in many behaviors that are specific to your needs.
- 5) I will not be bringing in other people or dogs during your set of private instruction. Privates are for learning, not for desensitization.
- 6) You need to fully understand item 5 - privates are not for desensitization of your dog's triggers - they are for building a relationship, trust, training really solid behaviors and enriching your dog's life. Without these things in place, you won't be able to safely work with your dog's reactivity/aggression and you'd be back where you started.
- 7) I cannot guarantee that after 6, one hour lessons, (the first lesson is always without the dog - even if you've trained in other places) your dog will be appropriate for the group class specifically designed for aggressive and reactive dogs. I also can't tell you how long - it will take as long as it takes. There is no magic bullet when working with behavior. Some dogs need more time (as do some humans). Please don't be insulted or frustrated if I recommend that you do more privates. I have the needs of the group and the needs of the dog always in the forefront of my mind.
- 8) I cannot guarantee that your dog will never bite you, other people or dogs during or after training.

I have read and fully understand the above. DATE: _____

Print your name

Signature