

# Barrier Reactivity



We refer to a dog as being “barrier reactive” when they bark, growl, or rush forward in response to a stimulus when they are behind a barrier. The barrier may be a fence, baby gate, window, screen door, car window, or any other physical item that stands between them and the stimulus. The trigger for this behavior might be another dog, cat, person, or squirrel, just to name a few. Modifying this behavior is possible, but requires lots of consistency.

## Step One: Management

It is important to have a management plan in place before you attempt to modify this behavior. You will need to cover windows and/or any breaks in the fence line to ensure that your dog is unable to see through them, attempting to eliminate their need to react in the first place. You may also want to keep your dog's leash clipped to their collar, but let them drag the handle so you are able to grab it and safely redirect them if they do become reactive.

## Step Two: Training

Once your management plan is in place, you can begin to work towards modifying this behavior. Be sure you are always present when your dog has access to the barriers they're reactive to; this may mean restricting access to certain rooms or areas when you aren't home. Cut up tiny pieces of high value food, like hot dogs or bits of their favorite smelly treats, and approach the barrier with your dog on leash. Remove the covering so they can now see through the window or fence line. The moment that they notice the trigger, begin to feed them constantly. Feed them for 10-30 seconds, put the visual barrier back in place, and stop feeding them.

If your dog begins to bark or react and is too distracted to take the food, don't panic! That simply means that your dog is over their threshold. Your dog's threshold will be the physical distance at which they will no longer take food because they are too focused on the trigger. If your dog is over threshold, you will be unable to modify their behavior in that moment. It will be necessary to move them further away from the trigger and possibly remove them from the situation altogether. If you find that being up close to the barrier is too difficult for your dog, move further away and try again once they have had the chance to calm down.

Be sure to keep these sessions short! This work is difficult for our dogs and you will want to train for a few very short sessions (1-3 minutes each) per day when you begin, rather than working for longer periods of time. As this work becomes easier for your dog, you can work with them for longer and longer periods of time.

## Top Tip:

Buy several airtight treat jars, fill them with non-perishable treats, and place them throughout your home. This will give you the opportunity to quickly offer your dog reinforcers throughout the day for staying relaxed when they hear their triggers, and for coming to you when called.

For a video on barrier reactivity, please go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fyIvLyZXyU&feature=youtu.be>