Tips for Navigating Camp Successfully

We all want Camp to be a happy successful experience so I am asking all campers to read this sheet. Whether your dog is friendly with other dogs or needs extra room let's treat all dogs with respect and give them space so they never have to feel uncomfortable.

Why Give ALL Dogs Space?

Camp can be stressful for even the friendliest laid-back dog. He/She is away from home and working many hours a day around new dogs and new people. The dog's routine is disrupted and so is their person's, which can make dogs act differently than they normally do.

Safety is first and foremost at Camp. We want all dogs to be safe and to feel safe. It is not emotionally healthy for reactive dogs to feel uncomfortable or for friendly dogs to be the target of another dog's upset. Campers with friendly dogs should be as concerned about protecting their dog's emotional health as the reactive dog's owners are. Many reactive dogs were friendly until something traumatic happened to them, so we need to bear that in mind even when navigating with non-reactive dogs.

Courtesy to fellow campers is important to ensure everyone feels safe and respected. If you need a little more space *kindly* ask the other camper. He or she may think they are providing enough room for you and your dog based on what their own dog requires. If you accidentally get too close to a dog, apologizing and giving that team a wider berth to move around camp, will help us co-exist harmony in such close quarters and under the stress of a 4-day camp.

What is a Reactive Dog or Emotional Animal?

Our Definition: Any dog that reacts in a fearful, fearfully defensive or "aggressive" manner when faced with certain triggers, exhibits uncontrolled excitement or over arousal. Sometimes fear and arousal appear simultaneously, often escalating the dog's response or reaction. Examples of triggers: dogs and other animals, collar jingling, strangers, vehicles, sounds, etc.

Dogs Look Like: running away, trembling, barking, lunging, growling, snarling, snapping, wants trigger to go away generally, over arousal wants to investigate, play, bully… **any behavior change from the normal calm state that you notice means your dog is feeling pressure.**

Management at Camp for reactive dogs or dogs under stress:

Camp can be a tough place for some dogs. B**e prepared to skip a session if needed** and go audit if your dog can relax in your cabin or car without you.

Prevent Practicing Unwanted Behaviors – vital to improvement and not increasing the problem

- Confinement: crate in room or car if easier on dog
- Covers for crate in cabin as well as class. Use your 2nd red bandana on your crate when at class and let your group members know, as they might not notice.

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- Music background noise – there are special music CDs just for dogs.
- Lots and lots of chew items for confinement
- Equipment: head collars, harness, flat buckle (non-punishing equipment is best)

Navigating Around Camp

- Have reinforcement out and use it to help keep your dog calm – no meals will be needed!
- Minimize walking at busy times when avoidable, be early when possible or wait until the crowds subside.
- Don't stop to chat.
- Use buildings, trees, cabins, vehicles and distance as visual blocks or carry a visual block with you such as a or panel (2 x 3 foam board with handle cut out works well)

Special Camp Considerations

- Some dogs get sensitized at camp more than other situations, be aware and take action to help your dog relax.
- Talk to your group members. Let your instructor know during class that you need more space or help with getting your dog to or from the search area.
- Advocate for your dog in a patient and kind way. Other campers might think that they are giving enough space or with all that is going on at camp, they may need a kind reminder.

Preventing Reactions:

Every animal is an individual and there is no set behavior pattern from one to another- **know your dog!** Observe your dog carefully to see the 1st clue that a reaction might happen: a subtle movement, alertness, stillness, facial expression, change in movement, orientation. You must stay focused to catch these moments.

Find Dana or other staff member if you need assistance or support.
PLEASE don't wait until you and/or your dog are in crisis to let us know.

Being alert to the 1st signs of behavior change in your dog is important so you can begin desensitizing. Feed non-contingently if needed to reduce emotion and distract or, if and when possible, engage in behaviors already known to the dog so can reinforce good behavior. Be ready with reinforcement any time you are moving about with your dog. It is important to be ready immediately when you notice a behavior change to help maintain your dog under threshold. If you need to begin with non-contingent food, transition to contingent food as soon as possible, working on a behavior so the food is now coming as a reinforcer for the behavior you want. You may need to get more distance at first from the stimulus, by moving dog away as you offer food to distract and reinforce moving away.

Use known, well-practiced, highly reinforced behaviors to keep dog engaged in the presence of triggers.

Practice/Teach a turn and escape then put on cue so dog is accustomed to quick about turns in a fun and reinforcing way versus being dragged away after reaction. This requires multiple and continued practices in situations with no triggers present so that the "turn and escape" cue does not become a signal that a trigger is present.

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Train Incompatible Behaviors

- Any behavior that will keep the animal/dog doing something that prevents the unwanted behavior without increasing stress.
- Teach all behaviors with R+

  Some Examples:

  Automatic Attention on handler (shaped attention), sit, down, stay, tricks, carry a toy, walk on loose leash, use any behavior the dog knows well and likes to engage in.

  Relaxation downs on a mat – really helpful for stationary situations!

MAKE THE TRIGGER A GOOD THING TO SEE - Click and treat every time your dog sees or hears or perceives the trigger in any way, quickly the trigger becomes a cue to check in for a reinforcer now you have attention on you cued by the environment. The antecedent that cued a reaction can now cue your dog to look at you or do any behavior you choose.

General tips

- ***Plan! Plan! Plan!***
- Take your time… seriously don't rush, **your** stress will increase your dog's stress and can set your dog off.
- Avoid and/or manage the triggers (antecedents) that put your dog over threshold = reactions.
- Exercise well. However, be cautious about adding more at **home** walking and play, if walks have multiple triggers, as too much constant arousal will increase stress hormone levels, which can increase reactivity.
- Dogs need down time be sure home is as quiet a place as possible. At camp, your "home" is your cabin or car.
- Be sure your dog has a chance to truly rest/sleep/nap/relax, not just be occupied. Dogs need to have solitary, quiet time to sleep.

Thank you and enjoy Camp!

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