

John Fisher's two-reward method.

If you are interested in trying the technique, try to find a good, qualified trainer/behavior counsellor in your area to help. The article's focus was on-leash aggression towards dogs, but the same steps can be applied with people, too.

Virginia Broitman fidorefined@mindspring.com wrote:

I attended an advanced behaviour course and was introduced to John Fisher's brilliant "Two Reward Method." This technique can have a miraculous effect on many dogs that display on-leash aggression toward other dogs.

Regardless of the aggressing dog's motivation, if the other dog *retreats* (by coincidence, as when the handler continues to walk him away, or on purpose, to avoid confrontation), the dog's aggressive display has just been *reinforced* and is likely to recur in the future.

Here are some examples of why this aggression may be displayed:

- A dog has an elevated opinion of himself and has decided to be the "Protector" of his owner.
- A dog has developed a confident, "tough guy" act when on leash, which may be fuelled by the owner's presence.
- Some insecure pups vocalize at big dogs and people may find it amusing. Their laughter or cheering can be reinforcing to the dog. These early displays can develop into a bad habit by the time the dog reaches maturity.
- Some people intentionally encourage a dog's "macho" displays.
- A dog may learn to behave inappropriately because the owner accidentally reinforces certain behaviours by petting, hovering protectively and talking sympathetically. (Oh, Fifi, it's okay, that dirty old dog won't hurt Mama's little baby!")
- Some dog's "act out" when other dogs are present because the owner is tense or worried, and this fear can be telegraphed right down the leash to the dog!
- Just the fact that the dog is restricted on a leash can complicate the situation, because it inhibits the dog's ability to communicate naturally with other dogs.

As you can see, there are a variety of reasons why dogs may end up behaving aggressively on leash toward other dogs. The funny thing is, these dogs often interact peacefully with the very same dogs if they are OFF leash.

Now, let's look at the steps we can take to correct this problem. I'll begin with an outline of John Fisher's "Two Reward Method" and then describe the details of one recent case I had.

TWO-REWARD METHOD:

Begin by tethering the dog to a secure spot, like a tree or post.

The leash should be attached to a secure buckle collar [NOT a training collar or head halter.]

The owner is calmly sitting or standing next to the dog.

Another person comes into view, at a distance, with a dog on leash.

They walk calmly and quietly, approaching the tethered dog in a lateral fashion.

If the tethered dog remains calm, the owner can praise. When the tethered dog begins to bark or show other signs of aggression, two things immediately happen: (1) The owner of the tethered dog instantly turns her back and moves away from him; (2) The other dog and handler stop where they are and remain there.

When the tethered dog stops aggressing, he receives TWO REWARDS: (1) The other dog and handler exit the scene immediately. (2) His owner then returns to him.

When being approached, if the dog willingly chooses to display another behaviour besides aggression, the owner should reward the dog.

These steps are repeated with a variety of dogs (and in many different situations), gradually reducing the distance between them.

Now, I'd like to share a specific on-leash aggression case with you, so that I can offer some important little details about this training process.

In April, my partner and I were giving a "problem solving" workshop and one attendee brought along a young, male Doberman. Several people reported this dog was absolutely fine with dogs when off-leash, but his aggressive displays on-leash were loud and impressive! Even with a head halter, it was a real challenge for this owner to manage him on leash with other dogs nearby. She was obviously troubled by his behaviour but didn't know how to solve this problem.

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

We begin by securing a strong leash around a column in the training building, and make sure the dog's buckle collar is fitted properly. Then we describe all the steps we'll be taking so that the owner knows exactly what to do and when. We assure her the dog cannot hurt another dog, and that all the workshop attendees are grateful to have this live demonstration and won't mind sitting through his aggressive displays! Next, we ask

her to take a deep breath, think happy thoughts and act relaxed, even if she has to pretend at first!

With all the preliminaries in place, I select one of my own dogs as the first "decoy." Here's an important area to pay attention to - the decoy dogs you select for early training set-ups should be quiet and attentive to YOU, and should not react to the other dog's aggressive displays. If they react fearfully or aggressively, the other dog is likely to find this rewarding.) At first, I want to know the dog I'm using will keep his eyes on me - no staring at the other dog, and no posturing.

We enter the area in front of the tethered dog, probably 25' feet away, and walk calmly in a lateral fashion. This allows us to gradually close the distance between the dogs, without approaching head-on in a threatening (eye to eye) way. At first the Doberman doesn't even look in our direction, but of course he knows we are there because he has excellent peripheral vision. Since the dog is not reacting aggressively, his owner is warmly praising him and giving him tasty treats. He also willingly performs simple obedience cues for her.

Gradually, my side-to-side walking pattern brings us to a point where the Doberman feels compelled to respond aggressively. Instantly, two things happen: (1) his owner turns her back and walks off to one side, about 10' away from him, and (2) I stop in my tracks and have my dog sit. (If I led my dog away, our retreat would be a reward to the aggressive dog.) While we wait, I continue to talk to my dog and give her treats.

The Doberman lunges and vocalizes for a little while, but gets absolutely no results. This is significant - there is no owner reaction, no reaction from the other dog and no retreat. Then he realizes he's been abandoned and looks in his owner's direction, ceasing his aggressive displays. At that moment, I exit the area with my dog, and the owner is told to return to the Doberman, giving praise and treats. He is visibly relieved by her return.

I choose another one of my dogs and we repeat the same steps. This time, the Doberman allows us to come even closer before he responds aggressively. When his owner departs, he continues to aggress for only a brief time and then looks anxiously in her direction. "Where is my supporter?" he seems to be thinking. Again, he receives his two rewards when he stops aggressing.

Already, the owner is beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, and is clearly more relaxed and hopeful. We continue with my third dog, moving in a more animated fashion. I even have him bark and jump up occasionally for good measure, and we throw in a few "play bows" just in case the Doberman receives these as a message of good will. This time, we are able to approach to within 8-10 feet, and the Doberman's reaction is half-hearted. We could all see the wind had been knocked out of his sails! More importantly, he discovered it was much more enjoyable to focus on his owner and earn treats and attention.

With my fourth and final dog, we present a slightly new picture, because her body language exudes assertiveness. Sometimes, she can get in a brief but weighty stare if she perceives a challenge. This clever Doberman is already sorting things out and

despite us approaching to within six feet of him; he chooses not to react. Of course, his proud owner hugely rewards him!

We ended the session on that successful note, and were thrilled to see that the Doberman's behaviour during the remaining hours of the workshop had dramatically improved. Better yet, I received an email recently from the workshop's host and owner of the training facility, saying that the Doberman was in a beginner's agility class. She observed the following: "He's on a loose leash, totally focused on her [the owner] and not aggressing toward any of the other dogs. Ta-da! It's a miracle."

I am pleased to say this kind of dramatic success is not uncommon with John Fisher's "Two Reward Method." It is so gratifying to see the dogs make the decision to abandon their aggressive displays, and it's a real joy to see their owners' amazement and pleasure. Of course, this technique isn't an instant fix, and it cannot work in all aggressive situations.

If you have a dog that displays on-leash aggression, you may want to try this method with the help of a qualified trainer who can orchestrate these training situations.