



## Fence Fighting

A fenced yard is usually a blessing to dog owners. Sometimes when a barrier separates dogs they can become frustrated or reactive. From barking and growling to charging, if the fence line seems to become a battle zone, it can make outside time unbearable! Many dogs are reactive due to barriers but are wonderful when it disappears. Having a dog that fence fights does not make the dog a bad dog! Here are some tips to manage and train a dog that is reactive through a fence.



### Management

- If you have more than one dog: separate outside time. This allows time to work with each dog individually and prevents redirection until each dog has learned appropriate behavior
- Never leave dog outside unattended. Not only is it unsafe, it allows the dog time to practice behaviors such as fence fighting without you being there to interrupt.
- If financially possible, install a second fence within your fence.

Visual barriers can help curb this behavior. While training is still needed even with visual barriers (some dogs react to sounds), below are visual barriers for most budgets:

- Home depot sells rolls of “shade” for porches. This is a lot less expensive than re-fencing everything. Not as strong as re-fencing but adds an extra visual barrier/block.
- Slats put in chain link fences.
- Tarps, plywood or fiberglass reinforced plastic can also work as visual barriers.
- Landscaping
- Bamboo or reed rolls
- Coyote Rollers (for fence jumpers)
- To temporarily put something between a dog that is already fence fighting, a plastic lid from large Tupperware bin can become a divider between fence and dogs without putting your body in the way

Some trainers may recommend shake can with pennies or spray bottle with water. We avoid recommending this because the dog is not learning what you would like them to do! While this may help deter the dog, it may affect both dogs involved in a negative way. If your dog learns that the presence of other dogs = punishment, it can temporarily stop the behavior but does not address the issue long term. In some cases the reactivity can become fear or intensify and may show up in other situations. Instead of using aversives, catch the dog doing what you like. For instance, reward before the dog reacts (even if it is before your dog even steps outside) and reward by tossing treats away from the fenced area. Then continue rewarding as your dog stays away.

## Training

If you live in a multiple dog household, when you do reintroduce both dogs outdoors, consider putting a light leash on them and letting it drag. That way if you run into a training snag, you have a way of maintaining control.

When outside, reward often for avoiding the fence line and not reacting, especially when you first begin training. Like all training, always begin rewarding before the challenge is present. Rewarding sits and calm behaviors at the door or even in another room will help set you both up for success. Don't begin recall training outside, at the fence line! Start it inside with less distractions and then take it outside when you know the other dog is not outside, only after you have successfully rewarded your dog in those situations will you begin working with the distraction. Below are cues that are useful to teach your dog:

- Recall- Teaching your dog to come back when called even during distractions. See our recall handout for tips.
- “Leave it”. See our recall handout for tips.
- Targeting- teaching a dog to target your hand or an object can move the dog away from what they are reacting to.
  1. Place your hand, fingers down and palm forward, about 5 inches from the dog's nose. The dog will likely put his nose to you to investigate and smell your hand.
  2. As soon as his nose touches you, mark with an enthusiastic “Yes!” and give a food reward.
  3. Repeat 5 times, moving your hand an inch to the left or right each time. Once the dog understands the behavior, you can begin moving your hand further away and attaching the command “Touch.”
- Go to “place” You can add mats outside, so each dog has a designated place to go to. This will help when you are ready to let all dogs out at once.
- Drama free zone! Teach dog to run in the opposite direction from the drama. This exercise can also be worked on with the neighbors, to teach their dog that it is more beneficial to avoid the drama of fence fighting.
  1. Use a cue such as “away”. Start this without the other dogs in your house around.
  2. Begin during neutral time, such as when Flower first notices the other dog.
  3. Squeak a squeaker and say “Away!” while tossing high value treats away from the dog at the fence.

4. When she goes to the tossed treats, she gets a jackpot of twenty second of treats and love. Clip on leash to keep her with you then do a happy jog back to the house.

Hopefully these tips will help bring harmony back into your yard again. If you feel that you need further help with this issue, you may consider hiring a private trainer or behaviorist to help you. Please contact us at: [helpline@awla.org](mailto:helpline@awla.org)

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