

# How to Protect Your Pup When Out on a Walk

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Avoidance is the first choice. But how do you avoid being approached by a potential attacker?

1. Know your walking route. Walk your neighbourhood without your dog. Pay attention to what is going on when you drive to and from your neighbourhood during normal life activities.
  - a. Note where other pups live, pay attention to the routine of your neighbour's (for example: When do the kids come home from school and potentially open the front door and their pup accidentally get out?).
  - b. Be aware of which neighbour's are responsible pet persons and which aren't.
  - c. Note where pups are allowed to look out of the windows all day while their persons are at work and allowed to bark at passersby (these dogs are practicing being aggressive).
  - d. Note the homes which are having new construction (many times I've seen construction workers accidentally let out a pup from a home where they are working).
  - e. Note possible escape routes if you do encounter an off leash aggressive pup. Where are cars parked that you could hide behind? Which porches are easily accessible and have furniture on them you could use to block an attacking pup from you and your pup? Are there any fenced in yards with front gates where other pups don't live that you could go into if necessary? Which homes have someone home during the day where you could knock on their door for help if necessary? Look for dense shrubs which you could see over but your pup could hide behind.
  - f. Make a mental note of the time when you are most likely to encounter an off leash pup. Avoid taking walks at this time.
  - g. Try to think as proactively as possible, consider possible scenarios and based on what you now know about your walking route, plan ahead for avoidance.
  - h. If you notice a neighbour consistently breaking local leash laws, kindly and diplomatically speak to them. They may not know the law and they may not have considered the consequences of their actions. Mention that when a pup who is leashed is approached by an off leash pup, the leash pup feels threatened. If they are not those who could be safely approached or you have spoken with them and they continue to let their pup run loose, call the appropriate authorities and file a formal complaint. Also talk to other neighbour's about your concerns. Sometimes the pressure of other neighbour's will help them comply.

One of my neighbour's has let his very dog aggressive dog out to eliminate in his un-fenced yard for years. I always cross to the other side of the street from this house. If I see her out, I stop and wait behind a parked car until he calls her back in. She doesn't see us so all is well. I place my pups in a sit/wait or engage them in a game of touch or look at me depending on her distance from us. Once, there were not cars, I did not see her in time and she came barrelling across the street towards us. I went up onto a neighbour's porch, stepped to the side and moved a porch chair in between us which I'd already scouted out as a possible block years before.

2. While out on a walk, give a wide berth to homes and yards with visible and audible barking dogs. Dogs do not know that their property line ends at point "x". They may consider the sidewalk and entire street to be theirs to protect. Often times by just leaving the sidewalk and walking out into the middle of the street as you pass a pup's home, you avoid that pup feeling threatened. You are not only respecting their perceived territory, you may also, in dog language, giving a calming signal to them.

3. Become known as the "Treat Lady" or "Treat Man" to the pups in your neighbourhood. In my neighbourhood, almost everyone has a dog. Some leave their dogs out in the yard during the day. Most let their pups out into their fenced yards without constant supervision. Most yards are small and the fenced in area goes all the way to the sidewalk. As I walk the neighbourhood with my pups, if I see a dog out in the yard, I'll stop on the sidewalk at a distance or out in the middle of the street and have my pup sit beside me with his/her back to the other pup and my side to them. I then give treats to my pup and toss treats to the fenced in pup if possible at that distance. (Not at them but a few feet in front of where they are facing or just off to their side.) Over time, I was able to get closer to the fenced-in pups and continue treating my pup and them. (Never approach where they are head on. This is considered rude doggie behavior. Shorten your distance by approaching from a side.) The fenced in pups now bark when they see us coming but it is an "Oh, goody!" Here comes the "Treat Lady!" Not "Stay away from my property" bark. I've accomplished two things. I've worked on distraction proofing my pups and almost guaranteed if these pups get out they will approach us with happy intentions. (Before giving treats to these pups ask their person's permission and about any food allergies they may have.)

When out on a walk, I now can take my dogs up to the fence of most of my neighbour's dog's yard, have my pups sit calmly with their side facing the fence and drop treats over the fence for the begging pups. Just yesterday I took Dickens 20 feet into a neighbour's yard up to their fence, had him sit and gave him treats and handed treats through the picket fence to the two little dogs on the other side. Both of these dogs have bitten other dogs and people and growl and bark ferociously at both humans and canines, but not at me or any of my four pups, nor at any other dog I may be walking. They squeal in delight when they see us coming and coo to my pups. They then whine as we leave.

If you decide to play what I call the bribery game, you'll need to play this game every time you pass their home for awhile. After a month or so, depending on how often you see them out and can treat them and the level of their aggressive behavior in the beginning, you can start not giving them treats occasionally. I walk out into the street or on the other side of the street and ignore them at first. By adding a variable rate of reinforcement you hard wire them to the game.

### **So avoidance and bribery didn't work. What do you do?**

1. First remember and practice being calm in this situation; never, ever run or scream.
  - a. Train your pup to calmly sit beside you and behind you. Work on this in the home then while out on walks with no distractions, then with distractions at a distance, then with the distractions closer. Make sure you work on them being distracted by a barking dog. This can be accomplished while also working on slowly, over time, getting closer to a fenced in barking dog. You want it so that if another dog is off leash and rushing you, you can quickly and calmly cue your pup to sit beside you or behind you and they will. You want your pup to be looking at you, not at the offending other pup. Practice calming yourself by taking deep breaths and focusing on your pup. You must "be a tree", motionless and not facing the rushing pup. Your pup must be calm also. Try to remember to keep a loose leash. Tightened leashes may signal to your pup that there is a reason to be concerned, and it also may make them feel trapped.
  - b. Keep a pocketful of tiny treats. You want to carry so many treats with you that when you come home at the end of the walk you know you'll have a cup or more of treats left. (My pockets are bulging with treats and poop bags. If you wear an outfit that doesn't have pockets, purchase a carpenter's belt and always wear it filled with treats when out walking. Who cares if you look silly with a carpenter's belt on over your office or party attire if it prevents your pup from being attacked?!) If a dog is rushing towards you, grab a handful of treats and be ready to throw these in their direction. Usually a fast approaching dog will slow down before they get to you. Take this time to throw the handful of very high value

treats (freeze dried liver, freeze dried fish, boiled chicken) towards them. You do not want to throw directly at them if at all possible. You want to throw the treats and have them land a few feet from them at their side. Many times they will stop, turn to forage all of the scattered yummy treats which will give you enough time to slowly, calmly turn and get to safety.

- c. Wear a hat, carry a piece of 8 1/2" x 11" piece of rolled paper which would fall out into a flat shape when removed from its carrying place, wear a scarf, whatever could be used to block the line of vision of the charging pup. Place your pup in a sit beside you, hold his leash with one hand by your side, and hold an object in your other hand with your arm stretched out. When the other pup gets near, hold the object in front of his face, blocking his line of vision. As he steps to the side and tries to see around this vision blocker, maintain the vision block by moving the object with him as he moves. You may need to slowly turn your body to do so. During this time, you want your pup to remain sitting and still. Do not say anything. Eventually the dog will get fed up with this game of yours and move on or help may arrive. Stay in place and wait until the offending pup has moved a good distance away and is engrossed in something else before quietly and calmly leaving the area in a perpendicular direction from his location.

This really works. I had seen a video presentation of this technique and thought, yeah, right. Then, on a therapy visit with Dickens to a new facility, we were rushed by a breeding pair of what later turned out to be trained fighting pit bulls. The female was obviously nursing pups. I took off my hat, followed what I detailed above and maintained a visual block between them, Dickens and me. It was not easy since there were two of them, I was not familiar with this neighbourhood and I had never tried it before. If someone had videotaped the encounter and my resulting "smooth dance to maintain a block", I'm sure it would have become a classic; both horror and comedy. By the time their person called them to come to him, they were already on their way home, disgusted with the unfulfilling encounter. I, nor Dickens moved from our spot until I was sure they were secured. However, I'd already begun popping treats into Dickens' mouth, unobtrusively and quietly, as soon as they began to walk away. I wanted to make sure that if they came back, Dickens would be more likely to stay seated.

- d. Learn the body language of dogs. Know what they are saying when they approach. This will help you to not over react when being rushed by an offending pup. Stay calm. Remember, if a dog is barking at you, this is a warning. Thank the dog for the warning and slowly back up. A dog who is barking is not nearly as likely to attack as one who approaches you without barking but with warning signs of attack. A non-barking dog who is not ruffled and who is wagging their tail but whose mouth is in a "C" shape and has a face freeze on is a very serious threat. Immediate other methods should be put into play.
  - e. Do not pick your pup up into your arms to protect him. This only places him in a more threatening position to the other dog, makes your pup feel as if he can't get away, and places you in danger of being bitten.
2. If all else fails and the other dog does attack your dog, drop your dog's leash so that he can protect himself.
    - a. If at all possible, grab a nearby chair or some other large, easy to manoeuvre object and place it in between the two. You should be able to create a visual block between the two this way and if necessary, use the object to pry them apart. Make sure that the objects are large enough so that you do not risk getting bitten on your arms, hands and face.
    - b. You may also use the wheel barrow method to remove the attacking pup from yours. This manoeuvre is best if there are two people present or if you know your pup will not continue the attack once you remove the offending pup. The manoeuvre has other inherent dangers such as if you try to drag a pup off of one he has his mouth clamped onto, you risk causing more injury to the one being attacked. Grab both back legs of the attacker, lift them off of

the ground and move backwards. Most of the time this will allow the attackee to get away and the attacker's focus is not on you so you can release your wheelbarrow hold from him and he won't turn on you.

- c. Dump a bucket full of water on the heads of the fighting pups. This not only startles them, it also blocks their breathing so they have to release each other to get a breath. This will give you enough time to reposition yourself and your pup or to take other avoidance actions to prevent another attack.
- d. Using a loud, sharp noise such as banging two metal pots together, using an air horn, or mustering up a deep from within, very loud, very sharp "NO!" works sometimes but for others it only makes the attacking pup more frenzied. If you do use a loud noise, only use it once. If it doesn't work the first time, continuing to repeat the noise will only make matters worse.