

WHAT DOES PROGRESS LOOK LIKE FOR THE HUMAN?

Progress is not just about how your dog is doing but how you are changing too. There are three things you may notice.

The first is that you are more aware of what is going on with your dog as well as what is happening in the environment. You will notice as soon as your dog starts to get concerned, whereas before you may only have realised when they were barking and lunging. You know which situations your dog can handle and take action when they need support.

The second is that your skills are improving and you are using tools and techniques to support your dog more naturally. So, now, when the lead gets tight, you know how to release the tension and when you see a trigger coming you calmly move your dog to safety.

The third is that you are becoming more resilient. You bounce back from stressful episodes quickly and can handle stress more easily. You don't worry as much when something goes wrong and see it as an opportunity to learn and improve.

When you notice these three things, you know you are making progress. Celebrate - you deserve it!



WHAT DOES PROGRESS LOOK LIKE FOR THE DOG?

Sometimes you can feel like you are not making any progress with your dog especially if they are still reacting to things that concern them. Remember that dogs are emotional beings and reacting to situations that worry them is natural. Your aim is to reduce the number of situations where your dog feels the need to react.

You can measure your progress towards this goal in three ways.

Firstly, track the distance from which your dog can comfortably watch a trigger. Is it reducing over time? It's not a race to decrease distance, but keeping track of your dog's responses will help you notice their progress.

Secondly, look at how quickly your dog recovers after a reaction. How long does it take them to relax their body language and show interest in something else? As you continue to work with your dog, they will begin to recover more quickly.

Thirdly, note the intensity of your dog's reaction. What behaviours do they display? Is it an intense outburst or a single bark? As your dog begins to become less concerned, their reactions will change. It will be easier to interrupt them and regain their focus.

These are three key indicators of progress. Remember that even if your dog reacts sometimes you are still moving forward and should celebrate your wins!



SUCCESSFUL STEALTH TRAINING

In stealth training you work your dog around things in the environment rather than doing set-ups with helpers. This is a good way to practice between sessions with your trainer or if you can't find suitable assistants.

Stealth training happens separately to walks. You go out specifically to work on your dog's reactivity and select locations where you can see triggers at a safe distance for your dog and ensure they will not have a bad experience.

If your dog's triggers are other dogs then you could watch them through a fence or visit an area where dogs have to be kept on lead. If their triggers are children then you could train near to a school boundary at play time.

Find places where you can watch your dog's triggers without them being able to reach you.

Position yourself across a road, behind a fence or even on the other side of a body of water.

You can use your vehicle as the base from which to train. This gives you both a barrier to go behind and a safe place to take frequent breaks. Large car parks can be great for stealth training. Many people travel with dogs and will keep them on lead near the road. This is perfect for working with your dog while other dogs pass by.

You are always working at a distance where the other person or dog are unconcerned and ideally unaware. If you notice anyone being disturbed by you and your dog, stop and move away immediately. There will be plenty of other opportunities to train!

Stealth training gives you the chance to practice with your dog in safe, realistic situations. If you do it regularly you will soon see progress!



REACTIVITY BINGO

Reactivity Bingo is a great way to shift your mindset from threat to challenge because you will be focusing on problem solving rather than what could go wrong. You can play it two ways.

In Best-Case Reactivity Bingo you write on your card all the good things that might happen on your walks. Examples include someone saying your dog is very well-trained or your dog making a good choice or you successfully averting a potential danger. Think of lots of these potential "best-case" scenarios, then mark them on your Bingo card when they actually happen.

If you can't imagine enough "best-case" examples then try Worst-Case Reactivity Bingo! You predict all the things that could go wrong: meeting a "my dog is friendly" pet-parent, your dog losing their rag or you losing patience with your dog. Again mark them off if they happen. This gives you a win-win. If they don't happen you win, and if they do, you will still feel differently about them because you get a win in your game!

And don't forget to give yourself a prize for a line or a full house. Rewarding yourself is just as important as rewarding your dog!



WALKING WITH OTHER DOGS

When your dog is ready to go for walks closer to other dogs, choose your location and the dogs you walk with wisely.

First walk in the area alone or with only your dog so you are aware of potential hazards.

When you go out to walk with another dog make sure you are familiar with your dog's body language and note whether they are showing comfort or concern. You will also need to watch the other dog.

Take things at your dog's pace - you may not get to the point of walking with the other dog in your outing but that is ok. Ensuring your dog has a good experience matters more than how much progress you make - and you'll make quicker progress overall if you ensure your dog is enjoying themselves.

Let your dog engage in activities they enjoy such as sniffing, training, or checking in with you and use their favourite reinforcers when out with new dogs. If this is food, be sure to carry more than you think you need so you don't run out. Always deliver the reinforcement so that your dog turns away from the other dog to get it. This will prevent them feeling any pressure to move closer to the other dog to get their reward.



Your dog's experience begins as soon as you arrive in the car or step outside of your house. Plan with the other person ahead of time to walk in a parallel fashion or with one dog following the other, giving each other plenty of space. It is much easier to follow than to be followed so allow the dog who is helping to lead the way. Wide open spaces like fields and car parks or quiet roads are great options for parallel walking. Allow your dog to choose the distance and be careful not to accidentally lead them closer to the other dog.

You can use partial barriers in the environment, such as chain link fences, to provide an extra layer of safety, but don't be tempted to rush the process and get too close too quickly.

Throughout, watch for your dog being able to look away from the other dog and engage in activities they enjoy. You want them to see, hear and smell the dog while remaining unconcerned.

The goal is for both dogs to be neutral in each other's presence. It is ok if they choose not to interact with each other or play - after all not all dogs want close social contact. If you follow these steps carefully you may soon find your dog enjoys walking with others.



USING WHAT'S IN THE ENVIRONMENT

While out on a walk, there may be things that appear unexpectedly. When these sudden changes occur, the environment can be a great source of help to keep your dog safe and prevent them from overreacting.

If you find a trigger is getting too close to you and your dog, look for things that can help block the view. You might be able to move behind a larger object such as a trash can or parked car while the trigger passes. Reinforce your dog for staying with you until it's safe to move on again.

Using an alley, driveway or other open area can help create the space your dog needs. You can also keep your dog's focus by doing other behaviors together such as fun tricks.

A row of bushes or a tree can be a great spot to encourage your dog to spend time sniffing instead of reacting to triggers.

No matter where you are when you encounter a trigger, there will likely be things in the environment that you can proactively use to help keep your dog safe. Sometimes all you need is a little imagination.



PRACTISING HAZARD AWARENESS

You may be on alert when you are out with your dog, worrying there might be another dog or scary human around every corner. You need to be aware of possible hazards in the environment so that you can keep your dog safe but this doesn't have to be stressful for you.

If you are an experienced driver, you notice potential hazards when you are in your car, but this is rarely stressful and does not stop you listening to the radio or holding a conversation at the same time.

This is because you have practiced hazard awareness while driving - and you can do the same for walking your dog.

First choose walking locations that are as open as possible. This allows you to create space for your dog when needed and lets you spot areas that may be risky - perhaps the path becomes narrower or there is a bend you can't see around.



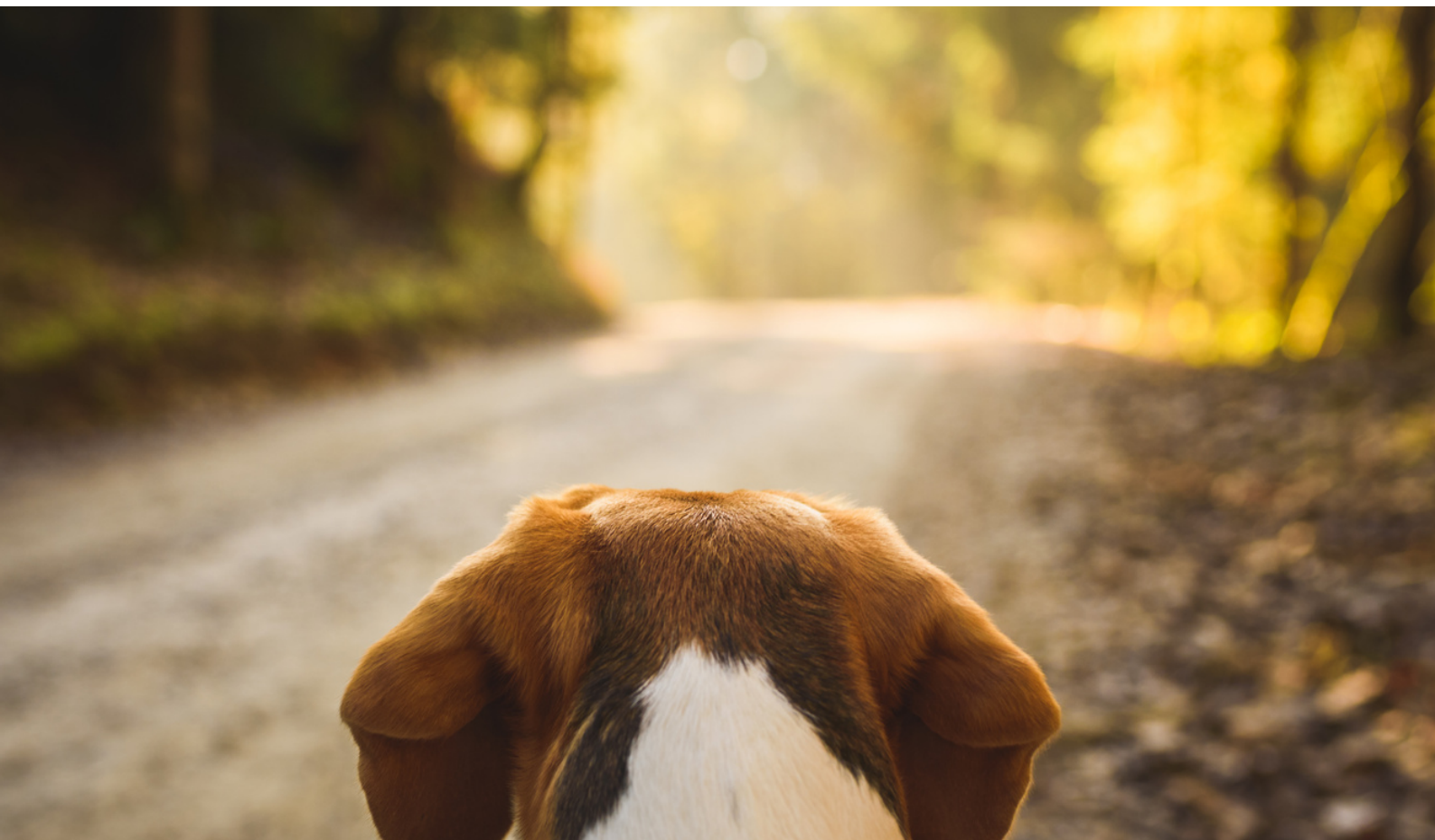
Practice looking around corners before your dog and plan what to do if someone else is coming. Get into the habit of noting where the nearest “passing place” is - perhaps you can move into a driveway or behind a parked car?

A great way to build your hazard handling skills is to go out without your dog and see what you encounter. What would you do if this happened when you were walking your dog?

Another tip is to video these outings so that you can rewatch later. This gives you the opportunity to practice spotting common hazards but also gives you the chance to pick up on things you didn't notice at the time. In fact, watching any footage of dog walking environments is great to hone your skills. As you watch, imagine you are there with your dog. Where are your escape routes? Where would you have to take extra care?

Our brains learn almost as effectively when we practice in our imagination as when we do tasks in reality.

So take every opportunity to practice dog walking hazard awareness and you will soon find going out with your dog much more relaxing.



EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Sometimes you'll find yourself in challenging situations with your dog. Perhaps someone wants to meet your dog and is insisting on coming closer or maybe they let their "friendly" dog come running over. Having strategies in place to cope in emergency situations can really help you remain calm and support your dog.

The first is to tell people what you need. It may seem obvious to you, but not everyone understands that some dogs need more space than others.

Use a hand signal to back up your words - holding your palm out in front of you is a universal prompt to stop and can be seen from a distance. Be clear, concise and polite in what you need and most people will respond positively if they are able to.

If they ignore you or they can't control their dog, your second strategy is to get away. This may involve crossing the road, turning around or taking a different route. Make use of skills like Let's Go and the Pattern Games to move your dog quickly in an emergency.



When dealing with an incoming dog you may also need to buy yourself some time so that you can get to safety. One strategy is to use a Treat Shower. Simply take a handful of treats and throw them into the path of the approaching dog. Most dogs will stop and investigate, giving you and your dog time to move away. Make sure your dog knows that you have even better treats for them so that they don't try to go after the treats you are throwing.

Finally remember you can use barriers in the environment such as fences, cars and roads to create safety for your dog.

A pop up umbrella can create an instant portable barrier where other options are limited. If another dog is persistent in trying to reach you, simply pop up the umbrella in front of your dog. This blocks the view of the approaching dog and might confuse them enough to stop them coming closer without causing harm.

You will need to teach your own dog that the pop up umbrella is not scary before you are able to do this. Introduce it slowly during calm, fun activities like Free Work where they can explore at their own pace. You'll want to practice opening it at a distance first so they get used to it popping up without concern before bringing it closer.

You can't always predict what other people will do but you can make sure that you and your dog are prepared for all situations!



HAZARDS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

A hazard is any danger in the environment. You can't always avoid them, but you can prepare by thinking ahead and planning appropriate action.

What constitutes a hazard depends on you and your dog. They can be things that worry or over-excite your dog. Or places where your dog could get into trouble or where visibility is poor. Sometimes hazards can appear suddenly without warning.

You can handle hazards by creating space or using activities and games you have taught your dog to help them cope better in challenging situations. Having an exit strategy will help you get out of tricky situations as quickly as possible.

Using equipment like a long line ensures you can get your dog back in an emergency.

When walking your dog, being aware of potential hazards is important but you'll also want to be able to assess the risk in any situation in order to plan the most sensible course of action.



What is the likelihood of something going wrong and what is the worst-case scenario if it does?

Sometimes the worst outcome is not serious, so you may be able to take a risk. Other times the worst outcome is disastrous and you need to be really careful.

For example, walking your dog along a short narrow lane where you're likely to meet people isn't a problem if your dog has an excellent U turn. The worst case scenario is that you will retrace your steps a short distance.

However if your dog is triggered by other animals and you're walking past a field of livestock it is best to keep your dog on a lead. The likelihood of the fencing being damaged is low, but the worst outcome is that your dog gets into the field, attacks the livestock and is killed. This risk is just not worth taking!

Think about hazards in advance. Assess the risk, plan your response and you'll be well on the way to stress-free walks with your dog.

