



ALPINE K9

Reactivity Recovery Roadmap

by Grayson Butler

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About The Trainer

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Dogs don't need perfection; they need leadership. Calm direction builds trust, and trust builds teamwork. When you lead with clarity, your dog follows with confidence. ■

Grayson Butler



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In the dynamic realm of dog training, Grayson Butler, has been a beacon to 800+ clients and their dogs on their journey to the ultimate dog lifestyle. With a passion for canine behavior and a deep understanding of the human-canine bond, he has transformed countless households into harmonious havens.

Grayson's approach combines empathy, expertise, and a touch of humor, making the training process enjoyable for both pets and their owners. His innovative methods focus on positive reinforcement, ensuring that each dog learns in an environment filled with love and respect. He specializes in helping dogs regulate their nervous systems, so they can learn to leave the fight-flight cycle and choose peace and acceptance.

His philosophy is simple yet profound: a well-trained dog is not just obedient, but a balanced partner in life's adventures. Whether tackling common behavioral issues or embarking on advanced training, Grayson ensures that the journey is as rewarding as the destination. For those seeking a transformative experience in dog training, Grayson Butler offers not just solutions, but a lifelong bond of understanding and companionship.

How *Reactivity* Impacts Your Dog

One of the most common struggles I see owners having lately is reactivity to dogs or people. This isn't just a bad behaviour its an insecure state of mind. Reactivity often stems from fear or anxiety, and it's important to approach it with empathy and understanding. Dogs may react defensively when they feel threatened or unsure in certain situations. Reactivity isn't just about barking or lunging—it's a stress response rooted in the dog's nervous system. It impacts how they feel, think, and respond to their environment.

Symptoms of Reactivity

Emotional Symptoms

- Heightened anxiety or hypervigilance
- Over-arousal in stimulating environments
- Difficulty calming down after an event
- Frustration when unable to reach the trigger

Behavioural Symptoms

- Barking, growling, whining, or howling
- Lunging, pulling hard on the leash, or pacing
- Snapping or nipping when feeling cornered
- Excessive focus on the trigger (can't disengage)

Cognitive Symptoms

- Shortened attention span
- Struggles to learn or respond to cues in the moment
- Difficulty thinking through choices—reacts impulsively
- Tunnel vision (sees only the trigger, not handler)

Physical Symptoms

- Tense body language (stiff posture, raised hackles)
- Dilated pupils, ears pinned back, rapid breathing
- Shaking, drooling, or shedding excessively
- Elevated heart rate (stress response)

Understanding *Your* Reactive Dog's Mindset

Understanding a reactive dog's mindset means recognizing that their behavior is not disobedience or defiance, but an emotional response driven by their nervous system. What feels ordinary to us—a passing dog, a runner, or a car—can feel overwhelming or even threatening to them, triggering a fight, flight, or freeze reaction. In those moments, their body floods with stress hormones, making it difficult for them to think clearly or respond to cues. They are not giving you a hard time; they are having a hard time. By seeing reactivity through this lens, we can shift from frustration to empathy, focusing on trust, safety, and structured training that helps them develop coping skills and confidence.

Key Points

01

Stress Responses

When faced with stress a dog will go through the following responses: fight, flight, avoid, or accept. A reactive dog is stuck in fight.

02

Overstimulated & Insecure

Many reactive dogs experience constant sensory overload, which makes even normal situations feel overwhelming. They may lack confidence in navigating their environment.

03

Disregulation vs Disobedience

What appears as ignoring commands is often a nervous system that is overwhelmed. Their emotional state prevents them from thinking clearly or responding. Understanding this helps handlers respond with patience, not frustration.

04

Regulation is the Solution

The focus should be on helping dogs manage their emotions, not punishing them. Coping skills, structure, and calm guidance teach them how to self-regulate. Over time, they learn to respond calmly instead of reacting impulsively.

The Pillars of Reactivity Recovery

01

Rest

Recovery starts with rest. Reactive dogs are often living in a heightened state of stress, and constant stimulation makes it difficult for them to calm down. Providing regular downtime, predictable routines, and quiet spaces allows their nervous system to reset and prepares them to engage more successfully in training.

02

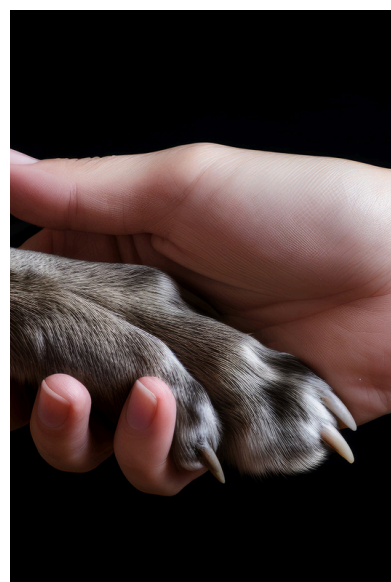
Regulation

Regulation is the foundation of long-term reactivity recovery. Teaching a dog how to manage stress, cope with triggers, and maintain emotional balance helps them respond thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively. Techniques such as controlled exposures, calming exercises, and structured guidance empower them to self-soothe and gain confidence.

03

Relationship

Strong relationships built on calm, confident leadership are essential for recovery. When a dog feels safe and guided by a steady, reassuring handler, they are more willing to trust cues and engage in positive behaviors. Consistent communication, structure, and support strengthen the bond and help the dog respond with confidence instead of fear.



Building Your *Training Program*

01

Step 1: Assess Your Dog

Begin by **observing your dog's behaviour, triggers, and stress signals**. Identify situations that provoke reactivity, as well as areas where your dog shows confidence or skills. This assessment gives you a clear baseline to measure progress.

- **What distance away from a trigger is your dog comfortable and calm?**
- **How long into a training session does my dog display reactivity?**
- **Where do I see my dog's confidence shine?**

02

Step 2: Set Realistic Goals

- **Define what success looks like for your dog in measurable terms.** Goals might include calm behavior around triggers, improved focus, or mastering coping skills. Break larger goals into achievable steps to avoid overwhelming your dog.
- Goals should **be attainable, and realistic**: having a goal of your reactive dog playing with other dogs could take time, or not be possible depending on the dog.

03

Step 3: Create a Plan around the 3 Pillars

Build your program using the three pillars of recovery:

- **Rest:** Ensure your dog has predictable downtime to reset and recover.
- **Regulation:** Teach coping strategies, emotional balance, and controlled responses to triggers.
- **Relationships:** Provide calm, confident leadership to build trust and cooperation.

04

Step 4: The 3 D's

Incorporate the Three D's to reinforce learning and behaviour change:

- **Distance:** Start far from triggers and gradually decrease distance as confidence grows.
- **Duration:** Increase the length of exposure slowly to prevent overwhelm.
- **Distraction:** Introduce controlled distractions to help your dog practice focus and self-regulation in real-world scenarios.

How To *Become a Pack Leader*

Becoming an elevated pack leader isn't about dominance or force—it's about calm, confident guidance that inspires trust and cooperation in your dog. An elevated leader understands their dog's emotional and physical needs, communicates clearly, and provides structure that promotes safety, confidence, and balance.

01

Cultivate Calm Confidence

Dogs are highly attuned to their handler's energy. Remaining calm and composed in all situations signals safety and predictability. This doesn't mean suppressing emotion—it means responding thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively.

02

Set Clear Boundaries and Expectations

Consistency is key. Your dog needs to understand what behaviors are acceptable and what is off-limits. Clear, consistent cues and expectations reduce confusion, anxiety, and reactive behaviors. Communicate with your leash what behaviours you want to see.

03

Emphasize Training and Emotional Regulation

An elevated pack leader prioritizes both skills and emotional wellbeing. Use training methods that teach coping strategies, calm focus, and confidence-building rather than punishment. Helping your dog regulate their emotions is as important as teaching commands.

04

Provide Structure and Routine

Structure creates security. Scheduled walks, training sessions, meals, and downtime help your dog know what to expect and reduce stress. A predictable environment allows them to focus on learning and self-regulation.

Transforming Your *Lifestyle*



Your dog's ability to recover from reactivity is only as strong as your training plan. Build a solid foundation, avoid flooding and find calm.

Guide to Making Training Part of Your Lifestyle



01. Build Consistent Routines

Structure daily activities like walks, meals, playtime, and training sessions. Predictable routines reduce stress, create security, and help your dog understand what's expected.

03. Use Short, Focused Sessions

Keep training sessions brief and frequent. Focus on one skill at a time, gradually increasing difficulty as your dog improves. Short sessions maintain engagement and prevent overwhelm.

05. Reinforce Calm, Positive Behaviours

Reward your dog for calm, regulated responses rather than punishing reactivity. Consistent reinforcement strengthens desired behaviors and builds confidence.

02. Incorporate the 3 Pillars

- **Rest:** Schedule quiet downtime to allow your dog to recover from stimulation.
- **Regulation:** Teach coping strategies and self-control to manage stress and triggers.
- **Relationships:** Lead with calm, confident guidance to build trust and cooperation.

04. Apply The 3 D's

- **Distance:** Start away from triggers and close in gradually.
- **Duration:** Increase the time your dog is exposed to situations slowly.
- **Distraction:** Add controlled distractions to practice focus in real-world environments.

06. Maintain Flexibility & Adjustments to Training

Observe how your dog responds and adapt your training as needed. Flexibility allows you to respond to your dog's needs, ensuring long-term progress and reducing stress for both handler and dog.

Key Steps to *Co-Regulation Exercises*



01. Prepare a Distraction-Free Zen Environment

Choose a quiet space where your dog feels safe and free from triggers. A calm setting allows both you and your dog to focus and practice regulation.

02. Grab a Leash and Stand with Your Dog

Use a leash for gentle guidance and safety, keeping your dog close but relaxed. Your presence should feel steady and supportive.

03. Breathe Deeply, and Visualize

Center yourself with slow, deep breaths. Visualize calm, confident energy flowing from you to your dog—dogs are highly attuned to your state.

04. Wait for Calm

Be patient and allow your dog to settle. Reward subtle signs of calm—soft body language, relaxed breathing, or attention on you.

05. Add Distractions

Once your dog is calm in the baseline environment, gradually introduce mild distractions. Maintain your calm presence and reinforce regulated behavior, increasing challenge slowly over time.

06. Practice Daily

Consistency is key. Short, daily sessions help your dog learn to co-regulate reliably and strengthen the bond between handler and dog.



A reactive dog isn't being disobedient—they're responding to a world that feels overwhelming. Understanding their fear, frustration, and stress is the first step toward trust, calm, and connection.



Want help laying
the foundation?
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is here to help you.

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