

ENCOUNTERING A THREATENING OFF LEASH DOG ON A WALK

SCENARIO: You take your dog for a walk through your neighborhood (or frankly, anywhere). Suddenly, a strange dog rounds a corner or a neighbor's dog darts out of a yard or off of a porch and it is immediately obvious that this dog does NOT intend anything good toward you and/or your dog.

If the dog charges toward you and your dog OR even if the dog approaches/encroaches at a seemingly more reserved pace, but in an unsettling or threatening manner...WHAT DO YOU DO?

You need to know what to do BEFORE you encounter a situation like this; rather than AFTER the fact. BE PREPARED, have a game plan. To be honest, this is the same thing people "without" a dog should consider if they walk or jog anywhere.

If you encountered a dog in these circumstances, it would be unnerving enough if you are by yourself. BUT, it is even more serious if you have a dog or dogs with you. Hopefully, your dog is "on leash". And, I actually prefer walking a dog on a harness no matter how good they are with you. The reason for the harness is should the unexpected occur and your dog senses danger or something untoward, they WILL want to protect you and themselves!!! They will know and sense what you cannot and if the threat is significant enough, your dog will do anything to get free from the vulnerability of being "restrained" in a dangerous situation. Dogs will be able to pull out of "collars" you would never conceive they could and if they can't, they will go into sheer PANIC mode.

Just as people have more strength in emergency/panic situations, so do the dogs. So, even if your dog is on a collar that they cannot pull out of, they may well have the strength to pull a leash out of your hand. At least a harness does give you more physical control in unusual circumstances. There is no guarantee, BUT you will increase your physical advantage.

I recommend that people walking their dogs ALWAYS have something with them to keep a dangerous or possibly dangerous dog at bay. You can have a "pocket sized" pepper spray or mace mechanism. On a walk, you want these to be easily accessible without having to get them out or unclip them. Consider that in an emergency situation, you do NOT want to have to take "time" to access your safety mechanism. Rather, you want them to be clipped on your belt with a "pull free" clip or a neck chain you could easily break free with a big pull or in a front facing fanny pouch that you could get to it without having to look to find it. These items should be easily and readily accessible. This is imperative.

Let me take a moment to give a word of caution. Please be prudent. DO NOT OVERREACT...but, equally important is to NOT WAIT TOO LONG TO REACT. It is a fine line, but crucial to take into account. Consider IF somehow your dog got loose from you or out your front door and went running through the neighborhood. They come upon another owner and dog on their walk and your dog barks like crazy and charges in...even if they mean "no harm".

Would you want someone walking in your neighborhood to...without a thought, pulled out the pepper spray or mace or used a stick to keep your dog at bay when your dog was just running toward them barking “hello” (albeit a bit too enthusiastically), BUT is misinterpreted the other person? You would be at the Vet with your dog before you could bat an eye. By the same token, no one can afford to wait too long to assess a situation before taking action. Like I said, it is a fine line.

Some people use INVISIBLE FENCING and their dog or dogs could charge right up to the “invisible barrier” and they know exactly how far they can go without incurring the “shock” from their collar. You should make yourself aware of which (if any) homes on your walks use the Invisible Fencing. If you do not, you could end up spraying a dog that would NOT actually end up being a true danger to you or your dog. Additionally, realize that “your dog” will NOT KNOW this charging, highly reactive, and seemingly threatening dog is confined by an “invisible fence”. This would likely cause your dog to become highly reactive and defensive. Remember that if your dog is “off” leash” or at the full length of your Flexi Leash...they could end up INSIDE the invisible barrier and this could lead to the same issues as encountering dogs not restrained by an Invisible Fence.

NOTE: I do NOT recommend Invisible Fencing for many reasons. There is an article on the dangers of [Invisible Fencing](#) on this website.

That said, I would prefer to ERR on the side of caution...rather than risk serious injury or worse to my dog or myself. I just ask that you react with at least a moment’s consideration, as opposed to reacting from a sheer and instantaneous “fear reflex”.

Another item that could well be effective is a pocket sized AIR HORN. These are like the big canister air horns that are used at football games, etc. There are smaller versions that are approximately the same size as the pocket sized pepper or mace sprays mechanisms. These make a sound as loud as the bigger versions and may well startle the charging/encroaching dog and/or run them off. Also, there is a good chance that with this loud sound, someone will hear this and look out a window and could be of help.

There are some “reactions/reflexes” that are common because of human nature and yet could exacerbate the situation. You can yell at the dog telling them to HEY, GO ON or NO, GET AWAY or similar type comments. This may work. BUT, be aware that sometimes “yelling” at a dog will INCITE the dog. Meaning that merely a loud, raised voice can be interpreted by a dog as “threatening” and suddenly a dog that was all “bluff and bluster” is now “threatened”. This completely alters and can significantly change the dynamic of the situation. IF you are going to try a verbal reaction, use a slightly raised volume...BUT, the tone should be “firm and stern”, NOT threatening.

DO NOT ever wave your hand/arm toward the dog to “shoo” them away. Almost all dogs will see this as a threat. DO NOT kick out toward them because this is even a more aggressive, threatening action to a dog. Many people carry walking sticks. However, waving these at a dog could INCITE a dog into an attack, when they would not otherwise actually attack.

For owners of small dogs, you have another major consideration and reflexive reaction to factor in. When you have small dog and feel there is an unsafe situation, you reflex by picking up your dog. This can actually increase the danger. If the charging or encroaching dog is also a small dog, you would want to make sure you get your dog AND their tail high enough that the dog on the ground CANNOT reach any part of your dog! Trust me, many small dogs can jump waist or even mid chest high. This means that your arms and your dog's TAIL (if you do not manage to secure the tail) are within reach of chomping jaws!

Additionally, picking up your dog can create a worse case scenario. WHY? Because when a dog does NOT have "full foot purchase", all four paws on the ground...they feel vulnerable. Moreover, the dog on the ground KNOWS the dog that does not have all four paws on the ground is vulnerable. This actually will cause the dog in your arms to start fighting/struggling to get down to protect themselves AND the dog on the ground is even more intent on getting your dog WHILE they are vulnerable!!!

IF you find yourself in a truly dangerous situation with another dog, all you can do is try to protect yourself and your dog as much as possible. IF the other dog is of the same "relative size" as your dog and there is actually contact (a fight or attack) between your dog and the other small dog, you have at least some time to react and possibly get the dogs apart and hopefully be able to further protect you dog or get the other dog to run off. There may be some blood spilled, but you still have some time and some options before there is serious or life threatening injury to your dog.

However, when you have a small breed and there is a medium or large sized dog that is the issue...you have few options. The reason is, when a medium or large dog jumps, attacks your small dog...the best case outcome is your dog is injured, and very possibly a serious injury. BUT, be aware that with a significant size discrepancy...it could all be over in literally a split of a second!!!!!!

It has long been recommended that when a person is attacked or an attack is eminent to get on the ground and curl up in a ball with your arms over your head and protecting your face. Yes, you may well be bitten on the body and arms, but you minimize the chance of truly serious, life threatening, or disfiguring injuries. This same approach is what I recommend with small dogs when it becomes apparent that you and your dog will be physically attacked. By this point, you have seconds to take a physically protective position. I would curl into the "ball" and use your body as a protective shell around your small dog. IF you stay standing, trying to get your dog off the ground and the attacking dog is medium to large size, their jumping up to get at your dog can knock you down or you could end up dropping your dog. Remember, your dog will also be struggling in your arms from fear and the need to self protect. Even if you managed to remain upright, your chance of getting your dog HIGH enough to be safe is remote, especially if you are being bitten in the attack and the other dog is intent on getting at your dog.

Everyone who walks their dog should consider this type of scenario and have a "game plan" and hopefully ALWAYS have protection items with you like the pepper spray, mace, or air horn. NEVER leave your house without something of this nature. Remember, it only takes once.

By the way, everything I have discussed is precisely the same reasons that NO DOG should ever be walked without being on a leash. I don't care how obedient your dog is. In a situation of this nature, instinct will override. And, your ability to contain and protect your dog AND deal with the other dog will be diminished, if not impossible. My dogs are never off leash in an "unsecured" environment. If anyone's dog was going to obey their owner's commands, it would be mine. I am 99.9999% certain I could contain any of my dogs, but I am not willing to risk my dogs' lives on that .0001% chance. I will also add that the same thing applies when a squirrel or rabbit or some other critter darts out right in front of your dog. Granted you MAY be able to contain your dog...BUT, what if this is the one time that their instincts override your command and it can happen with ANY dog. I will say once again that it ONLY takes once!

BE PREPARED, BE PRUDENT, BE SAFE!

Deb Duncan

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