



Rutland Dog Training

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On Lead Aggression by Adam Beral

We have a happy and laid back 3 year old Springer Spaniel (male but neutered). He has developed a behaviour pattern of being aggressive towards certain breeds of dog when he is on the lead, mainly German Shepherds and Boxers. He barks and strains on his lead towards the other dog even if the other dog is completely ignoring him. When off the lead I have no such worries with him and he behaves perfectly. I have taken to crossing the road to avoid bumping into these types of dog, but he is still upset by them and barks. Any ideas you have on how to help improve this situation would be appreciated.

This is a surprisingly common problem; many people have dogs who show aggression only when on the lead and only towards specific breeds or types of dog. Often, the secret to successfully combating the problem is to alter your behaviour, not his.

Dogs being walked on a lead is a necessary precaution but one that goes against their instincts and forces them into unnatural behaviour. When meeting, two dogs will never approach each other head-on, it is potentially very confrontational. Watch any two dogs meet naturally (say, for example, when off the lead) and they will take an arcing approach and meet each other from the back. Conversely, humans approach each other head-on because we are such a visual species and rely on being able to see each others facial expressions.

The association to particular breeds may be due to you or your dog have had some unpleasant experience with either a Boxer or a German Shepherd in the past. It may even have been a totally forgettable experience, such as a loud bang startling him as a Boxer walked past, causing a sudden and lasting impression to be formed.

Further, if you as an owner are *expecting* your dog to behave aggressively around certain other dogs, you are naturally going to become tense at the very sight of another dog. Your body will stiffen and your energy noticeably changes. Your voice will become tense. You will, no doubt, get a good grip on the lead and reel your dog in. All of these are signals that tell your dog trouble is on the horizon. The natural fight or flight response kicks in, however your dog is on a lead and so his flight option is limited; all that is left is fight.



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Most dogs want to avoid a fight, so will put on a loud and startling display of barking and lunging to scare off a potential attacker. Often, as is the case with your dog, he is not actually aggressive towards dogs when allowed to meet them on his terms. I would suggest you concentrate on your body language. Relax all tension on the lead, speak in a very cheerful tone and get his attention on you using a treat. Instead of crossing the road, divert his attention by jogging with your dog round in circles (if safe to do so) before he starts his aggressive display. When the other dog has gone by, praise him for not reacting!

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