

It's a great idea to have a strategy/strategies in mind in case you and your dog are ever confronted with a loose dog while on your adventures together. This is something that many dog owners have to deal with at some point, so knowing your options when a situation like that does arise can help you and your dog stay safe.

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## REMEMBER: YOUR DOG'S SAFETY AND WELL-BEING IS ALWAYS THE PRIORITY!

- In any dog interaction (off-leash or on), your own dog's safety has to be your main concern.
- As much as you might want to avoid risking or causing harm to the other dog, we have to remember that your primary responsibility is to your own on-leash dog.
- Because of this priority, some of the strategies you might need to use when your dog is being approached by a loose dog are more aversive towards the other dog and towards their person than we would hope. These measures are sometimes necessary to preserve the health and safety of everyone involved.
- In many cases, especially if your dog is reactive or has a bite history towards other dogs, prioritizing your dog's safety by getting distance from the off-leash dog (by whatever means necessary) is ALSO keeping the other dog safe as well.
- If your dog has a bite history, preserving the distance between the two dogs is especially important and therefore might require especially forceful strategies to keep the other dog away.



In this handout, we'll discuss the off-leash dog strategies in order of mild to high on a scale of potential safety impact & risk for the other (off-leash) dog.

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## STRATEGIES WITH **MILD** IMPACT TO THE OTHER DOG

- Toss a big handful of treats at the approaching dog's face and quickly turn and walk away with your dog while the other dog is cleaning up.
- Yell "SIT!" while making a hand cue as well. This is the most common behavior to teach dogs, so some (although definitely not all) dogs will stop in their tracks and either sit or pause long enough for you to try another strategy.
- Find a nearby obstacle (like a picnic table, electrical box, or the back of a pickup truck) and ask your dog to get up and sit. This elevation gives you some safety and control to be able to implement an intervention strategy. (Practice "Get Up" outside of the off-leash dog situation first!)

### **Communicating With the Other Dog's Owner (if Present)**

- If the owner is present, try to help them understand the need for distance in a few ways.
- Call towards the other owner, "Can you call your dog?" PLUS a statement such as: "My dog needs space." "My dog is contagious!" "I'm deathly allergic to [insert dog breed here]." "My dog is recovering from an injury." Even if those statements aren't exactly true, they will likely/hopefully cause more prompt response than "Can you call your dog?" standing alone.
- What NOT to say: "My dog is mean." "My dog will bite." Even if those things are true, if your dog is on a leash it doesn't matter if they are likely to bite. And communicating ahead of time that your dog is likely to react in a certain way can make things messy if your dog does react in that way and a bite occurs.

### **Have Your Dog Wear a Muzzle Even if it Isn't Strictly Necessary**

- Muzzles are easy to see from a distance and they cue other owners that their dog should keep distance.
- Even if your dog isn't a bite risk, if you are often getting surprised and overwhelmed by off-leash dogs, this is something that can encourage people to call their dogs away more quickly and give you the space you are looking for.
- If you want to explore this option, see our Muzzle 101 handout for more details on how to train your dog to wear a muzzle calmly & comfortably.



## STRATEGIES WITH **MEDIUM** IMPACT TO THE OTHER DOG

- Use a citronella spray product to keep the other dog at bay. We recommend PetSafe SprayShield. [Click here to buy it on Amazon.](#) You can carry the spray in your treat pouch if you're walking in an area where there are often loose dogs, such as unsupervised dogs with free roam of their yards and neighborhoods. Hopefully, if you're carrying a spray, you will never need to use it. The citronella spray causes eye irritation for the other dogs but is not as damaging as pepper spray/mace.
- Alternatively to a product like SprayShield, carrying an item such as an umbrella can be another deterrent option. As the off-leash dog approaches, you can open the umbrella towards them in an attempt to startle & scare them away. This also then acts as a visual barrier between your dog and the approaching dog. If you decide to utilize this strategy, make sure your dog is used to the sudden umbrella opening first so that they aren't scared as well!
- Another object you can carry with you for a dog-approach deterrent is a lanyard of spare keys. When an off-leash dog approaches, you can jingle the keys loudly or throw them in the direction of the dog (with as much force as the situation warrants).
- Yell, scream, throw rocks, and otherwise make a big scary scene in an effort to scare the other dog away. The hope is that the loud reaction from a stranger will startle the approaching dog and give you time to get away. It's important to understand that this tactic isn't ideal for all situations, as it may get your own dog more worked up. If this is a strategy you intend to utilize as a first line of defense, get your dog used to hearing you "throw a fit" like this by doing it mildly at other times and then rewarding your dog a lot for staying calm!





# STRATEGIES FOR OFF-LEASH DOG ENCOUNTERS

## STRATEGIES WITH **HIGH** IMPACT TO THE OTHER DOG

- If an off-leash dog is approaching you and your dog, make a bee-line for the nearest road. If you can cross the road safely, there will at least be cars between you and the loose dog. If possible get help from a passing driver if the owner isn't present.
- Sometimes owners are nonchalant about calling their dogs back, and might not understand the seriousness of the situation, especially if their dog is "friendly." If the owner is present, seeing their dog head towards a road will generally prompt the owner to call their own dog back more quickly because of the addition of cars to the mix.
- This tactic is obviously more risky with a busy street, but going across a busy street may still be preferable to a dog/dog altercation if your dog has a bite history or is highly reactive.

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## SKILLS TO TEACH YOUR DOG

- **Get Behind & Stay** - A "get behind and stay" behavior puts your dog behind your back so that you are between them and any oncoming off-leash dogs. That way, you can more easily intercept the loose dog.
- **Two Paws or Four Paws Up** - If your dog has some good obstacle navigation skills, you can cue them to a safe perch as an off-leash dog approaches.
- **Wear a Muzzle** - If your dog has a bite history, or you are worried that they might escalate to a bite in an off-leash situation, having them wear a muzzle is a great way to keep everyone safe.
- **Off-Leash Dog = Party!** - Generally, off-leash dogs cause us humans with space-sensitive dogs a lot of stress and anxiety. Our dogs pick up on that and that can have the opposite effect than what we want! Turn that anxiety around, and every time you see an off-leash dog, even one that isn't approaching you, use it as an opportunity to throw a little party for your own dog! Use a happy tone and phrases like "Who's the best dog in the world?!" and your dog will think it's the best day ever! Your initial anxious response turned around can become a source of positive feelings for you and your dog.