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# Top 10 tools for Handling a Reactive Dog

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We are in the age of social media and opinions galore, and it can be overwhelming to try to wade through the mounds of advice on various tools and products to help us "fix a problem". Reactive dog guardians are not immune to this! It seems like every day there is a new tool or gadget that promises to have a magical effect.

While I know that no one tool is going to work for all dogs in all situations, I certainly have my favourites. As the co-founder of our Cranky Canine program (est.2011) and a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, I'm happy to share them with you.

Here are my top 10 tools for handling a reactive dog:

## 1. *Harness*

My personal preference for most medium to extra large dogs is [2 Hounds Design - Freedom No-Pull Harness](#). The double-ended leash is a nice addition but not necessary as it's a bit short for my personal taste. I love that every strap is customisable in size, the belly-strap is velvety soft, and you have the option to clip the leash to the back or the front, depending on your needs at the time. I like clipping to the front for controlled walks and strong pullers, and if we're hiking with a longer line, I clip the leash to the back to allow more freedom.



However, if you find this harness rubs the armpits a bit on stocky or smaller breeds, try the [Blue-9 - Balance Harness](#). You can't go wrong with this one. Very customisable, fits nicely, ensures a wide range of motion, and looks nice too!

Lastly, the [Haquihana](#). I don't think there's a breed this doesn't fit perfectly! It's not as easily sourced, but worth it if you can find it!

## 2. Head-Halter

I will admit to my personal bias here - I absolutely love head-halters, but I'm also the person who is happy to spend a week or two conditioning it so that the dog loves it so much it becomes a secondary recall. (Not kidding.) My personal favourite is the [Halti](#) and there are two reasons - the first is that it is padded nicely on the top of the nose so you don't get that rubbing/tightening affect. The second reason is that it clips to a collar as a backup, which I think should be mandatory. I'm a huge fan of a double-clip system as many dogs are Houdinis and can manage to wriggle out of most things if they try hard enough.

My second choice is the [Gentle Leader](#). This is great for dogs with larger snouts who need a little more space to open wide. I don't love that it doesn't come with a backup-connector to the collar, so I end up making my own. It's not padded either and I find that it can create an indent in the snout and affect the eyes of hard pullers.

*Note: I will only walk dogs over 30lbs on a head-halter (otherwise our strength is easily too much for a smaller dog and we have to be mindful of neck-damage). I will also only use head-halters on dogs who absolutely love them, which means time must be taken to condition properly. Lastly, I walk dogs on head-halters on a short leash because one wrong lunge with too much lead can do some serious damage to the neck.*



## 3. Animal deterrent spray



We never want to have to use this, but if you or your dog are in danger, this is a more humane (and legal) option than pepper spray or bear spray. There are two brands - one being [Direct Stop](#) and the other being [Spray Shield](#). Both are equally fine. They fit in a treat pouch or a pocket and are easy to whip out and deploy if you're charged by an off-leash dog who cannot be controlled quickly. It sprays a powerful citronella scent, which surprises and deters the dog, giving you time to escape from the scenario (hopefully) unharmed.

## 4. Mini Compact Umbrella

I love carrying a [mini compact umbrella](#), and not just for the chance of rain! Slip one of these into your back or coat pocket, and if you are surprised by an off-leash dog, whip it out and press the deploy button. The umbrella opens and blocks that dog from coming any closer. I love loading it with dry treats in advance so that my dog thinks that when I open it, treats fly back towards him and it's no longer a scary thing.

These are also really helpful for condo hallways and elevators (if you can get past your superstition) as they can provide a visual barrier in a pinch, while you ask the person and their dog to take the next elevator because your dog is "contagious". Ahem.



## 5. Treats

The list is endless here, really...but if you need a quick'n'easy recipe, [try my famous doggie-meatloaf or doggie-meatballs](#). Using whole foods (as you should!) ? Need a quick backup that is medium- to high-value? So many options:

[Ziwe Peak](#) kibble is the best you'll find on the planet. Dogs LOVE this as a treat! It's an investment so make a little go a long way!

[Stella & Chewy's](#) meal toppers are easy to break and super tasty! Definitely also on the pricey side of things for the small amount.

[Benny Bully's](#) are great in small amounts (the liver can cause serious gas) but the cost can really add up. [Pure Bites](#) chicken and whitefish are also a great option but the liver is much harder to break in comparison to Benny Bully's.

[Rollover Dog Food Rolls](#). Slice, dice, portion, freeze. These are high-value, not the most unhealthy treat out there, and very affordable!

[Wellness Bites](#) - small, soft, and stinky! Easy to break into smaller pieces. Still, processed, so limit how much you use!

[Orijen freeze-dried treats](#) of all flavours - easy to break and high-value too!

[Whiskas Perfect Portions](#) - cat food that's portable and super-stinky! This is more of a jackpot treat, used for one-offs like recall or an emergency. Very affordable, but very low-quality. Not ideal for daily use, but for a once-in-a-while, fast-food option, it's a goodie!

## 6. Treat pouch

This is a must-have. You don't have time to dig into your skinny jeans' pocket for treats when you need to counter condition your reactive dog, throw a food-bomb, or reinforce some awesome behaviour. You might be tempted to use a fanny pack or a smaller bait bag, but let me tell you. If you have piano-hands like I do, both will frustrate you to no end AND slow down your mechanics.

[J.Walker](#) makes a fantastic one, [Karen Pryor](#) has a good one (lasts about four months with daily use), [PetSafe](#) makes one that may not last quite as long, and [RC Pets](#) has my favourite so far, which we sell in-school.



## 7. Squeeze tube



One of my all-time favourite inventions. The squeeze tube. Throw a little [canned dog food](#) #ad (or cat food!), [canned tripe](#), home-cooked food from [Tom & Sawyer](#) (get 25% OFF your first order, using coupon code **TCCE**), or a mixture of whatever dog-safe deliciousness your fridge has to offer, and get on your way. This is so key in our Canadian winters because our hands freeze in the minus-30°C weather and taking our hands out of our mitts to dole out goodies is hardcore but unnecessary when you've got a food-toob.

My personal favourite is the [Coghlans Squeeze Tube](#) - it's food-safe, easy to wash, fill, secure, and doesn't leak. It lasts for ages and is so affordable! My runner-up if you don't want to do the work is the [Kong Stuff'n squeeze tubes](#) of various flavours (PB, yogurt, cream cheese, sweet potato). The best part about these is the length of the spout - perfect for muzzle-training and dogs who are wearing a muzzle on walks!

There are a few other solutions out there, but the leak-factor is high, they're not food-grade, not BPA-free, or they have high lead-content (dollar store).



## 8. Basket Muzzle

*\*gasp\** You cannot be serious! Why, yes, I am! I am such a huge fan of basket muzzles. In fact, it is part of our curriculum in puppy classes, basic training, AND reactive dog classes! Basket muzzles keep our dogs safe if they are scavengers on the street, but they also prevent bites from occurring, AND they are a clear communication tool for people that says "don't let your dog run up to mine all willy-nilly" or "don't pet my dog unless you talk to me first". Basically, "give us space, yo."



The stigma is real, but I'm saying "get over it". Muzzles rock. They really do. They offer you some peace of mind and help you on your journey to "I don't care what others think".

I tend to go for a good ol' [Baskerville Ultra](#) in most cases, because they're accessible, mouldable, easy to clean, affordable, and fit most dogs easily. If you have a dog with a wider head/snout, they make a special one for those doggos - the [Baskerville Ultra Wide](#). Now, if you have a dog who has a bite history and is likely to resort to biting when triggered, you might make a different consideration because it is still possible to bite with one of these on, if the dog is determined enough to bend the rubber.

Next up would be a wire basket muzzle that prevents bites from happening altogether - just keep in mind that a swift muzzle punch can really hurt with one of these babies!

If you want to really invest and have a custom muzzle made, there are two amazing options: [BUMAS](#) which is really to die for, and [Hot Dogs All Dressed](#). I can't sing their praises enough. Truly. Especially for brachycephalic dogs (short/no snout) - they shouldn't be left out of the muzzle-party!

*Either way, please, please, please, for the love of doG, **do NOT use a fabric muzzle**. They keep the mouth closed, prevent proper breathing, panting, cooling, and can cause the dog to hyperventilate and suffocate. There is no place for these, IMHO.*

## 9. Hands-free leash



There is no other panic like the panic one experiences when our reactive dog yanks the leash out of our hands and takes off running. We never imagine this could happen, but we all get distracted, we all have to pick up poop, and we all make mistakes. A great way to back up your leash system is to have it attached to your body.

There are a few great hands-free leashes out there - [Canine Equipment](#) makes one that I swear would last through armageddon. I've had mine for almost two decades and it still looks and feels brand new! [Smoochy Poochy](#) makes one and I like that it has grommets for sizing, but the mesh ball-holder disintegrates quickly, so I tend to snip that off pretty soon after purchase. My personal fave as of late is the [Squishy Face Studio](#) - it's the waist band that feels so safe and secure, and it allows you use your favourite leash and attach it directly. Can't beat that!

## 10. Secure Buckle Collar

Collars hold ID tags and provide a backup for a head halter or harness.

If you have a dog with a slinky head and a neck that's about the same size (think sighthounds), you might find that collars slip off easily. You'll need to get a martingale (one that tightens when the leash is pulled, preventing it from slipping over the ears/head), whether it's fabric or chain. My personal preference is fabric because I imagine the chain-clinking sound is going to aggravate any dog after a period of time, and some dogs are even stressed out by the sound so close to their ears. Who can blame them?!



A buckle collar for all other dogs is best so that you can be sure it's not going to accidentally open/break, freeing your dog. Always have up to date ID tags on your dog, of course, attached to this buckle collar. The [bond buckle collars](#) are easy to clean and come in various colours to suit your dog's taste.

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