

Article 13

Roaming aggressive dog makes walking yours a challenge.

Dear Gus,

I walk my dog daily. Unfortunately, we sometimes run into a small dog that is loose who will "charge" at us, barking, growling, and acting aggressively. Although I can control my dog by having her sit, once we try to walk again, this small dog again will "charge" at us and follow us. It's very difficult for me to control my dog while walking when this small dog is "charging" at us. What is the best way to handle this situation?

Pat D., Orange

Dear Pat,

There are several issues here. First, the owner's of the aggressive dog need to be aware that their dog is roaming and behaving in a way that is unacceptable. I would recommend you approach them directly, but if you do not get cooperation, you should contact your local Animal Control Officer for help. I also suggest, since this has not been a one-time occurrence, that you avoid walking your dog near this dog's house until you are 100 percent sure that you can control your dog.

This leads to the second issue. The fact that your dog becomes difficult to handle indicates that your skill in handling your dog is suspect. This is an obedience issue. You need to work with your dog to get her 100 percent reliable with "healing" (walking close by your side) without any distractions before you walk her in areas with distractions. Focus drills, where your dog is paying attention only to you, are an important part of the process. I would practice healing first in your house without distractions, then with distractions. The next step would be in your yard or driveway, again without distractions and then when you have control at all times, with distractions. Only when you have complete obedience on your property would I begin walking short distances, always practicing "heal" with her on a 6 foot leash. She should walk even with your side, and sit when you stop. Use praise when she does well, and correct her with a "snap" of the lead when she gets too far ahead or lags behind. I don't recommend the use of the long, retractable leashes, since it is much more difficult to get control of your dog when she is 20 feet away. Although there is no exact solution for every encounter with a loose, aggressive dog if you believe you are in imminent danger, it's best to unleash your dog.

Since all animals are basically programmed to either "fight or flight" unclip the leash from the collar. Do not drop the leash, since it can get wrapped around you or your dog or even both dogs, increasing the chance of injury. I know this sounds drastic, but your dog, when restrained, has no option but to fight to protect both of you. When unleashed, the dog has the option of flight, which often will diffuse the situation. I hope this helps, and you are back to enjoying walks with your canine companion in no time.

Gus

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