

*What is a decompression walk?*

A decompression walk is a peaceful, quiet, exploratory walk an owner and dog take together. Unlike the suburban leash walk, where the dog may be worried about approaching dogs, people or traffic, a decompression walk is done in a quiet environment that is highly unlikely to contain any triggers for the dog. These walks allow for plenty of sniffing time, passive exploration and a private space to relax.

*Who needs a decompression walk?*

Any dog who finds the normal activity they are doing stressful, such as a leash reactive dog or fearful dog who is afraid of people or things on the walk really benefit from decompression walks.

*Why is this walk so important for my dog's training?*

Often, by the time a professional is called in to address a dogs behavior on leash walks, at dog parks or during dog sports the behavior has been escalating for some time. The dog is very stressed out and extremely tense when in the environment that causes their reactivity. Think of it this way, your leash reactive dog feels a true state of TERROR every time they become reactive, they feel as if their very life is in danger...now imagine if you take a leash walk every day and every day your dog enters that state of mind at least 1-2 times (or more). Over time the entire leash walk becomes an incredibly tense, negative experience. This chronic stress leads to a real issue for the dog, causing them to become exponentially more reactive, reducing their thresholds and increasing their triggers. In order to help change a dogs behavior in those environments they first have to release all of that tension and start to learn that they can feel safe, relaxed and have fun when they leave the house instead of having to feel hypervigilant, guarded and on edge. Another way to look at it? Every leash walk or repeated visit to the dog park winds your dog tighter and tighter, decompression walks loosen them! They need a chance to just feel safe again before any real improvement can be made.

*How do I do a decompression walk?*

These walks can look different for every dog! Start by finding locations that are appropriate where your dog is unlikely to run into a trigger (human, dog etc.) – these don't have to be typical walking spots, parking lots, the yards of large churches (when not in service), random fields and old cemeteries make up some of my favorite places to do decompression walks. Use a leash or a long-line to give your dog more freedom and encourage them to explore and sniff, don't ask them to do a lot of work – simply walk quietly, letting them set the pace and direction. Bring treats with you and reward your dog for checking in (offering eye contact), sprinkle treats around the environment for them to sniff out and enjoy, or toss them around playing find it games but mostly just let your dog sniff their heart out and set their own pace! Keep sessions short to prevent unintended run ins with people/dogs.