behavior modification protocols
One of a series of ASPCA® Behavior Modification Protocols developed by Emily Weiss, Ph.D., CAAB

reactivity towards other dogs
The goal of this program is to manage the dog’s reactive behavior by teaching him to look at the person holding the leash when in the presence of other dogs.

identifying dogs for the program:
• The dog is a SAFER™ “1” and “2” dog on all parts of the assessment other than the Dog-to-Dog Behavior item.
• He likely responds to seeing other dogs by attempting to rush in with tail high and ears forward, growling, alarm barking, and/or lunging on the end of the leash.

before you begin:
• Provide extra kennel enrichment for the dog in the program.
• Provide daily walks with skilled staff members and volunteers on a path less frequented by other dogs.

program instructions:
1. Teach the dog a “look” cue. The goal of using this cue is to have the dog turn and make eye contact with you when you say the verbal cue.
   a. Charge (classically condition) a reward marker (click, “good,” etc.).
   b. Hold a treat in your hand that is visible to the dog. Bring the treat up to the outer corner of your eye, then use your reward marker and deliver the treat when the dog follows the treat with his eyes and makes eye contact with you. Repeat until dog is reliably replicating this behavior.
   c. Now say the verbal cue “look” and bring the treat up close to your eye. Reward the dog when he tracks the treat with his eyes and makes eye contact with you. Repeat until he is reliably replicating the behavior.
   d. At this point, begin to keep the treat hidden until after you deliver the “look” verbal cue and the dog makes eye contact with you. Repeat until he is reliably replicating this behavior in other locations besides the room in which you did the initial training.
   e. At this point, begin to keep the treat hidden until after you deliver the “look” verbal cue and the dog makes eye contact with you. Repeat until he is reliably replicating this behavior in other locations besides the room in which you did the initial training.

2. Teach the dog the “sit” cue.
   a. Get dog to stand toe-to-toe with you.
   b. Place bit of food between thumb and forefinger.
   c. Bring treat (lure) to dog’s nose and get his attention with it. It is okay if he licks or nibbles at it, but do not give him the treat yet.
   d. Slowly raise the lure up and as the dog follows it with his nose, move it back over his head a few inches.
   e. As his head tilts back, he is likely to sit.
   f. As soon as the rear touches the floor, say “yes” and give the dog the treat.
   g. Practice 6-10 times in quick succession.
   h. After the dog is anticipating the next move and begins to sit before you move your hand up and back, he is ready to learn the verbal command. Take a piece of food, hold it in your hand at about waist level and when the dog looks like he’s ready to offer the behavior, say “sit.” When he sits, say “yes” and give him the food.
1. Dogs need the opportunity to generalize. In order for him to really know the command, you must practice it in many locations, under various weather conditions, around different levels of distraction, and on different flooring surfaces.

   Note: The two verbal cues are going to stay separate and you will not be chaining the “look” and “sit” cue/behaviors together. Asking the dog to sit will make it more difficult to be reactive in the initial stages of the program. Once the dog is adopted into a new home, he will be able to be on a walk and be asked to “look” while continuing to walk.

3. Now that the dog knows how to both “look” and “sit,” another dog can be brought into the behavior modification.

4. Have the reactive dog on leash and identify a safe distance from another dog on leash to begin practicing the “look” and “sit” cues. When correctly identifying the proper distance to begin the program, the dog should show little to no reactivity.

5. Have the non-reactive dog out of view and have someone helping bring him into view of the reactive dog. The moment the reactive dog sees him say the “look” cue and reward him for the correct behavior. Then immediately ask the dog to “sit” and reward him for the correct behavior. Be sure you are rewarding each individual behavior in order to keep them separate.

6. Once the dog is successful at a certain distance, decrease the distance between the two dogs and repeat the above procedure.

7. Continue to decrease the distance according to the dog’s success and repeat the above procedure.

8. Once the dog reliably look and sits on cue in the presence of many dogs in multiple locations, he is ready for adoption.

9. Keep a daily behavior log.

   Note: This is not a behavior modification protocol, but a way to manage the behavior of the dog around other dogs. Be sure to teach the adopters how to use the “look” cue prior to them leaving the shelter with the dog.

When the dog is adopted: Review the “Program for Reactivity Towards Other Dogs” instructions with the adopter which can be found in the Reproducible Forms and Templates section. Remember to follow-up with the adopter at three days, three weeks, and three months post-adoption.