

Leash Aggression/Barrier Frustration

Frustration intolerance occurs when the dog is unable to accomplish something that he desires, or get what he wants, or cannot figure out how to accomplish something that is asked of him, or cannot change environmental factors so that his wants are met.

The amount of frustration might show itself on a simple level as whining or barking but can also escalate to acts of aggression as the level of frustration increases.

A dog who wants you to play with them or pet them, might shove the toy in your lap, head butt you or get a nose under your hand or arm and lift it up, or put a paw on you, or scratch with the paws, or mouth you. The level of trying to get your attention, would increase as the frustration level increased.

We often see puppies grab the leash in their mouth and tug when the owner is not paying any attention or if the pup wants to go somewhere else. Some will bite the hand that is trying to restrain it by its collar. Frustration at not knowing what their owner wants them to do might cause the dog to use calming signals (sniffing the grass, looking away, scratching, etc.) If the owner persists, the dog might bark in annoyance, (STOP IT, I don't know what you want) or growl and snap. This can also occur if an owner tries to move their sleeping dog or get it off the couch or bed. Frustration intolerance can also present itself with separation anxiety, sometimes magnifying to the point of extreme destructive behavior.

Almost everything taught in basic obedience is an exercise in overcoming frustration intolerance.

- a. Teaching the sit and down, gives the dog something to do which can prevent frustration from escalating.
- b. Rewarding correct behavior helps, but the students also need to be shown the correct way to reward. i.e. if the dog receives a treat every single time that he performs a behavior then he can become frustrated when the reward is not given. So we teach handlers to use a variable schedule reward method.
- c. If the dog is very bossy and pushy with his owners and thinks it rules the roost, then we teach them about NILIF which is a means of obtaining good leadership.
- d. We teach the "watch me" so the dog learns that it can always look to its owner to find out what to do. Of course, that means showing the owners how to provide good leadership. This also provides the dog with an alternative to lunging and barking at the other dogs in class.

- e. We show the owners how to teach their dogs to settle and "go to rug" so the dog learns how to relax and be quiet for awhile.
- f. We teach them how to groom, touch, handle, and restrain their dogs so that the dog can be more tolerant of having it's body touched or held.
- g. We teach them the correct way to greet and socialize with other dogs and people. This also includes door-way control and behavior with guests in the home.
- h. We teach them how to get the dog to walk without pulling. This prevents a lot of frustration for dog and handler. And what to do when you meet other dogs on your walks.
- i. We show them how to teach their dogs to "leave it" and that good things happen when the dog does.

Frustration intolerance- the inability of a canine to maintain a modicum of self control or mental focus in the presence of a reward.

Seriously as far as what we teach, I think all exercises lead to dogs overcoming this issue. I think the toughest part is dealing with the human who has one of these "kids" at the end of the lead. They are usually frustrated and ready to pull their hair out and shoot the dog in the process. Specifically, I think the Brenda Aloff impulse control treat delivery exercise thingy can help. And of course the word that keeps popping into my brain is CALM. Owners need to stay calm and matter of fact. Start small, reward for little successes. Don't put the dog on a sit and expect them to stay for 5 minutes. Reward for 1 second, 2 sec, 3 sec, 4 sec, etc. Build up slowly and reward along the way. But keep praise in a calm fashion. Establish yourself as a good leader, NILF and hand feeding. It seems like a lot of these dogs are given too much freedom to make their own choices. Little to no direction from mom or dad.

Frustration intolerance = lack of impulse control = a state of emotional overload: Visual description - (could be a mild or extreme intensity of the following behaviors, from mild acting out and hyper-excitement to complete hysteria): Barking, whining, screaming, rapid panting, lunging, toenails dug into the floor scrambling, standing on hind legs, straining until breathing is difficult, spinning, grabbing, pawing at what it wants, climbing up onto the owners or nearby chair or table, even mounting. Redirected frustration - biting the leash or owner.

While some frustrated dogs may appear aggressive to the untrained eye, it might better be described as a temper tantrum in response to restraint when the dog can't get close to what it wants to see right up close or when it's under pressure to perform and doesn't understand what is expected, or when criteria has been raised before the dog understands the game (or in Gretchen's case, a training partner who isn't holding up her end of the bargain on the agility field! - see Teri's follow-up below.) Barrier frustration is a form of

frustration intolerance. A dog who practices this behavior with no outlet or redirection will often escalate, as the activity becomes self-reinforcing and frequently his antics *do* get him an inch or two closer to the object of his frustration.

This is simply a dog who hasn't learned that patience pays. He hasn't been taught that the human is the conduit to what it wants and needs in life. He hasn't learned to wait for permission. He has no limits, no boundaries. You might also call this a "spoiled dog" if temper tantrums have indeed gained it access to its demands.

This dog's owners are probably exasperated and embarrassed by his behavior. It is important to not make them feel like the "bad student" - they already feel like they are ruining class for everyone. This dog may never have acted like this before in its life - of course it's never BEEN in this situation before! Be gentle and patient as you help them get their dog and their stuff to their seat and help them manage the chaos that is at the end of their leash. When the owner apologizes, point out the positive aspect to the whole class. This personality type would excel at activities that require persistence and energy: SAR, agility, herding, weight pull, etc. where diligence and drive are required. The energy just needs to be channeled in the right direction. Sometimes all the owner needs to hear is, "this is normal adolescent [insert breed] behavior in this situation - don't worry, it will get better. This is why you are here."

List all exercises you use in class to teach skills that will be of most help to overcome this issue and outline any and all individual advice do you give dog owners.

Attention exercises - encourage owner to reward all attention (C/T dog for voluntarily choosing to return attention to handler when distracted)

Restraint massage, handling, grooming

Clear release cue - permission to engage in desired activity as reward!

Sit/wait at doors, before feeding, before chasing a toy, before greeting

Stays with distractions

Leave it - food on floor/biscuits on paws

Leave it - heeling through items, Brenda Aloff's food-to-nose exercise

Slack leash

Sit for petting / Sit - eye contact - go say hi (greet other dog/person) call away.

Encourage an on-leash enforced settle for a half hour while they watch TV or do email each night

Control games - you might even recommend tug-of-war with rules depending on the handler's ability

Time outs:

Enforced sit

Enforced down/settle

Equipment - Gentle Leader vs. Prong. A GL is recommended for any dog who is likely to redirect on its owner or become hostile to other dogs - a prong would escalate either situation. For dogs who are simply brats who can't wait, a prong would probably be fine, but you can't beat the calming effect of the GL..

Management techniques to address the dog who is frantic to get to other dogs:

Just get it over with. While putting the noisy, bratty, meltdown dog in another room or behind a blind may seem the easiest and most practical management technique, these merely frustrated dogs often do better in the middle of the most crowded part of the classroom. The corner chair by the hallway to the bathroom or the seat right next to the instructor chair often work well.

Rather than increase the dog's frustration by banning them from the group, allow him a brief meeting and a chance to work surrounded by all the other dogs. This will often help him habituate to the over stimulation of the situation sooner. Of course the object is to not let the temper tantrum at the front door work to get him what he wants! Get the dog's attention and during a brief moment when the dog isn't in a state of emotional meltdown, reward the momentary firing of his brain cells by allowing him proximity to what he wanted to see so badly that he became emotionally overwrought. Next week, be sure this dog arrives early and is seated before the rest of the class arrives.

This type of dog will be space invasive so care must be taken to help them learn to wait for the ok to "say hello" and guide them to use appropriate greeting behavior - slow approach on a slack leash. They must also be protected from repeatedly getting decked for their poor manners by practicing proper greetings with safe dogs through quiet handling, control sits, attention and calm release cues. Caution all owners about allowing their dogs to run willy-nilly into the personal space of other dogs, especially adult or unknown dogs.

Listen to descriptions week one and **encourage the owners to come early** (maybe a half hour early and just sit on the porch) to give the dog a chance to settle down before the other dogs arrive and not come in late into a full classroom like a whirlwind with a tornado on the end of the leash. (This also gives the owners a chance to be calmer and less stressed.)

Encourage calming signals: yawning, deep sighs, reciting nursery rhymes. (Often handlers wind-up as much as the dog does. They need to be aware of how frantic stroking, nagging and their own frustration can cause the dog to escalate.) Have the whole

class take a deep breath and let it out slowly. You will visibly see the dogs let go a little and the energy level of the room will decrease.

This dog probably won't be able to watch quietly while you work another dog, so use him! Sometimes I'll select this dog as my demo and sit on the floor in the middle of the main classroom and feed it for attention, allowing it to sniff a few stationary dog butts just to get it over with while praising and feeding the daylights out of the dog for noticing I'm on the planet. Then I'll return the dog to its owners and explain briefly what I did and what I want them to do. I will use that demo as an example to help the rest of the class learn how to redirect their own distracted dogs, so I'm not just taking up class time on someone else's problem. They all have distracted dogs, just not as distracted as THIS dog. (I'll also use this dog to demo leave-it exercises, to give the owners a head start and the dog some concrete information from the get-go, as this dog may require some exceptionally good timing to start.)

These high energy, easily frustrated dogs require a HIGH rate of reinforcement. They are likely to give up if they become frustrated, so they need to win and win fast to keep them in the game. Stingy owners will lose the dog quickly. Lousy timing and inconsistent handling will cause this dog to scream at its owners to make sense.