

Dog Is Aggressive Toward Anything That Moves

A Jack Russell Terrier shows aggression toward moving people and objects.

By September Morn

Q. In the last week or two my 1-year-old Jack Russell Terrier Spirit has started to become aggressive when I take her for walks. She's aggressive with dogs, cars, people walking, and bikers. I have started to make her sit, and if she sits and stays I give her a treat after the person or object goes by. If she doesn't sit and stay – no treat. This seems to be working, but I'd like to know if you have any other suggestions.

A. It sounds like you're on the right track with Spirit, teaching her to sit and stay instead of chasing after people and things that move. Another tactic that may help, in conjunction with what you're already doing, is to start conditioning your dog to have a more positive, relaxed attitude in the presence of moving objects and people. You can do this using a technique known as classical conditioning.

Start by taking your dog to a spot where she can see people, dogs, cars, etc. from a distance that's far enough away that she can watch them without reacting aggressively. Each time one of her "triggers" appears, start feeding her yummy treats. When they disappear from view, stop feeding. Wait for another trigger to appear, feed until it's out of sight, then stop. Continue this until she starts looking expectantly at you for treats when she sees one of her triggers. When that happens, you can move a bit closer for the next session.

If she won't take the treats in the presence of her triggers, she's too close to them, so move a bit farther away and try again.

Over time, this will cause a change in her attitude when she sees dogs, bikers, and bikers. Instead of becoming overexcited and getting aggressive, she'll be calmer and more optimistic. This is because the conditioning process will actually change the emotions she feels when she sees those things that presently make her feel aggressive.