WHAT CAUSES REACTIVITY?

So what causes reactivity? What makes one dog over-react when another dog doesn't?

Over-reaction is usually driven by an emotional response to something in the environment. Your dog may be frightened, frustrated, or over-excited – and sometimes it is hard to tell the difference. The good news is you can work from what you see even if you are not sure exactly how your dog is feeling. But you always need to remember that they are FEELING something and you want to change that feeling as well as how your dog behaves. Anything else is simply suppressing the behavior.

Over-reaction can happen because of a single traumatic event. Your dog's brain stores traumatic memories in a way that makes them quicker to recall – so even one experience can be enough to create an ongoing reactive response.

It can also happen if your dog has repeated negative experiences. Maybe they were fine after the first time another dog had a go at them, but when it happens two or three times more, they start to react to all dogs.

But there are other things you also need to think about...

Pain is first on the list. When you are sore or uncomfortable, your behavior changes right? You are more sensitive to other people or perhaps less tolerant or patient than usual? You might feel protective of yourself and not want to risk anyone brushing against the part of you that is sore. Your dog is no different!

So make sure you get your dog checked thoroughly for pain and illness, especially if you see a sudden change in them. Look at muscular-skeletal pain, gut pain, and illness, and remember that temporary pain or discomfort can influence your dog too.

Genetics are another factor. There are studies that show that fear of specific things can be passed down through several generations. Your dog might react to something because their mum or their grandparent did! Of course, you can't change this but knowing it can be reassuring especially when you think you must have done something wrong for your dog to be like this!

And remember that sometimes you won't be able to pinpoint a specific incident or cause. Your dog has been raised just like your previous dogs and none of them were overreactive. This can be frustrating for sure but don't worry! The good news is you don't need to know the cause to be able to change your dog's reaction.