



SAFE DOG WALKS: How to Deal with Loose Dogs

When you're out walking your DINOS (Dog in Need of Space)[™] and you spot a loose dog, with no owner in sight, it's hard not to panic. The following are some tips for dealing with loose dogs. Keep in mind that nothing works 100% of the time. As the scenarios and dogs vary, so will the solutions.

GENERAL TIPS

Invest in a wardrobe that has generous pockets or a small dog walking bag. On every dog walk bring the following:

- High Value Treats
- Cell Phone with Camera and Animal Control on Speed Dial
- Direct Stop aka Spray Shield
- + One Bodyguard (if you can walk with a buddy, it helps!)

Be Quiet. There are a lot of loose dogs hanging out in their yards. The very first thing you can do to avoid a confrontation is to slip by unnoticed. Try crossing to the other side of the street, so you're not directly in front of their property. Keep unwanted attention to a minimum by silencing the jingling from your dog's tags with tape or a "pet tag silencer" product.

Engage Your Dog. Sometimes our dogs are the ones attracting the attention when they react to another dog. If you see a dog before (or after) your DINOS does, engage your dog. Keep them focused on you, instead of staring or lunging at the other dog. Ask them to "look" at you or check in. Talk to them in a happy, loose voice. Walk briskly. Make kissy sounds. Sing them a silly song with their name in it. Put a treat or toy in front of their nose.

Do whatever you need to do to keep their attention on you, as you steer them past the dog hanging out in your neighbor's yard or while you do a u-turn (see below). You can flash a "stop" hand signal at the other dog too, just to reinforce the message that you and your dog aren't interested in them.

Tip for Dogs behind Fences: If you're passing dogs that are contained and are barking or running the length of the fence, try this: Cross the street to make space and say "Hi Guys!" in a loud and cheery, high-pitched voice. Sometimes that's all it takes to shut them up and it sends a message to your dog that things are ok.

Lick Your Lips. You need to try to stay calm, if you want your dog to stay calm too, so do a body scan. Are you pulling the leash tight? Relax a little. Are you holding your breath? Lick your lips. You can't hold your breath and lick your lips at the same time. Talk in a happy tone. Let your dog know you're cool.

WHEN YOU SEE A LOOSE DOG

In any situation you have to do two things – deal with your dog and the oncoming one.

For your dog: Emergency U-Turn

Teach your dog to move quickly and calmly in the opposite direction, so that when you encounter a loose dog or a scary person, you can make a fast getaway. Teach them to do this on cue using a phrase and tone you're most likely to use if you encounter this scenario. Like "Uh-Oh! Let's Go!" or "Holy Sh*t!" Whatever you think you'd actually say.

Read: **Feisty Fido** by Patricia McConnell for more on this technique, including teaching an Emergency Sit/Stay.



For the other dog: If you can spot the owner, let them know you need them to leash their dogs. Regardless, keep moving via the U-Turn.

IF THE LOOSE DOG IS NOW FOLLOWING YOU

Many of the tips that follow assume that the loose dog is alone and unsupervised.

For your dog: Body Block

This means getting in between your dog and the oncoming loose dog. Ideally, you've taught your dog a great sit-stay, so that you can step directly in front of them to deal with the loose dog. Try putting treats right in front of their nose to keep them in place.

For the loose dog, option 1: Use the VOG

That's the Voice of God (aka what James Earl Jones) sounds like. Step in front of your dog and, using the VOG, say: **NO** or **STAY** and flash the universal hand signal for stop: **a flat outstretched palm.**

The goal here is to startle the other dog, so you want to really BOOM! If you've got their attention, try telling them to SIT, STAY, or GO HOME.

For the loose dog, option 2: Hurl Treats

Take a handful of those high value treats you've got in your pocket and throw them right in the other dog's face. The goal here is to startle them, and then have them look around for the food, giving you enough time to get away. You'll likely have a 50-50 success rate with this, so it's worth a try, but it doesn't stop all dogs.

Or Toss Pea Gravel at their feet. If you've got room in your cargo pants for a hand full of pea gravel, it can be worth carrying some to startle oncoming dogs by throwing this at their paws.

set of hands. Drive your dogs to a safe spot to walk them. If your dog is aggressive, use a muzzle, so you don't have to worry about them hurting a friendly off leash dog that gets in their face.

IF YOU ARE TRAPPED

Tools

If your voice and treats don't work and you can't get away, this is when it's handy to have another tool. Try carrying one of the following:

- Direct Stop otherwise known as Spray Shield
- Umbrella (pop-up)
- Airhorn
- Shake can
- Walking Stick

The idea would be to body block your dog, by standing in front of them, and then use any of the tools you have to stop the oncoming dog. Spray 'em, pop the umbrella open in their face, throw the penny can at them, blast the air horn, block them with the stick.



Spray Shield is a legal citronella spray and it's a great choice. It won't harm the dog, so you're not risking their health. If you use it, spray the dog right in the muzzle. (side note: If the owner is nearby and wasn't responding to your request for them to control their dogs, just the sight of the spray may motivate them to move.)

Practice using the tools: In the chaos of a loose dog interaction, our brains often bail out on us and we forget how to use a tool such as the spray. To build confidence and a higher chance of success, practice unholstering and spraying. By repeating the movements when you're at ease, you'll build a muscle memory for that action, so that when panic takes over your brain, your body will still remember what to do.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

Here's what some people have done, to get their dogs away from loose dogs:

- Thrown their dogs over a fence
- Thrown their dogs over their shoulders, while kneeing/kicking the loose dog
- Thrown their dogs into the bed of random a pick-up truck

The point is: it's been done. Do what you have to do to keep everyone safe.

If the two dogs actually do connect, **expect a lot of noise.** Dogs sounds awful when they're in a tussle, but it's usually far worse sounding than it actually is. Try to stay calm (so hard), but if you're alone, call for help. A neighbor might come to lend a crucial second set of hands.

If you have a helper, **break up the fight** by: making a loud noise, spraying the dogs with your Direct Stop, or finding something to use as a physical barrier to smash/slide in between the dogs so that you can safely separate the dogs. Look for something big, like a trash can lid, a chair, a recycling bucket, anything large and nearby that you can wedge between the dogs.

Grabbing collars is an invitation to get bit (your own dog is likely to swing their head around and redirect on you), but sometimes people do it anyway. If you do grab collars, you can try twisting them to cut off air supply - briefly. Try holding the back legs instead. When you're able to separate the dogs, both parties need to move away from each other, preferably in a wide circle - not straight back - and do not let go of the dogs.

Read more on this: <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-articles/breaking-up-a-dogfight>

If you are all alone, the truth is that it's really hard to break up a dog fight by yourself. When you break up a dog fight, you need to make sure that after the dogs are separated, they don't go right back at each other. One way to do this, if you are by yourself, is to tie one of the dogs to a fence or post, separate the dogs, and then do not let go of the one you're holding. Move the dog as far away as you can. If there is any way to tie them up or enclose them (ex: unlocked car), do it. Call for help, call 911.



Things rarely get this far. For the most part, dogs chase you away from their property or chase after you to play or try to start a little bit of trouble and you can stop them with one of the early tips and tools.

No matter what happens, it's best to think about these things before they occur. Have a plan in place. Know the hot spots in your neighborhood with loose dogs and avoid them, even if you have to take a less convenient route. Walk at off hours. Scope out escape routes. Bring a friend, so you always have a second set of hands. Drive your dogs to a safe spot to walk them. If your dog is aggressive, use a muzzle, so you don't have to worry about them hurting a friendly off leash dog that gets in their face.

RECAP:

- Give all dogs space by moving away from their property.
- Engage your dog. Keep them focused on you and quiet enough not to attract unwanted attention.
- If you see a loose dog, try doing an Emergency U-turn to get away.
- If you're stuck, Body Block your dog, step forward and use the VOG and/or throw treats at them.
- If the dog keeps coming and you feel like there's no escape, spray them with Direct Stop, blow your air horn, use your tools.
- If contact is made, spray the dogs in the muzzle or use whatever large object you have access to (from a stick to trash can lid) to slide in between dogs.
- Separate dogs and do not let go. Call for help.
- Go home and have a drink. Don't beat yourself up if the walk went badly. It happens to all of us!

Use these tips at your own risk. The author assumes no responsibility for any harm that may arise from the use of this content. Please contact a professional for further assistance.

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