Frequently Asked Questions

The Calm and Confident Canine

My dog has been through obedience training. Why didn't that fix this?

Obedience training teaches your dog what to do. Behavior modification addresses how your dog feels. A dog in full stress response can't hear you ask for a sit — the thinking part of their brain has gone offline. This course works on the emotional and neurological level first, so your dog can actually learn and think.

Is my dog too reactive for this class?

This class is specifically designed for reactive dogs. If your dog lunges, barks, snaps, or shuts down around triggers, this is the appropriate starting point. Dogs are crated at their stations at the start of class and when they need to decompress. If you're unsure, reach out before enrolling — we're happy to discuss your dog's specific situation.

My dog is reactive to other dogs. Will being in a class with other dogs make it worse?

It's a fair concern. The answer is no — if it's managed well, and management is part of what this course is built around. Dogs work at distances where they can still think. Barriers are used as needed. The entire environment is designed to keep dogs from reacting to other dogs. Over the 9 weeks, most dogs show measurable improvement.

What's the difference between a reactive dog and an aggressive dog?

Reactivity is about the stress response — not intent to harm. Most reactive dogs are afraid, frustrated, or overstimulated, not predatory. That said, any dog can bite when overwhelmed, which is why this course emphasizes threshold management. If you have concerns, consult a veterinary behaviorist or private trainer before enrolling. You can also contact Vanessa at contact@calmwatersdogtraining.com.

What methods does this course use?

We provide agency and choice to the dog, as well as positive reinforcement, threshold management, classical counter-conditioning, and desensitization. We also incorporate T-Touch bodywork, relaxation protocols, mindfulness, and enrichment-based stress reduction. No punishment, no corrections, no aversive tools of any kind.

Will we use shock collars, prong collars, or other correction tools?

No. These tools are not permitted in class and are not part of this methodology. Aversive tools work by suppressing behavior, not resolving the underlying emotional state — and in reactive dogs, suppression often makes the underlying problem worse over time.

What is a "trigger" and how do I know what my dog's triggers are?

A trigger is anything your dog reacts to in an unwanted way — another dog, a stranger, a bicycle, a noise, a child running. Part of the homework for Week 1 is identifying your dog's specific triggers and noting the approximate

© Calm Waters Dog Training 2026

distance at which they begin to react. This becomes your baseline for measuring progress. Note: this class is not designed for dogs who are reactive to humans.

What is “trigger stacking” and why does it matter?

Trigger stacking happens when multiple stressors occur close together without recovery time in between. A dog who handled the morning walk fine might fall apart at class that evening — not because they’re unpredictable, but because a cat, a loud truck, and a vet visit already filled their stress bucket. Understanding this helps you plan your dog’s day.

Do I need any prior training experience?

No. This course starts from the ground up. Some exercises involve a clicker or marker word, but instruction is provided. What matters most is consistency and a willingness to practice daily between sessions.

How much homework is involved?

Expect to spend 10–20 minutes daily on the assigned exercises. Most homework is built into your everyday routine — practicing calm at doorways, rewarding eye contact, working a short relaxation session before and after a walk. The goal is integration into real life, not training sessions that feel like a separate chore.

My dog is fine at home. Why does this happen?

Off-leash, dogs have options — they can flee, investigate, or engage on their own terms. On leash, those options disappear. The frustration of being tethered, combined with no escape route, triggers reactivity in many dogs who are social and relaxed in other contexts. This is called “leash reactivity.”

Will my dog be “cured” after 9 weeks?

Behavior modification is not a cure — it’s a process. Most dogs show significant improvement over 9 weeks: longer time before reacting, ability to handle triggers at closer distances, faster recovery after a reaction. The tools you learn in this course compound over time.

What if my dog has a bad week?

That’s normal and expected. Progress is not linear. Trigger stacking, changes in routine, illness, or a difficult incident can set a dog back temporarily. You’ll learn to recognize this and adjust — that skill is part of what this course teaches.

Questions not answered here? Contact Vanessa at contact@calmwatersdogtraining.com or 651-260-1471

© Calm Waters Dog Training 2026