



‘He’s protecting me’is he really though?

This is something I hear from clients regularly. That they perceive their dog as being protective of them by barking, lunging and snarling when people or dogs approach when they are out on walks. That they only do it with them but are fine with other people if other people walk their dog. Honestly, I have yet to find an instance where this is in fact the case. That’s not to say it doesn’t happen ever but after working with thousands of dogs in all of those cases it has not been a case of the dog protecting its owner, even if they are a guarding breed. So, if the dog isn’t protecting its owner why is the dog displaying these behaviours? It’s usually protecting itself as it doesn’t have enough trust in the owner to keep them safe, harsh maybe, but true. This is why they will often be fine when faced with these situations with another person, they have the trust in them that they will keep the dog safe. Sometimes this is because another person walking the dog maybe more aware of dog body language or simply because they haven’t come across any situations that the dog has felt unsafe with that person.

Dogs will always resort to protecting themselves if pushed far enough. Sometimes this can be displayed as barking and growling at another dog, even if from across the street, they go into the mindset of ‘I’m going to get you before you get me’, a warning of sorts. or it has had enough negative experiences with one handler.

We also need to consider if the person who is walking the dog at the time is of a slightly nervous disposition. If we are not confident then our dogs will sense this and feel the need to keep themselves safe. Dogs can hear our heartbeat so as soon as we tense up or become nervous, they detect the change in us and look out for number one. In these cases, we often need to address two things –

1. How to improve the owner/handler’s confidence – which has likely been knocked further by the dogs barking and apparent aggressive behaviour causing frustration, uncertainty and frustration and it becomes a vicious cycle.
2. How to improve the dog’s trust in the owner/handler that they will take care of them and keep them safe.

Both of these things take lots of time, patience and repetition.

Useful things to remember -

- Don’t walk your dog when you are feeling stressed, anxious or in a foul mood, have a cup of tea, relax and go out when you are feeling calmer and more balanced.
- Making sure you and your dog have plenty of space between you and the things they would normally bark and react badly at, even if you need to cross the street or turn around and walk in the opposite direction, the more space the better

- Take high value treats and toys with you on walks, reward and play often and randomly.
- Have something that you can do together that is fun and help you further your bond. Training tricks around the house, playing with toys in the garden or going for a walk in the middle of nowhere without other people and dogs on occasion would help.
- Don't shout at or yank your dog's lead when they are 'playing up' – simply in a calm manner take them away from their trigger.

It's really common for owners in these situations to dread walking their dog, they feel embarrassed, defeated and frustrated with their dog's behaviour, they are loving and well behaved around the house but out in public they almost appear to like showing them up. It's a massive thing to live with a reactive dog and is something that you can improve with time, love, training and patience. Keep reminding yourself of all their positive qualities and have faith that you will get there! Success and calm walks are possible and within reach.