

**The Mannerly Dog**  
**A Mannerly Dog is Easy to Love**  
Pasadena, Texas

**BE PREPARED FOR BEHAVIOR EMERGENCIES: LOOSE DOG APPROACHING!**

Nancy M. Kelly



*These photos were safely staged to demonstrate a quick and happy u-turn with my own well-trained and reliable dogs. No humans or dogs were in danger to create the photos.*

Your dog is on leash, but an off-leash dog is approaching. You have no control over the loose dog and you can't be sure what his intentions are; you can keep your dog near you because of the leash, but he might get excited, bark and make things worse.

My emergency plan for this situation includes the following options:

(1) Turn and walk briskly in the opposite direction. Do not run; that will excite both dogs, and arousing them is not helpful. Calmness is key in this situation, so that you don't contribute to instigating a fight. If you see the loose dog in time, you can make a u-turn, telling your dog how great he is, and be on your way before the loose dog notices you're there. This is when your own leash skills and those of your dog come in handy; practice making quick, happy u-turns when out on a walk.

(2) If a loose dog suddenly appears coming toward you, and is too close for you to safely turn around and leave, throw a handful of treats just over his head so they land at his sides and behind him. He'll be surprised and stop for a second to figure out what's happening. If he was just approaching you out of curiosity and wasn't planning to attack, the treats will occupy him long enough for you to be on your way out of the area. If he had maliciousness on his mind, you won't have hurt anything if he ignores the treats.

If you know that a loose dog is protecting his or her yard, barking at you in a territorial manner, walking back and forth along his property line but not coming at you, you still want to get out of the area as quickly and calmly as possible. Usually you'll be okay to just cross the street and walk along the other side until you've passed the loose dog's territory. Make sure you know the loose dog's motivation (protecting his yard) and also your own dog's potential to react to the loose dog. If your dog barks and growls at the loose dog, a fight can ensue because the loose dog is already highly aroused and now your own dog is adding to the problem. If you have such a dog in your neighborhood, you can defuse this situation over time by using the "Open-Bar" technique every time you walk past his yard (See [Teaching Reactive Dogs a New Habit](#),

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*Part 1: Open Bar*) Both dogs will be less aroused as they become habituated to each other's presence, and your dog will learn to help the other dog calm by looking away from him. (See the Turid Rugaas [website](#) and her wonderful photos of Calming Signals.)

Recently a Springer Rescue volunteer took a very shy foster Springer to a local adoption event. Rescue groups often take in very shy, fearful dogs who can present quite the challenge to their foster parents as they help them with remedial socialization and try to turn them into adoptable dogs. This volunteer planned to take the dog inside for just a few minutes, giving lots of treats to help the dog remain calm, relaxed and happy among the crowd, and then take her back out to the car for a rest before repeating the short visit inside. They had a lovely, uneventful and very short visit inside, and were on their way back to the car when they encountered a volunteer from another rescue group with one leashed dog and one dog off-leash, heading inside to the event. Not expecting anything of this sort, the foster volunteer steered as far away from this trio as possible, but the loose dog came right over and attacked the shy Springer before the volunteer could react, and a fight ensued. No physical damage was done to either dog, and the two humans separated them immediately. The volunteer let the Springer rest in the car for a while and then took her inside for one more short and successful visit that day. The Springer showed no emotional damage or increased fear after this incident, but we don't know whether her conditioning would have moved forward more quickly without this event. Often just one attack like this can cause a fearful dog to shut down and become difficult to rehabilitate. This shows that things can happen when you least expect them, particularly at an adoption event, where there are lots of people and dogs, many of which are inexperienced in observing and responding appropriately to dog behavior. The Springer Rescue volunteers at the event spoke to those in charge about the volunteer walking her foster dog off-leash, and are satisfied that it won't happen again. What a fiasco — but what a good example of why we need to be prepared with an emergency plan!

The one thing I wish the volunteer could have done in this situation, because the dog was not ready to do a controlled u-turn, was to pick up the dog, turn and walk away. This usually is safe if the attacking dog is small and the owner is right there to help. With a large dog, it might not be safe to pick up your dog because it can arouse the attacking dog further and a larger dog can do more damage to a human. In this case, the attacking dog was very small, able to bite an ankle at worst, so this would have been a safe move. With foster dogs, you must consider whether your charge is amenable to your picking him or her up; this is why it's so important to work with dogs to be able to touch them in every area of their bodies and to pick them up if necessary. Take a look at my "Achieving Forever" YouTube channel, especially the "Conditioning: Collar Grab" video, for a little guidance in how to do this.

You can see why it's useful to think through an emergency plan before you meet a loose dog. If you're ever in this situation, you'll have to move quickly to change things and you won't have time to think. You can't plan in the middle of a crisis; it has to have been done ahead of time.