Troubleshooting BAT Set-Ups

The deeper your dog is in the water (the more stress he's experiencing), the more you will need to help out. Like the lifeguard, you will rescue your dog in the smallest way that will work with his current state of mind. Using the right level of intrusion avoids micromanagement and helps your dog practice decision-making and active coping strategies.

If your dog looks at the trigger, disengages quickly, and then just stares at you without going anywhere, your dog is in 'working mode.' Some dogs need more direction than others and freely wandering around the space may feel unusual or uncomfortable.

- Walk near interesting smells, so he can take his focus off of you. You can also casually drop treats behind you so that your dog can discover them later.
- Later, do some wandering walks with no triggers around, using the same trick of casually scattering treats mentioned above.
- The dog may be stressed and looking to the handler for help. In that case, regroup and start again farther away from the helper.

If any of the following situations happen, you are probably waiting too long to stop your dog. Whenever you have to prompt the dog away from the trigger, go far enough away that he doesn't glance back right away. If you use a recall cue, move your dog away from the helper and then **always reinforce**, say by tossing some treats on the ground.

If it's difficult to stop your dog in the first place, he's already in over his head, so call your dog away. I like "Treat Party" as a recall cue, which I reinforce with many treats tossed on the ground, one at a time.

If he walks directly toward the helper after disengaging, call him away, unless you are really sure that he is relaxed enough to handle it. Most of the time when this happens, the dog is too focused on the trigger and at least a few steps into the water.

If it takes your dog more than 2 seconds to disengage, his toes are in the water. Don't take control right away, but you will suggest where to go next.

- *Relax and wait for him to disengage on his own,* then suggest that he move away, using the right level of intrusion (control/prompting).
  - **If your dog was air-scenting** (gathering info) and pretty relaxed, prompt in a small way by shifting your weight away from the helper.

- o **If turning away was a little challenging**, use a more obvious prompt: ask aloud if he's "Done?" and shift your weight away from the helper.
- **If he's getting more excited while you wait** (face muscles tight, taller, up on toes, breathing faster, heart rate going up, mouth closing, leaning toward the helper, spine pointing directly at the helper, chest puffing out, ears forward, tail up, forehead wrinkled), **call your dog away**! He's moving deeper into the water at this point, so you can't give him time to check things out.

Most dogs seem to be drawn to the helper in some way. For example, learning about something that is scary makes it less scary, so there is a good reason to get close enough to gather information. You should gradually be getting closer and closer to the trigger, but it's a slow process, especially the first several times. You might even start out at one distance and then realize you actually have to be farther away. In the beginning, you are experimenting to find the right working distance. That's critical: working at the right distance is the most reliable way to help your dog overcome these issues.

If he completely ignores the trigger, you are too close or too far away, or he just hasn't noticed the trigger yet. Here are some options:

- Walk him further away and see if he starts to look up at the helper.
- Jingle tags for helper dogs or have helper humans say something to make sure he knows the helper is there.
- Sneakily put down some treats so that as he searches for the food, he works his way closer to the helper. Just make sure he doesn't sniff his way up so close that he is shocked and starts barking when he notices the helper for real.

How do I know it's working? In most set-ups, you should be able to see that your dog is significantly closer to the helper at the end of the set-ups than at the beginning. You should also see progress if you compare the threshold distance at the beginning of the first set-up to, say, the initial threshold distance for set-up number 5 or 10. If this is not happening, have a discussion with your trainer to see what else can be done.