

Survival Skills for Real Life or Smaller Spaces

In a set-up or in real life, it's critical to adjust to the situation or stress level. The best way to do that is to work at an appropriate distance where you can do regular BAT and just follow the dog around. Sometimes that's not possible. For example, the training space may be too small, you might be working on actual greetings (up close), or the dog is anxious just doing things on his own. In that case, use Mark & Move.



Mark & Move: A marker *signals that a behavior has earned a reinforcer*. Mark any behavior in the first column with any marker in the second column. Then move away and give any consequence in the third column. There are other behaviors and markers, so be creative. If you use a marker normally associated with food or toys, provide those after moving away.

Behaviors	Markers	Consequences after Moving Away
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving away • Looking at you • Looking away from the trigger (after looking) • Relaxing muscles (ears, tail, mouth,...) • Looking at the trigger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question Marker: "Done?" with weight shift away • Verbal "yes" or Hand • Flash (deaf dogs) • Clicker • Cues: Find It, Touch, Come, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm praise • Food on the ground • Food to the mouth • Toys to find or play with • Nose work, Agility, etc. • Perform cue for mark/reinforcer

Example: mark "looking at the trigger" with a clicker, move away, and then toss treats to find.

Behaviors are listed from least to most intrusive, or most to least effort/choice for the dog. If we mark for moving away, that's less distracting than if we mark as soon as the dog sees the trigger. If the dog is more relaxed, use behaviors near the top. If you are in a tight space, pick behaviors from the bottom. The markers are sorted approximately from least to most intrusive. For example, the dog has the choice to move away or not when you use the question marker, but will almost always turn to you if you click or give a cue. The consequences are listed from least to most distracting.

The more distracted dogs are, the less they can pay attention to learning about the trigger, so use the least intrusive version of Mark and Move (higher up on the list). BAT is fastest when the dog is relaxed and doesn't need your intervention to explore the area and learn about the trigger on his own.

Real Life: In real life, you don't have staged helpers—other dogs, animals, people or objects in the environment are what we call "triggers" for your reactions. However, **after each successful BAT set-up, your dog has a better chance of staying relaxed in these new situations**; it just takes practice. *Until the BAT set-ups have a chance to take effect, it is critical that you set your dog up for success. Only let your dog be around triggers in scenarios that he can handle.*

You can't control triggers on walks, but you can control where you go and what you do to keep your dog "on the beach." If you see the trigger before your dog does, **proactively arrange your distance to the trigger so that your dog will stay relaxed when he sees it.** Cross the street or move behind a car until the trigger passes, so that when your dog notices the trigger, he can make his own choices without needing more help. Take walks in places without off-leash dogs, change your walking time, etc. If your dog is "in over his head" (or soon will be), call or Mark & Move without shouting or tugging on the leash.

Sometimes you can't move far enough away. In that case, you are in **survival mode** and have to distract your dog from the trigger. This can happen a lot during urban training.¹ In the ocean beach analogy, if you can't bring your dog back to shore right away, you need to toss out a flotation device. There are many standard trainer tricks to get through this sort of situation.

Room to Move	Trapped!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark & Move • Touch (nose to hand) as you walk away • Find It (toss treats on the ground) as you move away • Toss treats at a loose dog and move away (keep your dog's focus if you do that) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Click for looking at the trigger, then treat • Click whenever he looks away from the trigger, then treat • Do tricks like Touch, chin targeting, etc • Find It in place (don't do this with loose dogs!) • Stand between your dog and the trigger and cue Watch Me • Constantly feed your dog until the trigger goes away

When you use distraction to get through this kind of situation, stress may still build up. Distraction doesn't necessarily give your dog any active coping skills or teach the dog that the situation is safe. However, it's not **nearly as bad as having your dog freak out.** If distracting doesn't work, do whatever you can to hold on and keep everyone safe. **Do not make things worse by trying to punish your dog.** Assess your dog's stress level. You may need to do Find It to help your dog relax (toss treats to find on the ground) or head home.

When you get home, brainstorm to avoid getting trapped again in the future. For example, do you have to walk that particular route? Can you drive somewhere else to walk?

Keep working at ways to set your dog up to stay calm during walks, so the training you are doing in [BAT set-ups](#) can take effect. If you do set-ups that allow your dog to experience the trigger in a stress-free way, you will see dramatic improvement. Good luck!

¹ It's tempting to stay in the city and be continuously in survival mode. If you want to stop micromanaging your dog, *set up scenarios where the dog can be relaxed*, even if it means driving to a location being creative about locations, implementing visual barriers, trying medications, relaxation techniques, etc.