

Hi all,

Like many of you in Harbury and Ladbroke, I have a beloved pooch and would like to share our story and raise awareness on how as dog owners we can all support one another.

Marlow is 2 and named after Albert Marlow, one of the young men recognised on the blue plaques around the village. I briefly lived in Ivy Lane in a cottage that has Albert's name proudly hung out front.

Unfortunately, when Marlow was around 9 months, he was chased and bitten by another dog (not in the village). Being a Border Collie and therefore an intelligent breed, this has sadly remained imprinted on his brain and boy have I had a ton of work to do!

Overnight he became reactive to every dog he saw. He would immediately lunge, bark and air snap towards any dog. This a dog's way to communicate, "Stay away, I am scared", not necessarily a sign of a viscous dog, as can be confirmed by any trainer. I was horrified, mortified and became nervous to walk him. So began my long and continuing journey of trying to understand a reactive dog, and this I why I wanted to share our journey to raise awareness.

Any dog can become reactive to any stimuli that frightens them. They may include dogs, bikes, traffic, people, cats almost anything! Sadly, some dogs react to multiple stimuli. Reading up, following groups online, hiring a professional trainer, consulting behaviourists and vets' visits (including getting him "done") I have spent hours of patient and repetitive training to build his confidence and mine to get out and about.

It's been very hard, but he has improved no end. He can tolerate dogs much closer to him now but does not like them coming to him head on and in his personal space. I will always attempt to make space or divert for the benefit of everyone.

He is always on a short lead, with a bright yellow sleeve saying he needs space. He is great off lead, but in consideration of other dogs and their owners, I always call him back and leash up if within his threshold tolerance.

Sadly, I have experienced many instances where other owners have not always been considerate, so this is my plea. If another dog off lead comes towards us, I always ask politely for the owner to call their dog back. Where possible, (as shouting over a distance sounds rude!) I explain he does not like other dogs and ask for space. Most owners are considerate and recall their dog/s and all is fine.

Sadly, I have had numerous occasions where I have had replies such as "Why, mines' friendly?", or "He's not doing any harm", or "You should socialise your dog with other dogs". Believe me I have tried, and he's fine with dogs he knows and has formed a bond with. One incident on Newbold Commyn where I asked someone to recall their out-of-control puppy has resulted in the owner in question attempting to assault me and Marlow. This has been reported as a crime.

When I ask an owner to do this, I am not only advocating for Marlow, but also in the best interests of the other dog. If Marlow gets too anxious, his cortisol is raised, and I cannot take him out for 24 hours. His barking and lunging have greatly reduced and continue to do so. He now tolerates dogs much closer than in the past. He's saying, "get out of my personal space". After all, if I ran up to you asking for a hug and invading your personal space you would most likely react thinking I was mad!

A responsible dog owner is aware of dog etiquette, and unless the dog's recall is bombproof will put their dog on a lead if required, for which I always thank them. As a point of interest, my dog may be deaf, visually impaired or elderly and need that consideration too.

Legally, if your dog has no recall, in the eyes of the law the dog is not under control, and therefore breaking the law. A dog on lead is under control. (Hence reporting the incident above besides, the threat of assault). Some dogs may have a sleeve or vest on alerting others. Some don't like dogs; some are naturally nervous. Different colours mean different things, but whatever the reason is visible for a purpose and conveying a message to others.

If I had a crystal ball when I picked him from the litter, would I have done so? Probably not. If I could turn back the clock and change him? Absolutely not. He is the most affectionate, loyal and best companion. He's asked for numerous cuddles whilst writing this!

In my perfect world all dogs would love other dogs and want to socialise with them all. Sadly, this is not the case for a variety of reasons as mentioned above, so when next out on a stroll with your best friend, please remember just like your beloved pooch Marlow is a best friend too and needs his space.

Thankyou