

Prey Drive



in Dogs

Dogs are innate predators. There was once a time when they needed to hunt their prey just to survive. Even now, stray dogs still rely on their natural instincts to sustain themselves when they are alone. This is important to remember when handling a dog with significant prey drive. They are not doing this on purpose to spite or disgust you, they are just responding to their instincts.

Dogs who experience higher prey drive may do so with animals that aren't the most suitable. This includes the neighbor's cat, a porcupine, or even a skunk. A squirrel is frustrating, may even be gross, but is far more suitable prey and usually doesn't cost you an expensive vet visit.

If you invest in some of these tools and sometime towards training your dog, you will be able to manage your dog's prey drive. Therefore, they will be easier to walk in areas where there are more potential prey-type animals.

- A bell to attach to their collar (to deter the animals they may be chasing).
- A basket muzzle (to reduce the instance of successful attempts to capture prey) – refer to our muzzle resource for more information on the fit & how to train a dog to wear one.
- Super yummy treats (make yourself more exciting/valuable than the animal).
- A flirt pole/lunge whip/teaser toy (it's a like a giant cat toy).
- Dog sports that allows for a natural outlet for prey drive (i.e. dock diving).



Note on the flirt pole: many owners who struggle with a dog that has a higher prey drive often worry that a flirt pole toy will increase their prey drive. However, it tends to do just the opposite for most dogs. A flirt pole allows them a more appropriate outlet to express their drive to chase and capture their "prey". By exhibiting these behaviors it reduces their overall prey drive because they have already completed the cycle of chase, capture, repeat during play. The key to reducing their prey drive through this toy is to ensure they successfully get to capture this toy instead of being successful with real prey. That makes your fake prey more enticing because there is a winning aspect.

To manage your dog's prey drive, it is important to be informed about their individual threshold. A dog's threshold is the limit to which they can sustain focus on their surroundings other than the trigger itself. This can mean focusing on you, another smell/dog/person, or in

general ignoring the trigger because they are far enough away to not be tempted by it. Besides knowing your individual dog's threshold, it is also recommended to train them during their walks to check in with you. This helps increase their threshold towards certain triggers as they practice ignoring them for you and a much more valuable reward. If you are more valuable from your dog's perspective, they are more likely to want to check-in with you when they see something exciting. Clicker training can also be effective here due to the linking the "click" sound to their treat which can be an auditory interruption before a dog exceeds its threshold in the presence of prey. You are trying to teach them that these triggers will still earn them a reward/food item, but that they can skip the chasing and hunting process as you will provide it from your hand instead.

Using a muzzle during the training process or even afterwards may be necessary for some dogs. It helps you reduce their success from obtaining prey. Even dogs who are well trained may need to always wear a muzzle, because the urge in specific situations may be stronger, such as, when the training is new, or the dog may be having an off day (i.e. they're hungry, bored, or stressed...).

Some things to consider when training your high prey dog:

- Their natural instinct is to track, chase, and capture prey. Once they start that sequence, it is much harder to redirect their attention elsewhere. Being aware of your surroundings and being one step ahead of them reaching their natural threshold.
- Pulling against their leash, using a prong, or other aversive tools can make matters worse. Dogs who have prey drive are likely already comfortable with pulling, so you pulling back doesn't really change their perspective. Prongs and shock collars are also not effective because there is no real link between the shock or pinch feeling and their prey retrieval behaviors.
- Dogs with high prey drive will likely not be successful off leash at any point and time, They tend to just be too stubborn to leave things alone just based on your vocal cue and treats. Having a leash gives you greater control to redirect your dog and remove them from the trigger.
- Prey drive is innate, it is also not the same as aggression. They shouldn't be mislabeled as the same since they tend to stem from a different portion of the brain. Dogs with high prey drive may not be aggressive, and aggressive dogs may have little-to-no prey drive.
- Outlets like flirt poles or dog sports are effective because they provide an appropriate outlet for the dogs natural behaviors that you approve of, instead of the dogs finding inappropriate outlets like the animals you may see on your daily walks.

