



Fearful Dog Help



Congratulations on your new family member!

Your new pet may have shown fearful behavior while at the shelter. Showing fear isn't necessarily abnormal as the shelter can be a very stressful place. Please follow these guidelines to help increase your dog's confidence and guide them to mature into behaviorally healthy dogs.

What Fear Looks Like

Extreme Fear: Takes on the look of aggression - snarling, barking, growling, nipping, and biting. Extreme fear can also manifest as immobile behavior. A dog is physically frozen, cowering, or moving in slow motion and refusing food. If your dog freezes up, you must immediately fix the situation before someone gets hurt.

Moderate Fear: At this level, your dog might not be able to eat treats, might seem hypervigilant of the environment, or might turn away or move away from the scary thing. At this point, you must intervene and remove the fear-inducing trigger or give your dog more distance. Do not make your dog get closer using food or force.

Low-Level Fear: Signs are yawning, excessive panting, a furrowed brow, lip licking, and hyper-vigilance. When you begin to notice these behaviors, it is the best time to intervene. Perform classical conditioning training by pairing the corrections with high-value food/treats!

The techniques outlined will teach your dog invaluable lessons.

- All good things come from humans
- Humans are kind, predictable and gentle
- Novel experiences are not scary

To learn these lessons, a dog needs to feel relaxed and safe. Avoid using punitive methods (punishment) with fearful dogs. Instead, manage your dog's environments and set them up for success. It is especially important for dogs with body handling issues to feel like they are in control of their bodies. Avoid touching your pet extensively until they begin soliciting attention themselves.

Make the first few weeks at home focused on getting your pet comfortable with people, handling, and being in a home.

ABT - Always be Treatin'

Food is inherently valuable and your primary reinforcement. Dogs don't enjoy verbal praise or petting as much as food. Please always carry treats – and good ones! Try boiled chicken, tiny pieces of cheese, soft dog treats, or something that you can dispense quickly and often. Pair the treats with ANYTHING novel and any handling you do. Don't worry about giving too many treats!

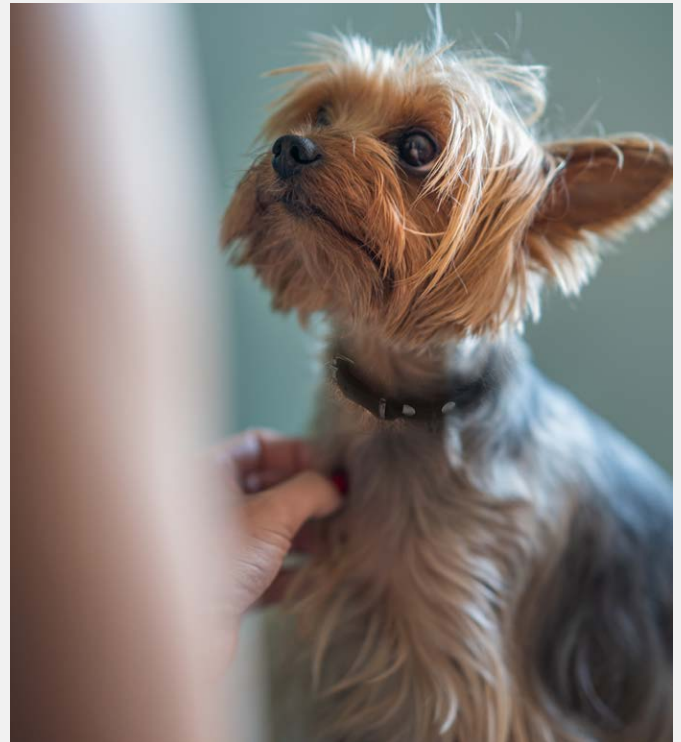
Dog in Charge

We must allow dogs to control their interactions with what they fear. Allow a fearful dog to approach you; do not go after or corner them. If you must pick up your dog, make sure you are pairing the pick up with high-value treats. It is ok to be creative and think of other ways to let your dog make choices. Fearful dogs have low confidence; making choices will help to boost that!

Hand-feeding

1. Start by feeding your fearful dog by hand. Hand-feed your dog by sitting on the floor with your dog and allow them to approach you. If your dog does not show interest in the food, you can plump it up with low sodium broth or water and canned food. Mix well and wait 30 minutes.
2. If your dog is too afraid of you to approach, begin by tossing kibble on the ground.
3. Slowly feed the dog, kibble by kibble, from your open palm.
4. Slowly feed your dog by hand with longer pauses in between. During those pauses, you are waiting for them to look up and make eye contact with you. Mark the eye contact with a soft yes then feed. Most of the time, fearful dogs will either avoid eye contact altogether or hard stare at you. We are trying to teach that soft, neutral eye contact is a good thing.

If your dog has low-level fear, you may be able to skip step one.



Desensitizing to Touch

Initially, fearful dogs do not want to be touched or handled. Spending time around or close to you is comforting, however, they may not be ready to be pet, touched, picked up, or snuggled. Your pet may not physically fight it, so look for other signs such as freezing, stiffening up, turning their heads away, laying their ears back, showing you the whites of their eyes, or simply shutting down.

Hoping they get used to human touching is not a good plan. Without proper introductions, repeated human contact could lead to aggressive behavior when touched. We want to teach your dog to feel safe, relaxed, and enjoy our touch. If you notice your dog unable to eat a treat they regularly enjoy while you're touching, that means you've gone way too far too fast.

Play with your dog

There are many ways to incorporate touching while you play with your pet. Play shows dogs what fun humans can be! Roll a ball, use a flirt pole/tail teaser, or play some gentle tug (and let your dog win often!), offer him

new things to smell, taste, and find. The sky is the limit as long as your dog is feeling safe and enjoying the activity.

Use your Voice

Speak to your dog calmly and gently; there is no need to use a harsh or stern voice. Using a stern voice teaches is that you are scary. It is pivotal when giving obedience that you use in a calm happy voice.

Positive Interrupter

We don't want to use a harsh "no!" when speaking to our dogs. It can make you seem like a scary human. If there is a time day you can't monitor your pet, please put him or her in their crate or a room that mitigates unwanted behavior. If you catch them doing an unwanted behavior, interrupt it with a happy sound like a kissy noise. That will get his/her attention, and when they make eye contact say "yes" and reward.

- **POSITIVE INTERRUPTER DEMO:** <https://youtu.be/TBvPaqMZyo8>

Gentle Exposure to Novelty (Socialization)

Often adult dogs you may think were abused just missed their socialization window (between 7-18 weeks). They now view everyday interactions as new and even scary. Those experiences can create fear and aggression. The reality is nothing scary has happened at all, just a lack of exposure to normal life events at an early age.

Once you have gained your dog's trust, start introducing them to new people, places, and things. Feed them LOTS of treats while you do this! Remember to implement classical conditioning (pairing something good, the food, with something unknown). Avoid flooding the dog with too many experiences at once, or expose them to a scary or intense experience. Make sure your dog has loose body language and looks HAPPY as they are experiencing new things.

No-force, No-fear Policy

Old school methods of forcing canines to accept touch and remain calm are **NOT** based in science and should **NOT** be used.

This includes alpha rolling, holding puppies down till they "calm", or any other forceful methods. The methodology outlined in this document is based on scientific research and is about getting dogs to happily do what we want them to do, to make good choices on their own, and enjoy handling by humans – not simply tolerate it.



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