

Helping the Shy or Fearful Dog

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Fearful dogs avoid people or things that frighten them, may seem depressed or disinterested and sometimes lunge or bark to make what they're afraid of go away. If you've decided to share your life with a shy dog, it's important to understand his feelings. The following information can help:

Different Kinds of Shyness:

The most common kinds of shyness in dogs are:

- *Social shyness:* fearful of unfamiliar or certain types of people. Dogs like this are sometimes described as “takes a while to warm up” or “protective.” They are usually fine with a person once they get to know them. Examples are dogs who are afraid of men, men with beards and dogs who are uncomfortable around children. Dogs can also be shy with other dogs.
- *Context fears:* afraid of certain kinds of situations. Examples are dogs who are afraid of going to the vet, panic during car rides or are uncomfortable in new places.
- *Sound sensitivities:* afraid of sudden loud noises. These dogs flatten and try to escape when a car backfires, or they pace and salivate during thunderstorms or fireworks.



Why Is He Like This?

Fear is very common in all animals. Although it's possible that a fearful dog has suffered abuse or a bad experience, most of the time fears result from a combination of a genetic predisposition and some lack of experience, especially in the first months of life. For instance, a dog may have missed out on becoming socialized to certain kinds of people by simply not being around them enough when he was a puppy.

Can This Behavior Change?

Most fearful dogs can be helped to gradually improve through training. This process requires patience. Shy dogs are not for everyone; they need caretakers who have compassion and perseverance to help them thrive!

What Can I Do?

The best thing for a fearful dog is to create positive associations to those things that frighten him. So, a dog who is afraid of children might start to feel more comfortable if he regularly sees children but at a distance where he doesn't feel too worried. Then, if he receives praise, love and treats he might start to see the kids as good news: “Wow, great things happen to me when kids are around!”



A dog who is afraid of traffic would benefit from audiotapes of traffic sounds, time spent near quieter streets, all combined with games, treats and happy talk from his guardian. As the dog has more positive interactions, he will begin to become less fearful. Dogs learn primarily through association.

How Can I Help My Shy Dog Settle into His New Home?

The best possible strategy is to let the dog go at his own pace. Any kind of pressure or coercion to make contact usually worsens the fear. Let the dog hide if he needs to, investigate things and come to you when he feels ready. Avoid as many negative experiences as possible early on. With time, your shy dog will get used to his new surroundings and bond with you.



If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call the **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.