



Adopting or Fostering a Fearful Dog

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The goal when working with a fearful dog is to modify their behavior by making new, positive associations with things that they might be afraid of as well as building their confidence. The following tips and tips will help you when bringing home a fearful dog.

1. Teach the dog to sit.

It is helpful when working with a fearful dog if they know how to sit. Asking the dog to “sit” gives their mind something to focus on to remove their focus from the scary thing. See our [Say Please](#) handout for more details.

2. Exercise the dog for 20-30 minutes per day.

Some studies suggest that endorphins released during exercise can be helpful in stress release for some individuals. For this reason, it may be helpful to get your dog regular exercise. The exercise will also help with future steps in reducing fear and building confidence.

3. Ask everyone to ignore your dog.

Do not allow anyone to touch your dog until your dog touches them first. This allows your fearful dog to be out of the spotlight for new greetings and also allows them to take their time. You may also need to step in between your dog and a new person to build the dog’s confidence that they are safe and secure from unwanted attention until they are ready.

4. Define your dog’s triggers.

Identify things that cause your dog to become fearful. It may be helpful to write them down at first to keep track of the things that you will want to help them build confidence around in the future.

5. Define your dog’s threshold.

Threshold is the point in which something changes which could be the distance that your dog can feel safe from a trigger. When training, it is important to keep your dog below threshold level where they are still relatively calm and responsive. If your dog goes over threshold or stops responding you are too close to the scary thing or you have gone too fast in training.

For more information on working with fearful dogs we recommend www.fearfuldogs.com and *The Cautious Canine* by Patricia McConnell.

For behavior and training advice, please contact Operation Kindness at behavior@operationkindness.org or visit www.operationkindness.org/training.