

# THE FEARFUL DOG

Has your dog displayed fearful behaviors for some people and places? Fear in dogs may occur because they have not received socialization with certain types of people outside of their normal environment.

Dogs that display fearful behaviors toward people might look away, run away, hide, cower, tremble, or tuck their tails between their legs. They also may growl or bark. If a fearful dog is approached while in a fearful state, they might nip or bite to try to keep the person away.

Dogs that are fearful in new environments might try to run away, cower, tremble, whine, or pant heavily. They may start to display signs of high anxiety. ***\*Please refer to the handout: Body Language of Fear in Dogs.***

Please follow some of the suggestions below to help your dog when meeting new people or in new situations.

## STEPS TO TAKE:

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- I. **When you know you're having visitors come to your home, always take the dog outside to greet your guests.** You don't want to scare your dog by having surprise guests over (at least to the dog it's a surprise). Always take yummy treats with you and have your visitor offer them to your dog.
- II. **Ask people who are meeting your dog for the first time to sit whenever possible and not look directly at him/her.** Do not allow a new person to touch your dog. Instead, ask them to toss high-valued treats to your dog. If your dog willingly eats the treats, ask the person to hold the treat in their hand to see if your dog will approach and take it.
- III. **If your dog likes to play with toys, ask the person to lightly toss the toy for him/her.** If your dog runs away or cowers, stop the attempts at play.
- IV. **Have a crate available for your dog to go to if he/she wants to avoid the person.** The crate will serve as a safe area for your dog to feel comfortable.
- V. **Stay away from places or situations that are going to cause your dog to be fearful (parades, parties, pet stores, ball games, etc.).**
- VI. **Never push your dog to accept people he/she is afraid of.** Forcing a dog to be petted or touched before they are ready can increase the dog's fear. It could also result in a dog biting a person. Look for clues that show your dog is ready. Watch for tail wags that are at spine level and relaxed, eating treats, and playful behaviors.
- VII. **It does not help to ignore some of your dog's fearful behaviors.** Comforting or touching your dog when he/she is displaying fearful behaviors actually might do more harm than good. This could reinforce the fearful behavior and signal to your dog that being afraid is ok.
- VIII. **Never scold or correct your dog for being afraid or for barking at a stranger.** This will reinforce the dog's fears and encourage the behavior. Showing your dog that you are upset or angry will also edify your dog's fear.

***An experienced trainer or behaviorist can assist you to guide your dog in the right direction. For a list of resources in your area please contact the Harrisburg Humane Society's Behavioral Department at (717)564-3320 x118.***



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