



Shy and Fearful Dog Tips

Thank you for opening your home and heart to a shy or fearful dog! Working with shy dogs can be rewarding, but also takes patience. Here are some things to remember:

- Be patient. Don't push the dog to interact or socialize with you if they are not ready.
- Make sure the dog has a safe space (such as a crate or bed in the corner of a quiet room) where they can go and be left alone by everyone in the home.
- Do not chase, corner, or otherwise force dogs into tolerating handling if they avoid you or shy away.
- Never physically or verbally punish, intimidate, or frighten the dog intentionally. This means no hitting, smacking, yelling, shoving into position, dragging, or handling the dog roughly.

Recognizing Body Language

It is important to be able to recognize when dogs are feeling social and comfortable, versus when they are feeling upset, nervous, or frightened. Many people make the mistake of thinking a dog who is not physically moving is calm, but they may still be very frightened.

- **Relaxed dogs** have soft/loose muscles and joints; the eyes are soft or squinty; ears and tails are neutral; tails are wagging; the jaw is relaxed (either open or closed); and the tongue is hanging softly in the mouth.
- **Worried dogs** have tense muscles/joints; rounded eyes (whites of the eye may show); a tense jaw; ears back; tails tucked; and low posture. May flick tongue out, yawn, or pant heavily.

Here are some photos to illustrate relaxed versus worried dogs:

Relaxed



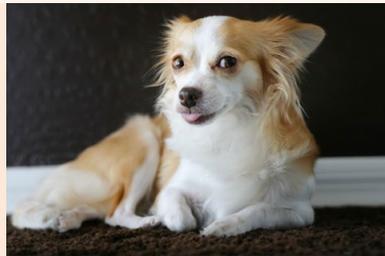
Worried/Frightened/Anxious



Relaxed



Worried/Frightened/Anxious



It is important that we respect and give space to dogs who are showing us signs they are worried or uncomfortable. Not respecting the dog's worried body language or pushing a dog to interact when they are afraid may result in aggressive behavior, potentially including biting. Dogs who display protracted warning signs (growling, snarling/lip curling, snapping, hard stares, bite attempts or bites) should not be handled.

Consent to Touching/Interacting

We always want dogs to consent to any touching or petting. Dogs who are feeling social will approach us with the following behavior: wagging tails, paw raises/pawing at us, ears back, whining, lip licks or jumping up to lick our faces.

If a dog is not approaching us with social cues, they likely do not want to be touched or pet. Instead, give them some space and allow them to approach at their own pace, and work on creating positive associations.

When we are engaging with fearful dogs, it is best if we pause frequently (every few seconds) during petting to make sure they re-engage with us. This gives the dog an opportunity to check out if they are feeling overwhelmed or worried. These dogs are usually more comfortable with petting that begins under the chin rather than reaching over their head.

We can help make these dogs feel a little more comfortable by getting low, angling our body to the side, and avoiding long, direct eye contact or hovering over them.

Do not hug or kiss dogs – most dogs find this threatening or uncomfortable. Many pets tolerate it, but an unfamiliar, already worried dog may react aggressively out of panic, and hugging/kissing puts our faces very close to theirs.

How To Meet A Dog

Do

- ✓ Kneel and turn to side
- ✓ Keep your face up and away from dog's face



- ✓ Walk up slowly and speak softly
- ✓ Allow dog to approach you
- ✓ Pet gently for a few seconds then stop
- ✓ Always ask before petting

Don't

- ✗ Reach towards or over head
- ✗ Make direct eye contact
- ✗ Make quick movements or loud noises
- ✗ Hug a dog you just met
- ✗ Pet a dog while holding a baby



A dog is afraid if you see:

- Wide, worried eyes
- Leaning or looking away
- Ears back, tail low or tucked

Courtesy of Pets and People in Harmony, Columbus Dog Connection, and CattleDog Publishing

Creating Positive Associations

One of the best ways we can build confidence and reduce fear is to build positive associations with new people and new things. Thankfully, we can do this easily with food. The juicier and smellier the food, the better, such as string cheese, hot dogs, etc. It is best to use many small pieces (as small as a pea), rather than one large piece.

- Anytime you socialize or interact with your dog, give them some high-value treats. Try to keep these on you (or conveniently stashed around the house) so you always have access to them.
- Anytime they are introduced to a new person or place, make sure they are showered with treats.
- If there is a sudden loud noise, scary movement, a knock on the door, or the doorbell rings, deliver some treats.
- For more fearful dogs who have not solicited attention from us, toss treats to them anytime you walk past them.

Remember: When trying to create positive associations, always give them treats regardless of their behavior.

Reinforcing Behavior We Like

Anytime the dog offers a behavior we like, we want to reward them with high-value treats. Examples may include:

- Pottying outside
- Being brave and exploring new areas of the home
- Walking politely on a leash
- Not jumping on us
- Playing with or chewing on appropriate toys
- Going into their crate
- Resting quietly
- Soliciting attention from people

Discouraging Behavior We Don't Like

When it comes to training, Denver Animal Protection is fully force/fear free. This means that we never use anything painful, scary, or uncomfortable to stop or punish behavior we don't like. This is especially important for dogs who are already fearful or worried about people or their environment. The good news is we still have some tools in our toolbox to discourage undesired behaviors. If your dog is displaying aggression or behavior that makes you uncomfortable, seek professional help from a certified dog behaviorist or trainer. Here are our options:

- Reinforce a behavior that is mutually exclusive to the behavior we dislike. For example, we can reinforce sitting or having all four paws on the floor for dogs who like to jump up.
- Remove what the dog wants when they perform the offending behavior. For example, if a dog is jumping up on us to receive attention, we can remove our attention (or even our entire selves) from the dog until they offer a better behavior. Once they offer the preferred behavior, make sure to reinforce that with treats and praise.
- Give the dog a "time out." This works well for vocalizing, jumpy or mouthy behavior, or inappropriate play. Once the dog performs the bad behavior (like mouthing during play), say "too bad" in a gentle voice and either remove the dog or the target (in this example, yourself) for several minutes. Over time, the dog learns that "too bad" means the time out is coming and helps them identify which behavior earned the time out. For more instruction and tips, seek professional help from a certified dog behaviorist or trainer.

Meeting New People

Once the dog is comfortable with you and your family, it's time to start broadening their social lives and having them meet new people. Just like when they were getting cozy in your space, we want to ensure any new people take things slowly and don't force the dog.

- Have lots of high-value treats ready.
- Do the meet where the dog is comfortable, such as your home, a quiet park they're familiar with, etc.
- Allow the dog to check out the new people, asking them to remain still and quiet while offering treats. If the dogs won't approach for treats, you can feed them treats from a distance.
- Make sure there is enough space so that the dog can exit the interaction if they want to.
- Don't allow petting or handling unless the dog is giving clear social cues they want to interact (approaching with waggy tails, paw raises, lip licks or licking faces) and have them pause frequently.
- Respect signs the dog is uncomfortable or doesn't want to engage (retreating, avoiding, worried body language).