

Brain Games – for fearful or reactive dogs

The activities below start out as a game in a comfortable non distracting area, then slowly build up using them in more distracting areas. These games will be able to be used when your dog encounters something that is “scary” or something that triggers a reaction. Notice if your dog is scanning the area for other dogs if s/he does, you can be a distraction with these games.

“FIND IT” – this game can be used when you are out and there is a presence of something that causes your dog to be afraid, such as the skateboard.

- a. Have your dog in front of you and with a handful of treats (something s/he really wants) behind your back.
- b. Say “Find It” in a happy calm voice
- c. Then toss a treat a few feet to your left
- d. Then repeat and toss to the right
- e. As your dog eats the treat praise.
- f. Keep doing this and toss the treats back and forth and a bit farther away each time, until your dog happily runs back and forth.
- g. When you are out and you see a whatever may trigger your dog’s reaction you can play this but keep the treats close to you.

TOUCH - This exercise can be used to distract your dog and to be comfortable with hands and is a fun game. At this time only people s/he is comfortable with should play this game



Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

with her. As time progresses this is a good way to build his/her confidence with unfamiliar people.

- a. Have your dog in front of you and with a handful of treats (something s/he really wants) behind your back.
- b. Offer your other hand to the dog, you can offer your open palm, the back of your hand or a closed fist.
- c. As soon as the dog touches your hand with its nose say "Yes!" and give a treat from the other hand.
- d. Repeat.
- e. After your dog has got the hang of "touch nose to hand and get a treat" you can start adding the word "touch" just before your dog starts touching your hand.

If you have trouble with your dog actually touching your hand, you can reward your dog for her nose getting close to your hand for a while and then increase the criteria of what you would like your dog to do by only rewarding the dog getting closer and closer until she is touching your hand.

"LETS GO"

- f. This will be your run away cue
- g. Start in the backyard
 - Say the cue then turn around and start running away from your dog while encouraging with calm happy talk, rewarding with a favorite toy or treat. Engage in what your dog loves the most.
- h. When out on a walk use the same cue and start walking faster with happy talk for 10-20 feet, stop and give treats or whatever your dog will enjoy the most, this could be just getting some attention from you.
- i. These steps will teach your dog the cue and know that a game is about to happen, again you can use this to refocus your dog from the trigger that gets a reaction, such as excited, nervous or scared.

"LOOK"

- j. Start at a far enough distance that the object does not have your dog too anxious.
- k. Point at an object, name it, when your dog acts calm or checks in with you
 - Praise and reward