

Fear of People

The SPCA of Texas receives many dogs who are fearful. Some dogs are naturally timid or shy, just like some people, while others may not have had a chance to learn to trust people while they were young. If you adopt one of these dogs, the work to build a relationship of trust could be a long and hard one but the experience can be one of the most rewarding of dog ownership.

Dogs who are afraid might look away, put their heads down, hide, cower, or tremble. Some dogs might even growl or bark. If something that they are scared of gets too close they might snap or nip. By following the guidelines provided you can teach your dog to trust you and keep your dog and others safe.

Provide your dog with a safe place. This is a place that your dog is allowed to retreat to at any time he needs space from something that is scary. A safe place can be another room such as a bedroom or closet, or a crate covered with a blanket. No one should be allowed to force any interactions with your dog when he decides to go into his safe place. Your dog will need a comfortable bed and perhaps some delicious chews and new toys in his safe place. You can also place an Adaptil diffuser in or near your dog's safe place. For more information on Adaptil products visit www.adaptil.com.

Sometimes it helps to ignore your dog's fearful behavior. Let your dog seek their safe place if they need to or approach and stay near you but with minimal attention from you. This may seem counterintuitive to building a relationship but your fearful dog needs to know that being close to humans does not always mean that they will have to directly interact.

Ask new people not to look at or pet your dog unless your dog approaches them and asked to be pet by rubbing their body or



Additional Resources

Behavior modification of fearful dogs can be difficult to do without the help of a professional and can cause the behavior to get worse.

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

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

See also:

[Fearful Dogs](#) and [Adopting a Fearful Dog](#)

head against the person's hands. Have new people sit down and toss delicious treats to your dog without looking at them. If your dog likes to play, give a favorite toy to a new person and ask them to throw the toy for your dog. Staring or even eye contact from new people can be very scary and overwhelming for dogs that are afraid of people so ask new people to avoid looking directly at your dog.

Don't take your dog to busy places where you cannot control the people or flow of people, such as parties, ball games, friend or relatives' houses with lots of traffic, or any other type of public or group event. You need to be able to control all the interactions that your dog has to keep him safe and in busy places you may become distracted and your dog can become overwhelmed quickly. Also, new places lack a safe place for your dog to retreat to.

Some people will tell you that you need to "socialize" your dog but the best time for socialization is before the age of 16 weeks. After that, if your dog is fearful of people, you will need to take things very slowly and carefully in an effort to modify your dog's behavior.

Don't force your dog. Your dog will tell you when they have had enough by moving away from the interaction. Forcing your dog over his limit can increase the dog's fear, and worse, end up with the dog snapping at or biting someone. Wait for your dog to approach you rather than always approaching them. Offer your dog lots of yummy treats whether they approach you or not, one sign of a dog being under a significant level of stress is their lack of interest in treats.

For more information about helping your dog overcome his or her fear issues, check out the following books:

From Fearful to Fear Free by Marty Becker, DVM

Help for Your Fearful Dog by Nicole Wilde, CPDT

Behavior Adjustment Training 2.0 by Grisha Stewart, M.A., CPDT-KA

Do Over Dogs by Pat Miller

All of these titles, and many more, are available online at www.dogwise.com