



Dog Behaviour Guide

Managing Fearful Dogs



Managing a fearful dog can be stressful at times. Here are some recommendations for improving your dog's confidence and managing their environment.

What to Expect

Dogs who are inadequately socialized during critical development periods or have encountered fearful experiences may require additional support from their family, in terms of training. These dogs may be more prone to behaviours such as:

- Fear towards unfamiliar people, dogs, objects or environments
- Touch sensitivity (i.e. defensiveness or avoidance of human touch)
- Separation anxiety
- House-soiling
- Destructive behaviour (i.e. attempts to escape)

It is important to be mindful of these behaviours when transitioning your dog into their home. Providing them with extra patience, understanding, and appropriate management will help settle your dog into their new life.

How You Can Help

As with any canine companion, using reward-based training will be most effective. Never punish or scold a fearful dog, as this will worsen their fear and anxiety.

Prepare a "safe place" for your dog in the home. Set-up a kennel or crate in a low-traffic, quiet area of your home. Place comfortable bedding inside to encourage your dog to rest. You can also drape a blanket over the kennel or crate, as darkness helps to encourage sleep. If your dog is fearful of kennels or crates, you can provide a comfortable, appropriately sized dog bed, instead.

Show your dog their safe place and use treats to encourage your dog to investigate the space. Ensure that household members do NOT disturb your dog while they are in their safe place. This should be their spot in the house to retreat and relax, without being disturbed.

Watch for behavioural signs of fear or distress, such as tail tucking, lip licking, flattening of the ears, paw lifting, a tense mouth, or cowering. If you notice these signs, slow your training, remove your dog from the stressful situation, and/or encourage them to go to their safe space if you are at home.

Helpful Tips

Keep a consistent daily routine and avoid sudden changes in your dog's environment, such as new people or dogs. A predictable and comfortable environment will help build your dog's confidence and reduce anxiety.

- Do NOT force your dog to be petted, touched, or picked up. Encourage your dog to approach you (or other people) by rewarding your dog with treats or a favourite toy when they approach. Go slow and reward for small successes.
- Speak and move calmly around your dog. Loud or sudden noises (i.e. yelling, clapping) or movements may trigger fear responses.
- Avoid taking your dog to environments that might be overstimulating, such as dog parks, or busy areas. Socialize your dog slowly by starting in low-traffic, relatively familiar environments, such as your home or a quiet residential area.
- Use positive reinforcement and progress through your training slowly, with short training sessions. Use high value treats to encourage motivation. Do NOT punish your dog for undesirable behaviour or use aversive equipment. This can elevate your dog's fear and anxiety and may cause your dog to react defensively.
- You can use a calming pheromone, such as Adaptil® to help reduce your dog's stress and promote relaxation. Adaptil® can be purchased at Bingo's Pet Shop at the Edmonton Humane Society!
- Seek advice from a certified professional dog trainer if you encounter behavioural issues. They can develop an appropriate desensitization or counter-conditioning training plan for your dog. You may also wish to consult a veterinarian, as prescribed medication can help alleviate stress in some dogs.

Manage Your Expectations

Extra patience, training, and appropriate management will help transition your dog into their new home. Reward your dog for small improvements, avoid fearful or overstimulating experiences, and do not punish undesired behaviour. Progress can be slow (but rewarding!) with fearful dogs.

Ensure you are prepared to manage any behavioural issues and do not hesitate to reach out to a certified dog trainer or a veterinarian for behavioural advice.

Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers training classes, including Courageous Canines! This course helps fearful dogs develop more confidence using reward-based training. For more information, visit our website:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/sessions/creating-courageous-canines/>

We also offer private consultations with our trainers, which may be more appropriate for some dogs. For further information, visit our website:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/private-consultations/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).