



**Fearful dogs need a little extra guidance and patience from their guardians. Here are some signs of what to look for and recommendations for improving your dog's confidence.**

## What Causes Fear?

It's normal for dogs to experience fear sometimes, but if they are constantly reacting strongly to that fear, it can affect them negatively, making it difficult to recover from those experiences.

*Dogs do not "grow out of" fearfulness, and if left untreated it can worsen. It's important to help your dog through training and managing exposure to what scares them.*

Fear is usually a result of inadequate socialization as a puppy. If your dog wasn't exposed to many people, places, other dogs and things as a puppy, it can make them unsure as adults. Genetics and negative past experiences can also contribute to fear.

## What to Expect

Dogs can be fearful of unfamiliar people, dogs, objects or environments. New or stressful situations like car rides or vet visits and even being handled or touched can cause fear. Also, it's important to remember dogs have extraordinary hearing and they can respond strongly to loud or sudden sounds around them – just like people, they don't like being scared.

Signs of fear in dog body language and behaviour	
Tucked tail	Flattening of the ears
Licking lips	Not eating or taking treats
Yawning	Cowering or trembling
Panting	Having a lowered posture
Paw lifting	Moving slowly, stalling, or not moving
Hiding	Running away or trying to escape
Hypervigilance (looking in many directions, not resting)	

It is important to watch for these behaviours and monitor your dog's body language when transitioning into your home. Patience, understanding and appropriate management will help to settle your dog into its new life with you.

## How You Can Help

As with any canine companion, using reward-based training will be most effective. Never punish or scold a fearful dog and do not force them to interact with something they are fearful of, as this will worsen their fear and anxiety.

Prepare a “safe place” for your dog in the home, by setting up a kennel or crate in a low-traffic, quiet area. 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.

Show your dog their safe place and use treats to encourage your dog to investigate the space. Ensure other members of your household do NOT disturb your dog while they are in their safe place. This should be your dog’s 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.

Take note of what scares your dog. When you know what scares your dog you can better manage their experiences and environment to help lessen the amount of stress they experience.

## 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 helps build your dog’s confidence and reduces anxiety.

- 🐾 Do NOT force your dog to be pet, touched or picked up. Let your dog approach you (or other people) to the extent they’re comfortable with and reward your dog with treats or a favourite toy when they approach. Go slowly and reward small successes.
- 🐾 Do NOT force or lure your dog to interact with an object or into an experience they’re fearful of. This will overwhelm them, strengthening their fear, and may cause their behaviour to escalate to aggression in an attempt to leave the situation.
- 🐾 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 into 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. 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 and aid in training in some dogs.

## Manage Your Expectations

Extra patience, training and appropriate management will help transition your dog into their new home. Go at your dog's pace and reward them 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](mailto: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](#).