

# SHY AND FEARFUL DOGS

A.D.O.P.T. PET SHELTER

## **Recognizing Shy and Fearful Body Language and Behaviors:**

Many people assume that most dogs are shy or fearful because they have been abused at some point in their lives. Although that is certainly a possibility, that is not always the case. There are three main components that shape a dog's personality- genetics, puppy socialization, and experience. Puppies born to parents that are fearful themselves may have a genetic disposition to fear. Also, puppies that are not adequately socialized, especially in the first four months of life, to lots of new experiences and environments can suffer from a lack of experience just as much as puppy who has had bad experiences.

There are many ways you can help a dog that is shy or fearful. Of course, the most important thing you can give a dog suffering from fear is patience. Your dog can't verbally tell you when he or she is feeling scared or nervous, but being able to recognize the signs can go a long way to helping your dog relax and feel more comfortable in their environment.

## **Signs your dog is scared, nervous, anxious or fearful:**

- Rapid panting, licking lips or tongue flicking, whining, excessive drooling
- Shaking, trembling, cowering, and/or hiding
- Tail low or tucked
- Ears pulled flat against their head
- Pacing or hypervigilance (looking for an escape route)
- Yawning (when not tired)
- Submissive urination or defecation
- Freezing in place, not moving
- Showing teeth, growling, or barking
- Avoiding touch, creating distance
- Paw lifts
- Turning away (head and/or body)
- Not eating or taking treats
- Putting on the brakes on leash, or refusing to walk through doors

## **Things you can do to help a shy or fearful dog:**

- Set up a safe space for them, in a quiet area of the house. You can do this through baby gates or through setting up a room in the home just for them. Provide food and water, bedding, a crate with the door open (the dog can choose to go in there or not), and soft music (solo piano works best).

- Give them time to adjust and relax to their new surroundings (don't plan on throwing a party or introducing him/her to all of your friends and family right away).
- Approach from the side versus facing them head on. Bend at the knees instead of at the waist so you appear less threatening.
- Speak softly, and remember that less is more!
- Sit on the floor, facing slightly away from the dog. Try tossing some extra yummy treats in their direction.
- Let the dog make the choice to approach you and check you out. This may not mean they are ready to be touched and petted just yet. Watch their body language from the corner of your eye.
- Never pull a dog out of their hiding space or force your dog to go somewhere on leash.
- Allow your dog to make the choice to meet new people, and instruct guests to follow the same protocol.

Working with a shy or fearful dog can be a long, slow process, but can also be very rewarding. Every dog is different, and some may gain confidence quicker than others. We highly recommend the [A Sound Beginning](http://www.asoundbeginningprogram.com) training program to help you to understand your shy dog and for more tips and advice on how to help them. In some cases, very fearful dogs often benefit from working with a veterinary behaviorist who can prescribe anxiety-reducing medications. A.D.O.P.T. Pet Shelter will be happy to provide you with a list of recommended trainers and behaviorists in the area that can help you.

**A Sound Beginning: [www.asoundbeginningprogram.com](http://www.asoundbeginningprogram.com) or (630) 776-8197**

*Questions? Call the shelter at 630-355-2299 or email [trainer@adoptpetshelter.org](mailto:trainer@adoptpetshelter.org)*