



METRO NASHVILLE
ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

SHY AND FEARFUL DOGS

Your new dog has shown fear of some people, either at the shelter or in a previous home. Dogs can be afraid of just about anything. Often fear comes from a lack of exposure. Fear of people is very common in dogs who have not grown up with certain types of people. For instance, dogs that have not grown up around children may be afraid of children. Dogs who have only lived with women may be afraid of men.

Dogs who are afraid of people may look away, yawn, put their tails down, hide, cower and even tremble when they see some people. Some may even growl, whine and bark. If the person they are afraid of reaches out to pet them, they may snap or nip, especially if they feel cornered or trapped. Dogs who are afraid of people tend to be very friendly to the people they know.

It is important to remember to move slow. If possible, limit your dog's interaction with new people for the first few weeks you have him/her home. (See our Decompression document). After your dog has been given a chance to decompress, the following guidelines may help you.

GUIDELINES

By following these guidelines, you will be able to help your new dog to be less afraid of new people. As a result, you will be on your way to a safe and long-lasting relationship.

- Have all new people sit whenever possible and ignore your dog at first. Then have the person toss or hand a DELICIOUS treat to your dog.
- Ask all new people not to look directly into your dog's eyes. Direct eye contact can be intimidating or threatening to a dog. Look at the floor or to the side.
- Ask all new people **NOT TO PET YOUR DOG** unless he or she approaches them and asks to be petted. Advise them to pet under the chin or on their chest or side. Avoid patting the top of the dog's head, which can look scary to your dog.
- If your dog likes to play, give a favorite toy to the new person. Have the person throw the toy to get your dog to play.

- DON'T PUSH YOUR DOG! Forcing a fearful dog to accept people before being ready, can result in increasing the dog's fear and worse, end up with the dog snapping at or biting the person.
- Do not punish your dog for being afraid. Punishment will only make him more fearful. Animals do not understand punishment after the fact, even if it is only seconds later. Don't yell, swat, shock, or pull on the leash if he growls or barks at strangers. Just calmly increase your distance from the scary person and redirect his attention to you. Then you can reward him for behaving calmly.
- It's always ok to say no if a stranger approaches your dog and you don't feel they're ready to meet. You can step between your dog and the other person, preventing an interaction. This also gives you time to kindly explain your need for space.
- Don't take your dog to places where there are many people you can't control (parties, parades, ballgames, dog parks, crowded restaurants). Most likely your dog will be more afraid and neither you nor your dog will be able to have good time. Many people may tell you that your dog just needs to be "socialized."

However, the best time for socialization is between the ages of 3 and 16 weeks. Unfortunately, this time has long passed. You can still "socialize" your dog, but now the socialization must be done slowly and carefully by pairing positive things (such as delicious treats) with new people. Putting your dog in a stressful situation will set their progress back. Go slow and give them time to gain confidence and trust.

**Seek out a qualified trainer or behaviorist if you are not noticing any improvements.*

Resource:

<https://centerforshelterdogs.tufts.edu/dog-behavior/>