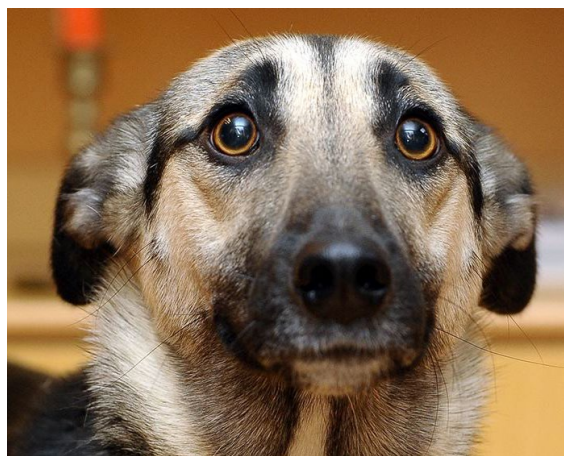


Adopting a Shy or Fearful Dog

Dogs can be afraid of many different things for any number of reasons. A frightened dog might also react in many different ways when they are afraid, such as:

- Roll onto their backs
- Run away or hide
- Tuck their tails
- Pant
- Drool
- Tremble or shake
- Pace
- Lick their lips
- Widen their eyes to show the whites of their eyes
- Avoid eye contact or stare
- Urinate or defecate
- Freeze
- Bark or growl
- Bare their teeth, snap, or bite



Fear often comes from a **lack of exposure**. Dogs are naturally afraid of new things and dogs that grew up in a deprived environment might be scared around "normal" things (for example: traffic cones or men in hats). Even dogs that had a normal upbringing are often afraid of new things that we humans know are harmless. This is why it's so important to expose your dog to lots of new things in a fun and safe way!

Other times, dogs might be afraid of things because of a **scary past experience**. A dog might have had a bad experience with a certain place, sound, type of person, or object. If the experience was scary enough, they'll probably be scared of it the next time they see it. Some dogs are also **genetically predisposed** to being more fearful.

What we can do:

Keep things calm: Keep your home quiet and your attitude calm when your new dog first arrives. Don't have a welcome home party, and avoid lots of visitors for the first few weeks. A shy or fearful dog may choose an area that they feel most comfortable in, such as a crate, mud room, or under a table. Let them stay in that area whenever possible and don't force them out. Let them take their time to come to you.

Have patience: An abundance of patience goes a long way when it comes to shy or fearful dogs. Let your dog have choices on what they want to do. Do not force your dog into situations where they are uncomfortable, such as meeting a new person or exploring a scary area. Use positive reinforcement to teach your dog that these things might not be so scary.

High-value treats: Always carry high-value treats when working with your dog. High-value treats are determined by your dog. Often, they can be cheese, liver, hot dogs, etc., but some dogs may be moved by a toy or a bowl of water. If going in the car is a scary situation for your dog, use treats to pave the way. Most dogs will start to understand that these things aren't so scary when they are paired with high-value treats. Just remember to go at your dog's pace. It may take several days to several weeks to get them comfortable with a former fear.

Desensitize: Determine your dog's triggers. Make a list of everything that is scary for your dog. This can include anything from the sound of the fan to other dogs to bikes and baby strollers. Create a plan to gradually desensitize your dog to the things that scare them.

What not to do:

- Do NOT force your dog to spend time with new family or new people. Allow them the choice to approach, and then positively reinforce them for interacting with people.
- Do NOT force your dog into scary situations, unless necessary like a medical emergency. Take the time to work with them to move past their fear before a situation becomes an emergency.
- Do NOT punish your new dog for house soiling, showing fearful behavior like growling, or any other inappropriate behavior. Punishment will only make your new dog fearful of you and can lead to aggression.

Owning a shy or fearful dog is not always easy. It is very rewarding when your dog trusts you and sees you as their ally and support. We know that it can be frustrating at times, but remember that you are helping them feel safe in this big world.

Do you need more help? We are here to help. Contact us through our FREE Behavior and Enrichment Helpline at mohawkhumane.org/behavior-helpline. Our trained behavior staff respond to requests within 48 hours.