

## Help! My Dog Is Scared of Everything! What to Do When Your Dog Is Afraid

Dogs that are frightened or nervous go into survival mode, and their reactions to the fearful thing can range from mild to panic-stricken.

If your dog is fearful or anxious, there are things you can do to help your dog work through his fears.

### **How Fears Begin**

Every dog is shaped by his experiences with the world, or lack thereof. Many fears come directly from lack of socialization. Some dogs are more adaptable when they lack these skills and respond well to later socialization. Other dogs may be nervous in new situations or with new people and require a lot more training.

The best way to help your dog is to socialize it to as many new people, places, things, and sounds as you possibly can when it is a puppy and to continue as it ages. Of course, some dogs are genetically predisposed to be slightly anxious, but socialization greatly helps them too.

In addition to lack of socialization or genetics, some fears are born out of a very real or scary experience that the dog simply cannot forget. Many dogs with aggressions towards other dogs have had a real experience, like a dog attack them while walking. This causes them to fear all new dogs it sees and react poorly to them in the future.

Other dogs when afraid want to flee the area and as quickly as possible. This is an instinctual part of the dog that tells them danger is ahead and to get out now! Dogs have been known to fly through glass windows in the middle of thunderstorms out of sheer panic.

### **Training to Help Your Dog**

No matter what kind of fear your dog has or how it started, the training is basically the same for all kinds. Here are training tips for working with a fearful dog:

- Never use techniques that force your dog into a situation it is uncomfortable with. A dog that is unable to escape its discomfort may react poorly and act out in aggression.
- Understand the severity of your dog's problem. How severe its fears are affects how you train it. Mild anxiety means you can push your dog further in the training faster; whereas, a dog that panics will need a lot more behavioral modification. Dogs experiencing great distress benefit from medications like over-the-counter herbal remedies or prescriptions. Be sure to speak with your veterinarian about the options.

- Figure out what your dog loves! Really wonderful bits of human food or his favorite toy can all be used to assist your dog and desensitize him to the scary things. Re-associate these scary things with fun!
- Your dog might not be able to be right next to the thing that scares him at first. You might need to determine how close he can be to something without reacting and slowly over time get him closer and closer.
- If your dog is afraid of certain sounds, you can desensitize him to the sounds through the use of a CD played at very low volumes while you're playing toys.
- In some cases, a dog can be taught to touch the end of a stick or a person's hand, so that even in the event of something scary, he can focus on something else and be given instructions. For example, a dog that touches the end of the stick will focus on that task, allowing you over time to get the stick closer and closer to what frightens him.
- If you have a second dog that is not afraid at all, this can be a valuable tool to help the fearful dog. Dogs often rely upon one another, and a stable dog can demonstrate how to work through a situation.
- A fearful dog must have an incredible relationship with its handler and trust that person. A dog that trusts you fully may follow your lead based on his trust, even if he's nervous. Work to develop this bond through positive-based obedience training techniques.

Lastly, never, ever get overtly frustrated with your dog! Your frustration and anger will only serve to further frighten him and reinforce his level of discomfort. Stay calm and relaxed yourself to show him there is nothing to worry about at all.