



Adopting a Shy and Fearful Dog

Congratulations! You have adopted a shy and fearful dog. With time, patience, and consistency, you will develop a deep bond with your dog. The information below will help in the first weeks to ensure safety, and help everyone feel a little more comfortable. **Realize that your new dog may never be super outgoing with strangers. They also may not love to go everywhere with you. But rest assured, most shy and fearful dogs transform into wonderful companions.** They just may need more time than the average dog to accomplish this.

- Your dog may take longer than average to settle in and adjust to their new home. **During this adjustment period, they should not meet lots of people or go on field trips outside the home.**
- **Your dog will appreciate a “safe spot” to be able to retreat to if they feel overwhelmed.** A crate or a bed in a quiet spot of the home will provide them a way to get away if they need some space. This area should not be in a high traffic area. Never force a shy and fearful dog to come out of their safe space. Let them decide when they are ready. Children should not be allowed access to this space.
- **It is common for a shy dog not to eat their kibble for the first 48 hours.** They will most likely take bits of hot dog or high value treats during this time. Make sure they have a water bowl close to their safe spot. It is also common for fearful dogs to eat when no one is around or at night.
- Interacting with your shy dog in a “low and slow” manner will help them feel more comfortable and less threatened. Sitting on the floor and tossing treats to them, speaking in a calm voice, not making any sudden moves, etc. will help tremendously. **Standing or leaning over a dog can be very scary for a shy/fearful dog. Direct eye contact is also intimidating for most.**

SAFETY

- Safety is especially important for a shy, fearful dog. A shy dog is more likely to try to run off before it has bonded with you. **Your new dog should ALWAYS be on a leash when outside for at least 2 weeks even in a fenced yard. Also, you may want to leash the dog, or crate, when strangers come into the house to ensure they don't door bolt.**
- **Make sure your new dog has a collar and identification tags that are secure around the neck immediately upon adopting.** We recommend using BOTH a harness and a collar clipped together to walk newly adopted shy dogs. They may spook easily and attempt to dart away from you. There are GPS collars on the market that offer owners an added level of protection should their dog escape.
- Uncomfortable shy dogs may not show the same distress signs as “average” dogs. Dogs pushed out of their comfort level may exhibit a flight or fight response and may bite.

Always closely monitor children around your new dog so the dog does not bite out of fear. Children do not always read a dog's body language correctly.

The following body language may indicate that a dog is uncomfortable.

- Ears back, tail tucked, lowering of head
- Whites of the eyes showing (whale eyes)
- Lip licking or lots of yawning
- Avoiding eye contact
- Submissive peeing or rolling over to expose belly (with tail tucked)
- Drooling when there is no food present
- Showing teeth

OTHER FACTS

- **Dogs should not be “forced to face their fears”.** Pushing a dog beyond its comfort zone may cause them to be more fearful of the “scary” thing, and may lead to a bite.
- **Many shy dogs enjoy the company of another dog.** Dogs that are friendly and outgoing with people and other dogs can help shy dogs come out of their shell by modeling positive outgoing behaviors. Some shy dogs do need a slower introduction to other dogs, especially if they have not been well socialized.
- **Teaching some basic obedience to your shy and fearful dog can be a big confidence booster for them.** “Touch” is a great command to teach. Put a yummy, smelly treat in an open hand. Place hand close to their nose and say “touch”. When they touch your hand with their nose to investigate, allow them to have the treat. Once their confidence improves you can begin to ask them to “touch” with an empty palm and treat them from the opposite hand. This will encourage them to interact with you, but in a non-threatening way since they are in control of their actions.
- **Puzzle feeders can also help a shy dog gain confidence.** Many types of puzzle feeders are available online or at local pet stores.

Be creative and learn what helps your dog feel more comfortable. Some shy dogs love to be close and cuddled while others may not enjoy a lot of handling or touching. Do not be afraid to go slow and take the time your dog needs to feel comfortable and reach out to a professional trainer if you have questions or concerns.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

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