



Fear of New Family Members

It's not uncommon for dogs to bond more quickly with one new member of the family while also acting fearful of other new family members. Typically we'll see dogs bond quickly with women in the household and then act fearful of men in the household. Dogs can go either way with children; some dogs absolutely love them and bond with them quickly while other dogs find children and their erratic movement and noises to be absolutely terrifying. The tips outlined below are designed for adults, NOT for children. We have a separate handout geared for owners who have dogs that are fearful of children.

- Most dogs are intimidated by human body language that we think is not intimidating. For example, standing and leaning over a dog to pet them is scary and seen as a very dominating/challenging and threatening body stance if another dog were to do that to them, so you can only imagine how scary and intimidating that can be for a dog when a human does that because we are so much taller.
- You may have noticed that your new dog will come to you while you're seated because you are not as tall, you're not leaning over her body, and you're spine is curved almost like a non-threatening dog would curve its back and tuck its tail. The best way to greet a new dog, whether it's a new dog that you've recently adopted or a dog that you meet on the street, is to turn sideways, crouch down low or kneel, don't make direct eye contact, and slowly reach your fist out for them to smell. You may have to turn away completely with your back to them and reach your hand out behind you for them to smell if they are extremely fearful. Never try to pet them over the top of their head; instead, try to pet the chest, shoulder, or the side of the neck.
- Studies have also shown that dogs naturally tend to be more fearful of men than women, but we don't know exactly why that is (tone of voice, size, smell of testosterone, etc). We recommend that all of your dog's pleasant experiences come from whoever your dog is most fearful of in the house (usually the man in the household), for example being let outside to potty, going for walks, play time, training time, feeding meals, giving treats/rawhides/squeaky toys, etc.
- Dogs that have gone through the traumatic experience of living in a home and then losing their home only to live in the more stressful environment of a shelter will take time to adjust to their new home and family. It will take time for you two to build a relationship together and for your new dog to trust you and become acquainted with the new environment. This can take anywhere from 2 days to 2 weeks to 2 months or, with severe cases, a year or more.
- Many recent adopters get frustrated when their new dog won't come to them when called. The reason your new dog is hesitant to come when called is that you two haven't built a relationship yet, the dog finds you intimidating, and the dog probably doesn't know its name. They also may have no clue what the word "come" means, so you'll want to use positive reinforcement training to teach your dog what it means. Certain breeds can also be known for being independent and/or escape artists outside, so teaching your dog to come may take a little more time than other breeds. Some dogs love the outside so much that they feel like going back inside is a punishment, so you always want to give them a treat when they step inside. If you have a fenced-in backyard

and you need your dog to come back inside after being let out to go to the bathroom, you may need to start off by keeping your dog on a leash in the backyard until your dog has learned its new name and how to respond to the command “come” indoors before letting her off leash in the backyard. With enough practice and relationship building, you will be able to say her name to get her attention and say “inside” instead of “come,” and she’ll immediately start heading for the door because she knows she’ll always get a treat when she comes inside.

- You can practice coming when called by practicing inside on a leash first, with treats, then practice outside on a leash with treats. Just because she’s on a leash doesn’t mean that you have to force her to come to you by dragging her to you on a leash. The easiest way to get your dog to come when called is actually to run backwards away from your dog and turn it into a game of chase while saying “come” in a high-pitched, playful voice. Then always have your treats nearby to reward her for coming to you and sitting nicely at your feet. The reason you want her to sit is so that she doesn’t just run right past you; it gives you more control. Lastly, when she sits at your feet after she comes to you, always remember to pet her around her collar so that she thinks she’s being physically praised and petted for doing a good job but what you’re actually doing is desensitizing her to handling her collar every time she comes to you so that you can grab her collar in an emergency without her actually knowing that you’re trying to grab her collar.

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.

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team

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Here are some links to additional information so that you can learn more about how to teach your dog to come and how to work with a dog that is shy and fearful of new people:

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/dogs-who-are-hand-shy>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/fear-people>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/canine-body-language>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-come-when-called>