



## Fear of Strangers or New Family Members

---

It is not uncommon for dogs to be fearful of strangers or new family members. With shelter dogs, many times we don't know what their past experiences have been. If you have just adopted or acquired your dog, giving them time to decompress, adjust, and bond before introducing them to new people can make all the difference.

If your dog does show signs of being fearful of strangers, here are some tips to help with introductions, while boosting their confidence and keeping everyone safe.

- Always have your dog on leash when guests arrive or when your dog is meeting a stranger.
- Encourage the stranger to approach slowly and toss a very yummy treat.
- Allow your dog to make the choice to approach or not. DO NOT force any interaction.
- Watch your dog for body language that would indicate they are nervous or submissive. (tucked tail, whale eyes, ears back, rolling over on their belly, hiding behind you)
- If your dog is too uncomfortable to approach, allow your dog to remain behind a baby gate or in a crate while guests are there. Make sure they have a special treat in their kennel so they still associate that good things happen when strangers are present. If you are out in public, just kindly explain your dog is fearful and doesn't want to be interacted with. You may still have them toss a treat and walk away.
- If your dog approaches the stranger, keep the interaction short and always allow the dog to move away if it chooses. It is better to have short, positive sessions, rather than waiting for the dog to get nervous or react.
- It is not uncommon for a fearful dog to be frozen and possibly in a submissive body position and as the stranger moves away or moves their hand away, the dog will lunge or snap. If your dog is frozen in place or turning away it is very important to not allow strangers to approach. The dog is trying to communicate they do not want to interact.
- If you are introducing to a group of people or there are children involved, it is easier to let everyone know ahead of time that your dog is nervous and what to expect.

Building a strong, trusting relationship with your dog is a crucial part of working on your dog's fears. They should know you always have their back and will listen to their body language. Lastly, building your dog's self-confidence in other situations can give them the courage to step outside their box more readily. This is easily achieved through basic obedience training.

A fearful dog requires patience, and dedication. If you are following these tips and your dog is still struggling meeting strangers, or they are lunging, growling or biting, it is time to seek the help of a professional positive reinforcement trainer.

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](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).

Written by the Wayside Waifs Canine Behavior Team  
© 2019 Copyright Wayside Waifs, Inc. All rights reserved.