



Helping for Your Fearful Dog

As people we all have different personalities, we are outgoing, shy, serious, silly, and everything in between. Your dog is not different, and every dog is an individual, just like people. Dogs are born with similar traits based on their breed but will have their own unique personality. And just like us humans, experiences and lack of experiences can shape their personality and how they function in the world.

Recognizes the signs of your dogs' fears is the first step:

- Tucked tail
- Trembling
- Flattened ears
- Repeated yawning
- Pacing or panting
- Growling, lunging, or barking
- Crouching
- Lack of eye contact
- Loss of bladder or bowl control

Any combination of some of the behaviors above can indicate your dogs fear signals. We typically do not know the cause of their fear. It could be genetics, it could be lack of socialization during key development stages, it could be previous trauma. It is rarely completely clear what causes fear in our dogs, but identifying your dog's signals will help you understand how to respond. *Note if these is a sudden change in your dog's behavior, it is also important to speak with your veterinarian and advise them of the changes to rule out any underlying medical conditions.

What can you do to help change the fear?

The best way to change a fearful dog is with positive associations, time and patience. The dog will need to gain confidence and trust with slow, introductions to the things that frighten them with a low intensity.

For example, if your dog is afraid of loud noises outside, start by taking your dog leashed to a local park, finding a bench or place out of the way where your dog can see and hear things going on, but is far enough away to not be engaged. Start by sitting there quietly with your dog for 5 minutes, allowing the dog to take everything in. When your dog is not showing their fearful body signals reward with a treat. After a successful sit, calmly walk back to your car. Give the dog a low stimulation, slow introduction to the stimulus, then leave on a positive note. Do this in repetition until the dog builds confidence with this location and learns they get rewarded for showing confidence, and that you will be leaving together.

Changing a fearful experience to a positive experience will go a long way in reducing your dog's fears.



Managing Your Dog's Fear

- Initially, control your dog's environment by limiting their exposure to fearful situations. Never force your dog into situations in which they are fearful as this will likely increase the fearful response.
- Keep your dog on leash. A fearful dog may startle and bolt, so keeping them on leash at all times will help them stay safe. Ensure your dog has updated identification tags and a microchip. To help prevent slipping out of their collar/harness, make everything fits properly. When using a harness or head halter, attach a safety clip from the harness to your dog's collar for a second point of connection. Use a properly fitted martingale collar with any flight dogs, a backup collar (or safety clip) is also recommended.
- Consider your dog's perspective. Attending Saturday Market or going for a walk along the busy Springwater corridor or in Forest Park may be way too overwhelming for your dog.
- When you observe your dog signaling that they are fearful, calmly remove them from the situation.
- Remain calm yourself. Breathe slowly and deeply. Speak calmly.
- Watch for small signs of improvement such as approaching a once fearful situation or displaying their tail instead of tucking it underneath. Calmly reward and praise these small improvements.
- Be diligent to not comfort your pet when they are scared, so as not to reward fearful behavior with positive rewards such as petting.
- If a stranger asks to pet your dog say, "Thank you for asking but no, Fido is uncomfortable with strangers." Or "sorry Fido is in training."
- If your dog is startled or surprised by a fearful situation, turn and walk away calmly.
- Find games to play with your dog in your home and fenced yard that are fun and fear free.
- Enroll in a training class. Appropriate classes can help build your dog's confidence. Inform the instructor about your dog's fearful behaviors before classes begin, to ensure it is an appropriate fit.
- Be patient. Celebrate small victories. Have fun with the baby steps!

Knowingly putting your dog in a stressful situation can cause a setback for the dog. Focus your energy on being a confident, patient leader for your dog. Building trust takes time, but your dog can show improvement with effort on your part!