

Bringing Home Your Shy Dog

Bringing your new dog home is an exciting time for everyone. But for a timid, shy, or fearful dog the transition into a new home can be very stressful. Even the most well intended human act of kindness can cause anxiety or fear in a timid dog. Dogs experience the world and communicate in a manner that is very different from how humans communicate and perceive the world. We all know dogs don't speak our language but did you know our body language – that is, how we approach, touch or even how we move can profoundly affect a timid dog? Patience and a slow approach, both literally and figuratively are your keys to success. Developing a bond and mutual trust with a shy dog takes time but the journey can be so rewarding! Never has the saying “*good things come to those who wait*” been more true. Here are some guidelines and tips to help your shy dog transition into your new home. Think of your developing relationship with your dog as a journey and celebrate each little success as your dog gains confidence and blossoms in your care.

Safety First

- Timid or fearful dogs often have a strong “flight” response when startled or when encountering strange places or people. We recommend using a martingale style collar which prevents a dog from backing-out or slipping a collar should they be startled or scared. Keep a collar with identification tags on your dog at all times.
- Don't leave your new dog alone in a yard until you have established a routine and your dog is more comfortable in his new surroundings. Check for any gaps in fencing or gates that a small dog might slip through. Remove any items that a dog might use to leap-frog over a fence. Keep your dog leashed when not in a securely fenced area.
- Be vigilant about opening doors or gates leading outside. Have your dog on leash, in a crate, or behind a closed door or baby gate before you open the door to avoid a door dash.

Slow and Steady

When it comes to timid and shy dogs, “*too much of a good thing*” is never more true! Shy dogs can be especially sensitive about their personal space, sounds, physical contact and even eye contact. In the excitement of bringing home your new dog it's tempting to share him with family and friends, take him on a shopping spree for supplies, and to lavish them with your love and affection. For those happy-go-lucky types this might be great. But for a sensitive soul this well-intended attention can be overwhelming. Make the first few weeks a quiet and peaceful homecoming. Take a *less is more* approach to integrating your new dog into your home and lifestyle during those critical first weeks.

- Invest in a crate. This will serve as your dogs *Safe Spot*. A cozy private den where he can relax, let his guard down, nap and just take a break! Remember, even new

and wonderful experiences can be stressful mentally, physically and emotionally. Crating your dog gives him time to process new experiences in a secure and safe spot. *So give-em-a-break and crate!* Read the *Crating your Dog* handout for the how to's and additional benefits of crating.

- Create routines. Schedule meal times, walks, and play sessions for the same time every day. The more predictable your day is, the less stressful it is for your shy dog. A daily routine is a comfort to a timid or anxious dog and will help him settle and gain confidence over time.

What-do-ya Say?

Become a student of canine body language. Being observant and mindful of your dog's body language will help you understand his needs and emotional state. Honing your skills in reading canine body language and responding in a thoughtful non-threatening manner will build trust and confidence. Growling, snapping or biting are clear signs of fear but more subtle signs of anxiety or fear in dogs include:

Crouching, freezing, or moving in slow motion

Sideways glances with wide rounded eyes

Avoidance or whirling around when touched

Licking lips, yawning, or facial tension

And think about your body language too! A slow approach from the dogs side can elicit a calm encounter whereas a rushed frontal approach with an outstretched hand might very well frighten your sensitive new dog. Here a few ways to help your shy dog by using non-threatening body language:

Don't	Do
Make a beeline for & reach out your arm or hand toward the dog	Approach slowly & from the side. Keep your hands low & slow
Invade the dog's space & lean over them	Squat down beside them & initiate touch on the side closest to you
Make direct eye contact &/or stare	Glance at them from the side & avoid prolonged eye contact.
Hug, pat on the head or put your face near theirs	Let the dog approach your & offer chest rubs or chin scratches. Hugs can be too scary for shy dogs!
Punish or "correct" a dog by yelling, jerking the leash, or with rough handling	Be gentle, patient, & reward good behaviors with praise and treats

Tips for Success:

Draggin' The Line: Keep a light leash or tie a very light line to your dog's collar. Just let it drag both inside and outside if he is off-leash. If your dog is avoiding contact, or hiding under a chair or in a corner you can more easily retrieve them using the line. This will aid in avoiding rough or inappropriate handling when your pooch is in a sensitive state. Never drag your dog or yank on the line and always praise or treat for coming toward you. Use a light, slow pulse on the line to gently encourage forward motion.

Drive-By-Treats: Every approach to your shy dog should be paired with a super yummy treat. Just drop a tiny treat as you walk by, nothing more. Enlist the aid of others to do the same. Keep treats handy (e.g. by the front door, your favorite chair, and in rooms you frequent). No need to stop, talk or touch just drop and go. Pair up your approach with good things!

Less is More: Constantly touching, looking at, or talking to your shy dog can feel like pressure despite your loving intent. This *social pressure* can be especially intimidating for a shy dog. Patience is the key. Wait for your dog to solicit your attention. Offer your love when they are in a relaxed state. This is when dogs are more receptive to your affections and when you can build trust and bond.

A Dog's Best Friend: That means you! Step up and help your dog when he cannot help himself. Prevent others from inadvertently scaring your dog with well-intended but misguided attempts to approach, pet or handle. Never force your dog to interact with a person or other dog. Let the dog decide when he is ready to venture closer. If he chooses not to engage with the person or another dog, that's OK. With your help and guidance he will find his comfort zones over time. No need to rush!