

The Mannerly Dog
A Mannerly Dog is Easy to Love
Pasadena, Texas

SHY/FEARFUL DOGS: DON'T MAKE IT WORSE!!

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When handling shy/fearful dogs, it is important to remember:

1. Dogs respond well to having the choice of interacting with someone or not.
 - a. "Approaching" dogs is a misnomer: dogs should always be invited to approach us, particularly shy ones.
 - b. There's no reason anyone should pet or handle a dog who doesn't want to be petted or handled.
 - c. When a fearful dog chooses to approach someone, he should be rewarded with the freedom to walk away.
2. Giving dogs the choice to interact or not, coupled with positive reinforcement, builds their confidence for future interactions, making it more likely he will choose to interact more often.
3. Positive reinforcement must be evaluated from the dog's point of view. Petting a dog who does not want to be petted is NOT positive reinforcement. Treats may be; a toy may be; being allowed the freedom to walk away after approaching to take a sniff may be; simply sitting near someone showing respectful and non-threatening body language may be.

Techniques:

1. Turn to the side; don't face the dog full-front.
2. Squat down, still turned to the side.
3. DO NOT reach your hand out to the dog's nose. This is a common thing for people to do with dogs, but it is commonly perceived by dogs as a threat. Keep all body parts close; keep your head turned away, glancing over intermittently at the dog, and allow the dog to decide whether he wants to approach. If he doesn't, or if he walks away, resist the urge to pressure him by begging, cajoling, etc. Accept his answer of "no" and try again later. Understand that his exercising his minimal freedom of choice allows him to possibly make a different choice next time.
4. Toss a treat on the floor in front of the dog so he gets to have a treat without the pressure of having to approach to take it out of your hand when he is not yet comfortable enough to do so. DO NOT use this technique to lure him over by providing a trail of treats leading to you. We never want to "trick" dogs, but we do want to build their confidence by being consistent in our responses to their experimental behaviors. It's better to toss a treat on the floor, let him eat it, and then toss another further away from you so he has your encouragement to move away from you. Then perhaps another closer, followed by another further away. Remember, this dog's desire is to have more distance from you. Don't take it personally; make a trade: "If you come a step closer, you can take a few steps further away." This is another way to support a dog, build his confidence, and avoid

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tricking him. When dogs can predict what the consequences of their behavior are, they are more willing to try something new. When they can trust a human to be consistent and not do things like lure him closer, only to grab him - which is scary to him - they are more likely to want to be close to those humans.

5. Even when a dog approaches you, resist the urge to pet unless he begins to show solicitous behaviors like turning to the side, moving really close to you, rubbing on your leg, offering soft, low, slow tail wags, turning his head as though to give you better access to his neck, etc. Begin petting only on the sides of the face and neck, under the chin neck, or on the side over his ribs and shoulders. NEVER reach over his head or back to pet - this is likely to appear threatening. Pet for about 5 seconds, then stop and see if the dog moves away or "asks" for more. This is important again for his need for freedom of choice; just because he wanted a little petting doesn't mean he wants it for a long time! If at any time you notice the dog become still or stiff, even in a minimal way, stop petting immediately and allow him to walk away. Never take your eyes off the dog while petting: this is an important time to observe his body language to acquaint yourself with his needs. You can build from where he is now as long as you keep him in a state where he is comfortable and relaxed and willing to continue to experiment with you. If you destroy that tiny bit of trust you have, it will be much harder and eventually impossible to get him to try again.
6. If the dog trusts you but not other people, practice using the techniques in the following articles to help him learn to check in with you when a new person approaches; this will keep him from being in a situation in which he feels pressured by a new person, possibly trapped between people, with no way to get out of the circumstances.

<http://www.themannerlydog.com/TrainingArticles.html>

Teaching Reactive Dogs a New Habit, Parts 1 and 2

Note that both of these articles focus on the techniques being used for reactive dogs, which most people picture as barking and lunging types; however, shy, fearful dogs are "reactive" in that they become immediately fearful, anxious, and stressed when new people come into the picture, often exhibiting big eyes, stiff bodies, tucked tails and ears, backing away, etc. These techniques are great for helping them change their emotional responses to new people/dogs, etc.