



The Shy Dog

Life can be more challenging when you're living with a shy, fearful, dog. They range from the cautious dog that takes a few minutes to a few hours to warm up to a new person to the other end of the spectrum...what many of us know as 'the Spook'. Spooks are so shy they bolt when you get out of a chair, look in their direction, or even enter the room. They never come up to you for petting like most dogs do, often they want to, but they just can't. There is also the 'puppy mill dog'. These dogs often live lives with little human attention and very limited environments.

A dog's personality is a combination of its genetic makeup and its environment. Spooks often are genetically programmed to be shy and have what is known as 'Idiopathic shyness' or a fear of just about everything. These shy pups probably started life at the bottom of the pecking order in their little family unit since they tend to be very submissive and nervous types. Due to their nature, they get less human attention, losing the formative window of opportunity to learn that humans are okay.

So, can we help our shy dog? As it turns out- there is a lot that we can do!

First, identify who your dog shy around. For instance, if it is men, is it *all* men, or just men with beards or baseball caps. Maybe sunglasses? It is young children or elderly people who move around differently?

Things to do:

Talk in a calm voice and keep your arms still.

Move slowly and confidently around your dog.

Give lots of gentle touches...in small doses.

Give lots of really yummy hand held treats. You may have to do this sitting down and looking away or even put your treat hand behind your back while not looking. It is important not to make any eye contact.

Establish routines for walks, feeding, and bedtime.

Apply lots of praise.

Consider using Adaptil (containing D.A.P. or dog appeasing pheromone). Adaptil contains a synthetic version of the pheromone momma dogs give off when nursing their puppies. Studies show that many dogs find it very comforting. It comes as a wall plug-in, a collar, and a spray.

Avoid crowded places where there are too many strangers, loud noises, and chaos.

Shy dogs often become more confident with obedience classes (especially learning behaviors like 'touch') and agility.

Try a ThunderShirt. This anxiety wrap uses pressure to make a dog feel more secure.

Beggin to Behave Dog Training

Sandy Strychor, ABCD7



Reward all positive behaviors. For some, even a look in your direction may be cause for a reward. Ignore bad or unwanted behavior, avoid harsh corrections. Desensitization can be a key to unlocking a shy dog. Start by a 'safe' distance and rewarding with a super yummy treat and then gradually bring the scary thing closer. Make these sessions short, fun, and very rewarding.

Shy dogs respond well to 'Calming Signals' a system of body language pioneered by Turid Rugaas, a canine behaviorist. Calming signals are how dogs communicate to other dogs. They use them to resolve conflicts, when they are fearful or stressed, and to calm each other. You can use them too!

Head turns and avoiding direct eye contact. A quick turn away says 'calm down, I'm no threat'.

Approach in a curve instead of straight on to your dog.

Lick your lips. Dogs lick their noses when they are stressed.

Yawn. Dogs don't yawn because they are sleepy. They are saying 'I'm nervous and I need to calm myself'.

Turn your body sideways when approaching your shy pup.

Sit or lay down. This is less scary than standing up.

Pet your shy dog under the chin or scratch his ribs. Most dogs don't really like their heads petted although most learn to accept it.

Slow blinks say 'I'm a friend'.

Use Tellington T-Touch for dogs. This method of touching and massaging your dog probably engages the parasympathetic nervous system allowing muscles to relax - slowing heart rate and blood pressure and bringing stress levels down. It can be very helpful with anxiety-based behavioral issues. There are many videos of how to perform these techniques on YouTube.

Play dog relaxation music. Try 'Through a Dog's Ear' (available as a CD) or 'Relax My Dog' (available on YouTube for free). Although it sounds like ordinary classical music to us, it is specially made for dogs to help them stay calm and relaxed.

A last consideration... **Medications** like alprazolam or Prozac may help a severely shy or anxious dog. Most dogs do not need to take medications for long periods of time, just long enough to discover that life in your home is good and there is no reason to be so fearful.

A shy dog may overcome his fears in a few weeks. A spook may take a few years. Be patient. When bonding with a shy dog happens, it is a life changing experience for these wonderful dogs.

Read More:

<http://www.adaptil.com/us/>

http://www.whole-dog-journal.com/issues/13_8/features/TTouch-For-Dogs_20039-1.html

<http://www.thundershirt.com>

<http://www.ttouch.com/howtodoTTouch.shtml>

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.relaxmydog&hl=en>

<http://www.petmd.com/dog/slideshows/14-medications-dog-anxiety>

