



# Caring Hands Humane Society

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## Helping Shy or Fearful Dogs

Fearful dogs avoid people or things that frighten them, seem depressed or uninterested. If you have decided to share your life with a shy dog the following can help you understand what she is feeling and help her get better.

### **Social shyness:**

- Dogs who are fearful of unfamiliar or certain types of people, dogs like this are often labeled “one man dogs” or “taking a while to warm up.” They are usually fine once they get to know you. They can be afraid of men or women, men with beards, people who wear hats, big people and people with unusual gaits, or children.

The oldest member of my canine family was fearful of males when she first came to live with us at three years of age, this presented somewhat of a problem as the only female in the family was my wife and then us three boys. She would follow us everywhere but always kept a comfortable distance, should we suddenly decide to change direction she would also. She never came directly to us, yet we could tell she desired to belong. We would sit, so as not to present an overpowering posture and offer treats to her yet she was reluctant to retrieve them from our hands. We were content tossing them to her trying to gradually decrease the distance between us and the treat. She would hesitantly and cautiously creep forward to retrieve her bribe, retreating to her comfortable distance to eat. If we would stand she would immediately move to a safe distance and when we walked away, she would follow. She always slept on the front porch and one morning I walked out and as normal she jumped up to place that comfortable distance between us. I walked over and sat on the edge of the porch, offering her a treat, she trotted right up to retrieve it from my hand. Three months of patience had finally paid off and to this day we share each others love and respect.

- Dogs can be afraid of certain kinds of situations. Such as going to a vet, panic during car rides or are uncomfortable in new places.
- Sound sensitivities, where the dog is afraid of sudden loud noises. These dogs may flatten or try to escape when a car backfires or pace and salivate during thunderstorms or fireworks.

Fear is an adaptive trait in animals. Although it is possible that a fearful dog has been abused or had a bad experience, most of the time the fear results from an interplay between a genetic predisposition and some lack of experience, especially in the first

months of life. They may not have been socialized around certain kinds of people early in life. Your compassion and perseverance is just what your shy dog needs.

- The best thing for a fearful dog is to expose him to what frightens him but in a milder form, combine this with a positive outcome such as his favorite treat. So a dog who is afraid of children might do well to see them at a distance so he doesn't feel worried, when he notices them, reward him, he will associate children with a positive reward and can then be taken closer and closer until his fears seem to melt away. Remember never force more on him than he is ready to accept.

### **Dogs learn strongly from association**

### **Let them go at their own pace**

CHHS Staff