

### What does 'fear of strangers' mean?

It means that your dog may try to move away, look away, put his tail down, hide, cower or even tremble when meeting unfamiliar people. Some dogs may become still, show teeth, growl or bark. If the stranger reaches out to pet them, they may snap or bite. Fear of strangers is very common in dogs who did not meet enough new people when they were puppies. Dogs who are afraid of strangers can be very friendly to the people they know.

### What can I do to help my dog?

- **Learn canine body language and watch for warning signs.** Early canine warning signs include licking lips (pic 1), yawning when your dog isn't tired or waking up, panting when it's not hot, pinned back ears (pic 1, 2, 3, 4), closing his mouth (pic 2, 3, 4), looking away (pic 3), turning away, weight on his back legs (pic 4), lifting a paw (pic 1, 3) and showing the whites of his eyes (pic 1, 2). If you see these signs, you should gently guide your dog away from the scary person.



- **Be aware of your own body language.** Avoid quick movements, loud noises and looming over your dog.
- **Ask guests to ignore your dog.** By taking away the pressure to interact, your dog will feel less stressed and will be more inclined to approach and sniff at his own pace.
- **Provide an escape.** Ensure your dog is not trapped or forced into interacting with strangers. It's important to remember that a dog can feel trapped even if he is not cornered or leashed. In a fight or flight situation, we want to make sure the "flight" option is readily available. Avoid introducing your dog to strangers when he is on leash.
- **Ask your dog if they are enjoying petting.** If a new person is petting your dog, have them pause for a moment. Does your dog lean in for more petting? Or do they stand uncomfortably still or run away?
- **Encourage your dog to back away.** Sometimes, dogs are so fearful of the stranger that they forget they can leave. Calmly call their name and encourage them to move away from the stranger. You will not be reinforcing their fear, you will be teaching them to look to you for guidance and help when they are afraid.

### How can I train my dog to like strangers?

- **Greet from a distance.** Ask new people to avoid quick movements, loud noises and looming over your dog. Encourage them to turn sideways, squint their eyes and relax their body. Then have the person slowly toss a treat to your dog.
- **Teach "Say Hello."** Once your dog is comfortable with you, hold your open palm out in front of your dog, about two inches away from his nose. The instant you feel his nose touch your palm, say "Yes!" Immediately feed your dog a tiny treat from the other hand. Repeat the exercise about 5-10 times before gradually increasing the distance you ask your dog to move towards you. Be sure you are not moving your palm towards him; your dog should be the one moving, not you! Once he is consistently touching your palm, you can add in the "Say Hello" cue right before you present your hand for him to touch. Ask your friends and family to help your dog practice, but make sure that the treat comes from you – this ensures that your dog will get to retreat from the person after touching their hand and run towards you for a treat... a double reward!
- **Seek professional advice.** Some people may tell you that your dog just needs to be "socialized," but the best time for socialization is between the ages of 3-16 weeks. Unfortunately, this time has long passed. A Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (<https://www.animalbehaviorsociety.org/web/applied-behavior-caab-directory.php>) or qualified Certified Professional Dog Trainer (<http://www.ccpdt.org/>) can help you treat your dog's fear of strangers through specific protocol work.

### What are some general recommendations to help my dog?

- **Avoid crowded events.** Don't take your dog to places where you would expect to encounter large numbers of strangers (parties, parades, ballgames).
- **Don't push your dog.** Forcing your fearful dog to interact with strangers before he is ready can result in increasing his fear and could end with your dog snapping at or biting a person.

Adapted from Center for Shelter Dogs, Fear of People