

What does 'general fear' mean?

It means that your dog may try to move away, look away, put his tail down, hide, cower or tremble when he encounters new situations, new objects or unfamiliar people. Some dogs may become still, show teeth, growl, bark, snap or even bite. General fear is very common in dogs who did not get enough socialization when they were puppies. For instance, dogs that didn't get taken enough new places when they were puppies may be afraid of new places. Dogs that did not meet enough men when they were puppies may be afraid of men. Dogs who are fearful of new situations, new objects or unfamiliar people can be very friendly to the people they know.

What can I do to help my shy/cautious 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 situation, object or person.



- **Be aware of your own body language.** Avoid quick movements, loud noises and looming over your dog.
- **Don't push your dog.** Pulling your dog towards a scary object or forcing him to accept unfamiliar people before he is ready can result in increasing his fear and could end with your dog biting.
- **Reward bravery.** Is your dog afraid of the dishwasher? Reward him for sniffing the dishwasher when it's not turned on. Afraid of the laundry basket? Reward him for approaching it to investigate. Encourage him to approach scary items on his own terms and reward him for his efforts.
- **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. Avoid introducing your dog to strangers when he is on leash.
- **Encourage your dog to back away.** Sometimes, dogs are so fearful of the unfamiliar situation, object or person that they forget they can leave. Calmly call their name and encourage them to move away from the person or object. You will not be reinforcing their fear, you will be teaching them to look to you for guidance and help when they are afraid.
- **Understand trigger stacking.** When a dog encounters several stressors (things that cause fear/stress in your dog) in a short amount of time, they can add up and cause a reaction that is greater than what you might normally expect.

What are some general recommendations for shy/cautious dogs?

- **Accept them for who they are.** Just like some people are shy, so are some dogs. It doesn't mean they are broken! In fact, many fearful dogs are very affectionate with the people they know and love, but it takes time and patience to establish that bond.
- **Find what they love and do that.** Your dog may not enjoy the work of a therapy dog, but maybe they would enjoy learning new tricks at home with you. Take video and post it on Facebook or a blog to show off your dog's latest talent!
- **Set your dog up for success.** Exposing your dog to unfamiliar situations and people should only be done when you are prepared to devote training time to slowly helping your dog create positive associations with those feared people or objects using the techniques described above (reward bravery).
- **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. If your puppy is over 16 weeks of age, this time has passed. If you feel your dog is overly shy or cautious, 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 implement a behavior modification program.

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