



# What to Expect When Adopting a Confidence College Graduate (Dogs with a History of Being Shy and Fearful)

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You're considering adopting a dog that graduated from the Wayside Waifs Confidence College program—what's next? Confidence College graduates are dogs that have a history of being shy and fearful with people, new places, and noises. Wayside Waifs' highly skilled and trained staff and volunteers have worked to get your new family member on the path to becoming a well-rounded adult dog. Confidence College graduates will need continued socialization and training in their new home. If you feel at any point while reading this handout that a shy dog is not the right fit for you, please talk to an adoptions counselor, who can help you find a dog that is.

## Determining whether your home is the right place for a shy and fearful dog:

- If you are looking for a dog to accompany you while you travel around or if you would like to entertain and have a lot of visitors over, a shy and fearful dog will not be the right fit for you. While some Confidence College graduates can be rehabilitated to the point that they become social and outgoing, most will never be comfortable in some social situations that involve a lot of new people.
- They need a patient, quiet, and understanding home that is going to allow them to become comfortable on their terms. Fearful dogs, if pushed out of their comfort zones, do have the potential to bite. We have rehabilitated and worked with Confidence College graduates long enough that we feel they are safe adoption candidates, but there is always a bite potential with any dog.
- They need a calm, quiet, and predictable environment. They also need their own space to allow them to become comfortable without being pushed past their comfort level. Each dog needs different lengths of time to acclimate to the new space they are living in and to bond with all family members. It is hard to determine how long the dog will need to adjust.
- If you have kids (or their friends) who don't understand that they need to give the dog space, then a shy dog will not be the right match. That is why many Confidence College dogs have child restrictions.
- If you or someone in your house believes that harsh training methods are the way to train fear out of a dog, then this type of dog is not the right fit for you. Using harsh training methods with this type of dog can make the dog more fearful (and lead to a potential bite).

**What is Confidence College?** Confidence College was created to help rehabilitate shy and fearful dogs. It is comprised of a team of trained volunteers and staff to help the dogs build confidence, be more comfortable around strangers, and sometimes to help them with leash training. There are several stages that each dog can go through while in the program. Some dogs progress faster than others, and there is no set time for each dog; they all progress at their own pace. If a dog is making little to no progress, we usually have great success working with them in a foster home because the environment is much less stressful than a shelter.

**Safety** is important for any pet but especially for scared dogs. If your shy dog runs off before it has formed a bond with you and before becoming comfortable in its new home, your dog may never be seen again. They may also have a higher fight-or-flight response than the average dog, even after they have formed that bond with you. This is just in their nature and is why they should be in secure areas at all times. **We routinely see Confidence College graduates get away from their owners even before making it home for the first night. They usually get away while loading or unloading in and out of the car. These dogs often get away because their owners do not have proper hold of the leash, they don't tie the leash to a head rest or crate them while them while in the car, or they back out of their loose-fitting collars when they get scared and stop suddenly or flail.**

- In the beginning, dogs should always be on leash while in the house, in the back yard, or on a walk.
- Shy dogs should be walked securely; we use a regular collar and an Easy Walk Harness (helps to deter pulling) both clipped together with the leash. Clipping the harness to the collar via the leash ensures there is no way they can get away if one or the other of the collar or harness fails.
- Dogs should have ID tags on their collars, and all Wayside Waifs dogs are also microchipped.
- They should be supervised while outside, no matter how secure you feel your yard may be. They should also be dragging a long leash in case they do try to climb or jump the fence.
- Any doorway that does not go outside to a fenced-in area should be baby gated, or some type of dog-proof barrier should be put up to prevent the dog from escaping. They could also be put into a dog-proofed bedroom or crated when you leave for work or go out to run errands. If you take the time to properly crate train your new shy and fearful dog, you will help teach your dog that it has a safe zone away from any overwhelming household activity, and your dog will feel safe in this den-like environment (please see our Crate Training handout).
- Retractable leashes should never be used. They do not give you any control over the dog. The leash can also break if the dog pulls too hard, and then you have lost the dog. Additionally, they can hurt you as well as the dog.
- A GPS tracking collar can also be used as an extra precaution, but you will need to follow the instructions carefully (download software, register the tracker online, charge/install the collar batteries, etc.), and use it in addition to a regular collar in case it accidentally comes off.

**Time and Patience** are the keys to rehabilitating a shy and fearful dog.

- They need a place they can go to feel safe when they are overwhelmed or scared. A crate or a place in a bedroom, such as under a bed or desk, are all appropriate places for a new shy and fearful dog to retreat.
- This safe place should not have a lot of people coming and going. They need to be left to have time to calm down and to be given the opportunity to come out when they feel comfortable. Help teach them where their safe zone is located and reward them with high-value treats (like hot dog pieces or a Kong filled with peanut butter) when they go to their safe zone.
- Never force your dog to approach or do something that it clearly does not want to do. Body language that you should look for when a dog is nervous, uncomfortable, or fearful include:
  - Their tail may be tucked, and they are pulling their body away from you.
  - They may have whale eye, where their eyes are wide open and you can see the whites of their eyes.
  - They may look away or turn away from you and raise one of their front paws off the ground.
  - They may do a lot of lip-licking and yawning.
  - They may turn their head away from you and avert their gaze.
  - They may find something to smell that is not really there or shake off like they are wet. They may also scratch themselves to avoid interaction.
- **Desensitization & Counter Conditioning:** Pairing something rewarding, like food/treats with something that makes the dog feel uncomfortable is referred to as counter conditioning. Try to give small pieces of a high-value treat to your dog when they are acting hesitant to help make them see that whatever they might be afraid of gives them something good.
  - For example, if your dog is acting fearful around you, toss the treat as far as the dog feels comfortable approaching on their own and after they eat that treat, reward them by tossing two more treats farther away from you. After playing this pressure on/pressure off treat-tossing game for five minutes, give your dog a break and leave the room while they're still having fun. Try again later in the day; they may surprise you and approach closer than they did earlier in the day. If the dog does not eat the treat, then you tossed the treat too close to you, and your dog finds that proximity to you scary. If your dog doesn't eat any treats, that is okay; they may eat it after you leave the room. Even if the dog does not eat the treat, you are still showing them that good things do come from people.
- **Adjustment Period:** Some dogs will need more time than others to be fully comfortable in their new environments and with their new families. The average dog takes 2 weeks to adjust in a new home, but our shyer dogs can take a month or more to adjust. During this adjustment period, they should not meet a lot of new people or go on field trips outside

the home: no dog parks, pet stores, groomers, or visiting friends'/family homes for the first month. If you have one family member whom your dog has bonded with but it's not bonding well with other members of the family, please see our handout on Fear of New Family Members. Most shy dogs will not eat their dry kibble for the first 48 hours of being in a home due to nervousness in their new environment. They will usually still take high-value treats, such as a piece of hot dog, deli meat, or cheese during that 48-hour time frame. If your new dog is not eating or drinking at all during the first 48 hours, please call the Wayside Waifs vet clinic immediately.

## What to do if your newly adopted dog gets loose:

- Contact your local Animal Control. You will have to go in person to any Animal Control or shelter to look for and identify your dog. You should check multiple times per week if not daily. You should also check surrounding shelters for your lost dog; someone could have picked up your dog and taken it to a different shelter.
- Contact the Wayside Waifs Admissions department: 816-986-4405 (if no one answers, please leave a message).
- Facebook: Check the Lost and Found Pets Kansas City Group, and there are multiple other lost sites on Facebook. You should also post a photo with information on the dog like its name, how you can be contacted, etc.
- Make and post fliers in the surrounding areas where the dog was lost.

## Myths About Fearful Dogs:

- Shy dogs must not be around other dogs because they need to bond with humans.
  - This is NOT true. If a shy dog enjoys the company of other dogs, then they should have dog friends. Dogs that are friendly and outgoing with people can help shy dogs come out of their shell. These dogs act like therapy dogs for your shy dog and help them by modeling behavior.
- Dogs must be forced to face their fears.
  - This is NOT true and is referred to as flooding an animal. Pushing dogs past their limits can make them more fearful and can also lead to a dog biting. It would be like locking a person in a room with a bunch of spiders when they have a phobia of spiders; it's not a humane way to handle any problem relating to fear, nor is it effective.
- Shy dogs need lots of hugs and petting.
  - This is NOT true. Shy dogs need to be left alone first. They need to be given the option to come to you on their own for attention, not the other way around.

*If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your **dog**, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).*

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team

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## Additional links and information:

### Books:

- Cautious Canine by Patricia McConnell
- A Guide to Living with and Training a Fearful Dog by Debbie Jacobs

### Links:

#### Body Language

- [www.Fearfuldogs.com](http://www.fearfuldogs.com)
- <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=sophia+yin+dog+body+language&view=detailv2&qpvts=sophia+yin+dog+body+language&id=D3C596AD492F6EA0B85863C47419942639CF7175&selectedIndex=1&ccid=lqyUGvVt&simid=608027289522931483&thid=OIP.M22ac941af56d2bd827d83616febc1653H0&ajaxhist=0>
- <http://www.shibamac.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/hrJEn.jpg>

#### Lost Dog Prevention

- <http://dogs.about.com/od/caringfordogsandpuppies/ht/Search-For-Lost-Or-Missing-Dogs.htm>
- <http://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/archive/2014/06/11/retractable-dog-leash.aspx>

#### Videos

- <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=video+of+fearful+dog+zac+george&qpvts=video+of+fearful+dog+zac+george&FORM=VDRE#view=detail&mid=AF2EA740BA4AA994C508AF2EA740BA4AA994C508>
- <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=video+of+fearful+dog&qpvts=video+of+fearful+dog&FORM=VDRE#view=detail&mid=395301CE4F296A824263395301CE4F296A824263>