

## Confidence Boosting Exercises For shy or fearful dogs

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While some dogs seem to be oblivious to their changing surroundings or the coming and going of people or other dogs, others are more nervous in nature and will greatly benefit from some confidence building. If you are struggling with your dog exhibiting timid or fearful behavior, we have some helpful exercises that are designed to boost your dog's confidence.

**If your dog is displaying growling or snapping in these situations, it is time to call in a professional dog trainer with experience in fear-based aggression. Contact us to get help finding a trainer who is equipped to help modify these behaviors.**

### Remember

**Patience is key to working with dogs that display shy or fearful behaviors.** We tend to want to flood our dog with experiences, especially the first week we get them! This can be very overwhelming for a shy dog. This can potentially cause them to regress. Remember that every dog is an individual, and their comfort level will vary with each stimulus.

### Dispelling the comfort myth:

In the past, it was believed that we shouldn't comfort our fearful dogs. This was because we thought that we might reinforce the fear or anxiety. That is a myth and should not be followed. Please provide love, care, comfort, and support for your fearful dog in their moments of discomfort.

### Exercises to try

#### Enrichment, Brain games, and puzzle feeders

These are easy ways to boost our dog's confidence levels. These can be simply implemented into your everyday life by replacing their food bowl with enrichment activities. To start, focus on trying to use items around the house while your dog is still learning. You might find out that puzzles, brain games, and/or enrichment items aren't something that your dog prefers. For example, some dogs don't like to work for the Kong filling but might prefer a bowl with the fillings smeared around the sides and bottoms of a bowl or slow feeder. Check out our [handout Canine Enrichment Ideas](#) for more examples!

**Walking is often underrated for building confidence.** Walking can be a bonding time for you and your dog. There are things to smell and see which can distract your dog away from any nervous feelings. Start simple if your dog is very fearful and follow the same route until they are walking with no issue. You can change the route a little each time as they begin to exhibit more confidence on your walks. **Always be sure that your dog is securely leashed.** Consider using a martingale collar clipped to a harness as a second barrier to getting free. If the distance is too great to clip the leash on both, use a carabiner clip to connect the two. Connect the leash directly to the harness. *Note: if your dog is unable to walk on a leash, you may want to skip the walks and work on building confidence on leash while inside the house.*

## Alternatives to Walking

There are many other ways that we can exercise our dogs that don't cause them added stress. Many dog sports can be done from the comfort of your home! Many of these dog sports provide an outlet for energy release while also boosting confidence and problem-solving skills. Look into sports such as Dog Parkour, Agility, Nose work, Trick dog titles, Treibball (herding balls), dock diving, swimming, hiking, Frisbee, flyball, tracking, and more!

## Teaching your dog to target your hand with the "Touch" cue

The goal behavior is that our dog will touch our hand with their nose. We can use this in many ways, from getting our dog into a different physical location, to helping them turn away from a scary stimulus, or to building autonomy and confidence when moving towards hands.

**To teach this**, we want to rub a smelly treat along the palm of our hand. This will be our target hand. The other hand will be our reward hand. Gently move your target hand towards your dog's nose. When they turn to sniff your hand and accidentally boop or touch you with their nose, say "yes!" and deliver a treat from the reward hand. You can start saying "touch" just before you offer your target hand. You won't have to rub a smelly treat on your hand forever. That is just until they are consistently doing the behavior when cued.

Gradually build up to practicing this new behavior in more distracting environments. If they can't do the behavior when asked, note that. You can try it in a lower-distraction place. Just as with any behavior, you may not get the entire behavior trained in one session. Keep going in small sessions and keep things positive to help them learn that trying new things is rewarding.

## Play dates with Other Friendly Dogs

If your dog likes other dogs, arrange play dates with other well-adjusted dogs. Interacting with other dogs who are confident and well-mannered can help your dog learn to mimic those behaviors. Dog play is a great way to burn off some cortisol, the stress hormone, which builds up in your fearful dog. **Dog parks can be very overwhelming for a timid or fearful dog.** You also do not have control over people or other dogs and how they interact with your dog. If your dog is fearful, start with play dates at home.

## Basic Obedience Training

Training basic obedience cues such as sit, down, look, and wait is an excellent idea for any dog. Be sure that you are always using positive reinforcement training. That means, ask for a behavior, the dog does the behavior, and they are rewarded with something good like a treat or praise. Start working on these behaviors inside in a low-distraction environment. Gradually work towards more distracting environments as they get proficient in one space. Remember that dogs may have to re-learn how to do a behavior when in a new environment. Don't get frustrated! Practice new behaviors when out on walks or in higher distraction environments to keep them focused. Keeping their minds busy in times like this will keep their focus on you and not the environment.

## Play!

Playing games with your dog – even simply running around and playing small games of chase – can be a huge confidence booster! Try playing Tug or Fetch! When playing Tug, make sure to remember to let them "win" by letting them take the toy away. Bring extra toys for Tug and Fetch. It's much easier to play with extras instead of trying to race your dog to get to the toy. Note: You can also work on cues such as drop it!

**Register for Resilient Rover for a guided approach to boosting your fearful dog's confidence! [Click here or scan to register!](#)**

