

Building Confidence in a Shy Dog

Some dogs, due to certain or unknown circumstances, are not confident in themselves. This article will explore ways to build confidence in a dog that is shy or scares easily.

A shy dog, or one that scares easily many times has been physically, verbally, and/or emotionally abused in their past. Other dogs may have not had any or enough human contact when they were puppies. And dogs that are brought up in lovingly in a household but do not have the opportunity to leave the house and meet new dogs and people do not develop the confidence in themselves to handle new situations. Another problem these types of dogs often exhibit is separation anxiety, especially after becoming emotionally attached to a human in the household.

In order to help these types of dogs help themselves, one must make it a priority to build the dog's confidence.

- Enroll the dog in a basic obedience class. Unless the dog is so neurotic that taking it outside the home and into an obedience class is impossible, this is your first step. The main reason for doing obedience work is not to accomplish the commands, but to establish a means of trusted communication with the dog. Mutual respect and trust is the foundation of a good master/dog relationship.
- Whether you take your dog to an obedience class, or work at home, take your dog out of the house for an outing at least 3 times a week, ideally once each day. Getting out of the house and experiencing new people, places and things will help your dog gain confidence in himself.
- If your dog is scared of the collar, try a harness. If he is scared of a leash, introduce the leash as a new toy. When he begins to enjoy the leash, attach it to his collar or harness and let him drag it around (supervised) for a few minutes at a time. Always associate the leash with fun.
- Try to protect the dog's personal space. Do not let strangers overwhelm him, etc.. You may not be aware of a passerby petting the dog. It is amazing what really goes on. Do not allow people (even family members) to pet the dog on the top of the head or behind his ears. Instead, pat and scratch the dog on his chest and neck. This is much less threatening to a dog.
- Teach your dog to play with you. It may take a lot of patience and repetition. Entice the dog for a game of chase, with the dog chasing you. If he won't chase you while you're running, try crawling. The idea is to make the dog happy to follow you because it means fun. Teach the dog to play fetch. Praise the dog when he gets the ball. Building confidence is a necessity.
- If the dog is scared of people, instruct them to sit down and avoid eye contact until the dog is no longer scared of this particular person. They may offer the dog a treat, but don't force the dog to take it.

- Don't stroke a scared dog and say "It's okay." This is perceived as praise by the dog and will make it more likely that the dog will repeat his fear again next time. Instead give robust pats on the sides and act happy, pretend there is nothing to be scared about, and if at all possible, remove him from the frightful situation.
- Do not over-stimulate or push the dog too far too fast. Let the dog regulate how close he can get to other people, places and things. If you push a scared dog too far, you will create a neurosis that will be more difficult to treat.
- If the dog is scared of human contact, even from you, pet the dog as you walk by. Do it quickly and friendly, and then keep walking. By sneaking in friendly petting with no consequences (you simply walk away) the dog will learn that being touched is not a bad thing.
- Being scared is very stressful. Exercise is one of the most beneficial ways to relieve stress, so make sure your dog gets plenty of it. Be sure to allow the dog to romp and play unrestricted (except for a fence) until they tire out. This may be one of the best therapies that you can give a shy dog.

Dogs that need to build their confidence need your help. Taking the time to bring them out of their shell is certainly worth the effort!