



Dogs who are Fearful of People

Whether you have a new furry addition to your family, or a pet who has been with you for some time, it's important to be able to recognize signals that your dog is fearful of someone or something. If you've had your dog for a while, you are probably able to identify certain situations that will make your dog feel afraid. If your dog is new to you, you may still be learning to read the signals and understand what is causing your dog's fear. If your newly adopted dog is showing fearful behavior, it's important to remember that sometimes, fearful behavior will manifest in a shelter environment but may not surface in a stable home environment and other times, behavior seen in the shelter may carry over to the new home.

Definition of Fearful Behavior

Dogs display fearful behavior for a number of reasons. Some dogs are predisposed to having a fearful personality. Others may be fearful due to improper, or lack of, early socialization. Some dogs may have fearful behavior due to a prior traumatic experience. In many cases, a combination of these factors can result in a dog who displays fearful behavior. A dog may demonstrate fearful behavior in response to certain situations or people, i.e., the behavior can be context specific, or a dog may demonstrate fearful behavior in all situations, i.e., it may be more generalized.

Examples of Signals that a Dog May Display Out of Fear

- Avoidance (moving away from the person, object, or situation)
- Averted eye contact
- Tail tucked underneath belly
- Slow movement or 'freezing'
- Displacement behaviors such as lip-licking or yawning
- Dilated pupils
- Trembling
- Flattening their body to the ground
- Panting or pacing
- Refusal to accept food/treat

PO Box 43 • 46 Holland Road • West Kennebunk, ME 04094

— (207) 985-3244 ext 111 • obedience@animalwelfaresociety.org —





Here are some general tips

- Give your dog some space. Do not force a fearful dog to interact; instead, let the dog make the choice to interact when they feel comfortable.
- Do not allow family members, guests, or strangers to rush up to or pressure your dog to interact; many fearful dogs do best if they are politely ignored.
- Try to keep your movements slow and predictable.
- Use a soft, pleasing tone of voice.
- Use gentle, non-threatening body language when interacting with a dog who is displaying fearful behavior. Stand sideways instead of 'head-on' and avoid direct eye contact. If possible, turn sideways and kneel down while turning your eyes slightly away from the dog.
- Do not engage in body language that may be perceived as threatening such as direct eye contact, reaching into the dog's space, putting hands over the dog's head or neck, looming or standing over the dog.
- Always keep your dog on leash when outdoors. A martingale-style collar can be beneficial as a dog can slip out of it if he gets startled or spooked by a noise or something in the environment.
- Even if you have a fenced yard, it may be helpful to take the dog out on a leash or long line in the yard so you can gently guide the dog to and from your home.

All interactions should be on the dog's terms. Plan ahead for meetings with new people. Talk with your visitors about how best to approach your dog, and use management tools of baby gates, leash, or a crate to create a safe space when visitors would be unable to follow directions, or you have service workers visiting your home. Pair praise and treats with people coming to visit, these should come from you, your dog's most trusted person, and not the unfamiliar visitor.

Our training team is available for help via phone, email, group classes and in person private lessons anytime! Please reach out for more information.

PO Box 43 • 46 Holland Road • West Kennebunk, ME 04094

— (207) 985-3244 ext 111 • obedience@animalwelfaresociety.org —

