

## Help for Your Fearful Dog

It is very important to your dog that you learn to recognize **his** fear signals. Watch your dog for behaviors such as panting, trembling, whining, salivating, tucking tail, flattening ears, averting eyes, freezing, crouching, and frantically looking around or attempting to flee. In some cases, your dog may lose control of his bladder or bowels, become destructive, or lunge and bark at the scary stimulus.

Often, we don't know the cause of the fear. It could be a lack of socialization or flooding with scary stimuli during his developmental months. It could have been a specific incident or genetics. If you notice a sudden change in your dog's behavior, it is important that you contact your vet for advice and to rule out an underlying medical problem.

### Managing Your Dog's Fear:

- Initially, control your dog's environment by limiting his exposure to fearful situations. Never force your dog into situations in which she is fearful as this will likely increase the fearful response.
- Keep your dog on leash. A fearful dog may startle and bolt, so keeping him on leash at all times will help him stay safe. Ensure your dog has updated identification tags and a microchip.
- Consider your dog's perspective. Attending Saturday Market or going for a walk along the busy Springwater corridor or in Forest Park may be way too overwhelming for your dog at this time.
- When you observe your dog signaling that he is fearful, quickly and calmly remove him from the situation.
- Remain calm yourself. Breathe slowly and deeply. Speak calmly.
- Watch for small signs of improvement such as approaching a once fearful situation, or displaying her tail instead of tucking it underneath her. Calmly reward and praise these small improvements.
- If strangers ask or try to pet your dog say "Thank you for asking but no, he is uncomfortable with strangers."
- If you are surprised by a fearful stimulus, turn and walk away from it quickly and calmly.
- Avoid physical or harsh corrections, especially pinch collars, popping a choke collar, shouting, or hitting. This is true with any dog. You want your dog to trust you not fear you.
- Find games to play with your dog in your home and back yard that are fun and fear free.
- Enroll in a training class. Appropriate classes will help build your dog's confidence. Inform the instructor about your dog's fearful behaviors before classes begin, to ensure it is an appropriate fit.
- Be patient and try to have fun with the baby steps!
- **Ask for help!** This is not an easy process. You can reach the OHS Behavior Help Line at (503) 416-2983 or email a trainer at [OHSTrainers@oregonhumane.org](mailto:OHSTrainers@oregonhumane.org).

### What can you do to help change the fear?

**Seek professional help.** Desensitization and Counter Conditioning is the key to modifying your dog's behavior. We want your dog to become comfortable with the fearful stimulus, to change the way he feels about it and how he responds to it. Most people need professional help to work out a program which best fits their dog. Please contact our training department for assistance.

**Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**