

## Help for Your Fearful Dog

It is very important to your dog that you learn to recognize their fear signals. By understanding your dog's fear signals, you'll be able to see when your dog is becoming overwhelmed and when it may be necessary to stop an interaction or leave a situation. 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 genetics. It's possible your dog wasn't properly introduced to new things during key developmental stages. Perhaps a specific incident traumatized them. 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 their exposure to fearful situations. Never force your dog into situations in which they are fearful as this will likely increase the fearful response.
- Keep your dog on leash. A fearful dog may startle and bolt, so keeping them on leash at all times will help them stay safe. Ensure your dog has updated identification tags and a microchip. To help prevent slipping out of their collar/harness, make everything fits properly. When using a harness or head halter, attach a safety clip from the harness to your dog's collar for a second point of connection.
- 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.
- When you observe your dog signaling that they are fearful, quickly and calmly remove them 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 their tail instead of tucking it underneath. Calmly reward and praise these small improvements.
- If a stranger asks to pet your dog say, "Thank you for asking but no, Fido is uncomfortable with strangers."
- If your dog is startled or surprised by a fearful situation, 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 fenced yard that are fun and fear free.
- Enroll in a training class. Appropriate classes can 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. Celebrate small victories. 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).

## **If your dog panics and gets away from you on a walk:**

- Do not run after them. This could scare your dog more or cause them to run into the road. Calmly and quickly follow them to see which direction they're headed.
- If you have your cell phone, call someone to help you. Have them bring a crate (if the dog likes a crate). A crate can be a safe spot for the dog to run into if given a chance.
- If you have treats, rattle the bag and cheerfully say the dog's name or "puppy, puppy." If the dog looks at you, squat down and toss treats towards the dog. If the dog takes the treats and starts walking towards you, continue to toss treats but try not to grab them until you are sure you can catch the leash. Sudden movements could cause them to run again.
- Call us for more advice or suggestions.

## **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 us for assistance.

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