



# How to interact with a Fearful Dog



It is normal for dogs to be fearful at times, and humans can learn to respond in non-threatening ways. Here is some advice to help you safely interact with a fearful or unfamiliar dog.

Fear is protective if it stops an animal from putting itself into a potentially harmful situation. Fearful dogs may misunderstand social interactions and bite in self-defense. Humans can help by recognizing signs of fear, and by not pressuring dogs to engage. Signs of fear include:

- Standing still or moving away
- Eyes staring or glancing away when reached for
- Tail tucked
- Panting, lip licking
- Stiff movement of neck or back
- Slow cautious steps

## REMEMBER

Punishment causes fear and has no place in dog training. Dogs learn confidence and skills with reward-based training.

If your dog is fearful, provide a safe zone by keeping people from approaching, and offering a confinement 'retreat' (e.g., a room, crate, or pen) where no one will bother them.

Identify and avoid fear triggers or get professional help to modify them. Find a Veterinary Behaviorist [HERE](#).

## Here are some dos & don'ts when it comes to interacting with fearful or unfamiliar dogs.

### DO

- Let the dog approach you
- Look at the dog's feet, shoulder or tail
- Turn slightly to the side, stand with your torso upright. If it is safe to be at the dog's level, turn to the side and squat down without leaning towards the dog
- Breathe normally, smile, relax your neck and shoulders
- Toss yummy food away from yourself
- Be content to talk, toss treats and not pet
- Let the dog instigate petting by softly coming up under your hands with a wiggly body and relaxed face and tail. Stroke the chest briefly, then stop. Wait for the dog to instigate again
- Keep space at the face! Keep your hands, face and torso in your own space

### DON'T

- Approach the dog
- Look or stare directly at the dog's face
- Hold your breath, tense your muscles, look confrontational
- Bend towards or over the dog or reach out your hand for the dog to sniff
- Crowd the dog's face with your own face, hands or body
- Offer treats directly from your hand (toss away from you instead)
- Reach to pet the dog, especially over their head
- Hug or kiss someone else's dog – EVER. That can make a dog feel trapped and is a very common bite trigger!