What Do I Do – My Dog is Scared!
September 2012

Having a timid dog can be frustrating, time-consuming, and life limiting. And that’s just from your perspective. Think about what it must be like for the dog, being scared of everything all the time. It’s safe to assume that both ends of the leash are stressed when there’s a fearful dog in the house.

When the latest service pup in-training came to us at 11 weeks, she had virtually no experiences outside her yard. An unfortunate circumstance, to be sure, but thankfully we still have four weeks left before Siena’s socialization window is closed for good. What that means is: we’ve got our work cut out for us and have no time to waste thoughtfully introducing her to life outside the house. If you have an adolescent or adult dog that is fearful, don’t fret – there are still things you can do to help your dog overcome her fears. September’s newsletter will help you teach your timid dog that life isn’t all scary.

Socialization Period
Puppies are malleable until they’re about 16 weeks old. That means that you can help shape their outlook on life relatively easily. Pups are born with a natural curiosity and it’s not until about 16 weeks that pups start to become naturally more cautious and wary of unfamiliar situations. If you have a puppy under 16 weeks, find dog-friendly locations (around here both Southern States and Tractor Supply Co. allow dogs in their stores) where you can get your pup out and about. Take really tasty treats (think: cooked chicken or beef) to pair with those new and potentially frightening experiences. Be sure to let your pup investigate the world at her own pace – never force your pup to move toward something or prevent her from moving away from something that she finds frightening or intimidating. Between the ages of 8 and 16 weeks, it’s crucial to get your pup into the situations in which she’ll be placed throughout her life. For instance, if you ride horses frequently, be sure your pup has good experiences around horses before she’s 16 weeks old. If you go camping, plan a short camping adventure for your pup between the ages of 2 and 4 months.

Tools to Help the Fearful Dog
Siena came to us at 11 weeks with no experience outside her home. She had never had a collar and leash on before we got her. Everything was new to her. And because she had no prior experience, everything new was also scary for her. Thankfully, there are some products on the market to help fearful and stressed dogs. We’re using them with Siena and finding pleasant results.

Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP): A natural form of dog-appeasing pheromone is secreted from mother dogs immediately after they give birth. This pheromone has calming effects in both young and adult dogs in variety of stressful situations. A synthetic version has been created and has been effective treating dogs with separation-related behavior problems, phobias, and hyper-attachment. Dog-appeasing pheromone has been reported to reduce separation-induced anxiety, fear in puppies in a
new environment, and anxiety and stress in the car. It can also reduce anxiety of aggressive dogs, and anxiety of puppies in learning and socialization. DAP has no toxicities or side effects and is particularly beneficial for sick and geriatric dogs (Can Vet J. 2010 April; 51(4): 380–384. Efficacy of dog-appeasing pheromone (DAP) for ameliorating separation-related behavioral signs in hospitalized dogs.)

DAP is available in several forms: a room diffuser, a spray (to spray directly on bedding, for example), and a collar. Use can use the different forms together or alone. We’re using the DAP collar on Siena. I’m also using the spray to helping her relax in the crate, and also in public. Where to Buy: online, your veterinarian, or most big box pet supply stores. Prices run about $20 - $25 depending on the retailer.

**Thundershirt:** The Thundershirt is very much like a tight, stretchy t-shirt. You wrap it around your dog and it has a “swaddling effect” on some dogs. The gentle, constant pressure has a dramatic calming effect for most dogs if they are anxious, fearful or over-excited. As for why Thundershirt’s gentle pressure works to calm a dog, experts such as Dr. Temple Grandin believe that pressure has a calming effect on the nervous system. Using pressure to relieve anxiety has been a common practice for years. Where to Buy: online at [www.Thundershirt.com](http://www.Thundershirt.com), other online pet supply retailers, from your veterinarian, trainer, or most big box pet supply stores. Use code FE512 for free embroidery! Cost is about $25 - $40 depending on vendor.

**Through A Dog’s Ear:** Music soothes the savage beast. It's true! *Through a Dog’s Ear* is a clinically researched auditory solution for canine behavior issues. The over-arching psychoacoustic theory informing *Through a Dog’s Ear* is summed up in just two words — **simple sound**. This term refers to the process of minimizing intricate auditory information found in most music. The music of *Dog’s Ear* is intentionally selected, arranged and recorded to provide easeful auditory assimilation. I’ll be honest: I don’t know exactly how it works. But I do know that there is a lot of anecdotal and empirical data to support the claim that music can really help calm your dog. I’m playing it as I type this newsletter and all four dogs are dead out asleep. Where to Buy: online at [Through A Dog’s Ear website](http://Through A Dog’s Ear website). At $9.99 for digital downloads and no side effects, this is an easy and inexpensive solution.

**Training, Behavior Modification, and Your Veterinarian**
Some dogs respond well to one or more of these tools. Other dogs have deep-seated fear and need more help. If you try the tools mentioned above (or a combination thereof) and your dog is still distressed, it’s time to get a team of professionals to help you. You’ll need a veterinarian with experience in behavior (or a veterinary behaviorist, if one is near you), as well as an experienced positive reinforcement trainer. The veterinarian will provide the diagnosis after a consultation and physical exam. Your veterinarian will also give you the prognosis as well as prescribe medication that might help alleviate your dog’s anxiety. In addition to the diagnosis, prognosis, medications, and physical exam, your veterinarian will likely recommend a positive reinforcement trainer to help implement the behavior modification part of the treatment plan. Working together with the veterinarian-trainer team, your dog has a better chance of improvement.
Avoid These Pitfalls

Lack or Delay of Treatment: For a fearful dog or pup, the worst treatment is no treatment at all. At the very least, try some of the over-the-counter tools mentioned above. Living in constant fear or anxiety isn’t a good life – for you or your dog.

Force: Let a fearful pup take his time to approach the scary thing or place. Tugging on the leash, dragging him along will not help him get over his fears. In fact, you’re likely to increase the treatment time by forcing the pup to interact or tolerate the scary situation or person.

Anger: Yelling at a fearful dog will only increase his fear – of the scary situation and of you. Now, instead of the dog simply fearing one thing, it now fears the thing and you – his source of trust has just been eliminated. Always “prop your dog up” with happy-go-lucky language and tone of voice instead of getting frustrated and angry.

Problem Prevention

Getting your puppy into training as soon as your veterinarian deems him healthy is the best way to prevent fear from developing. If you just adopted an older dog, find a positive reinforcement trainer who understands fearful dogs – get your dog into a clicker training class as soon as he’s settled into your home (don’t wait more than a month to start training, if your dog is healthy). Smart Dog University offers Puppy Charm School for pups 8 – 18 weeks. We cover all the puppy issues you’re likely to encounter: puppy nipping, house training, crate training, puppy socialization, and more! K9 Building Blocks classes are for dogs 18+ weeks old and we teach good manners to your dog. Having a set of good manners already installed in your pup or dog gives you lots of tools to help combat fear in your dog!

Laurie Luck
Professional Dog Trainer
Smart Dog University
Facebook
Twitter
YouTube

*I wasn’t compensated in any way from any of the companies who manufacture or sell the products listed above. In fact, they aren’t even aware I recommend them or their products. Nor will I get any compensation as a result of your purchases. I simply hope any of the products helps your fearful dog.