



Shy Dog Training Guide

Name _____

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SHY DOGS

WHAT ARE SHY DOGS?

When we describe a dog as 'shy,' it usually means they're feeling a bit nervous or unsure. These dogs might take time to warm up, may hide at first, or seem cautious around new people or unfamiliar things in their environment.

WHY ARE THEY SHY?

Some dogs are shy or fearful due to a mix of early life experiences and natural temperament. Dogs that weren't socialized or exposed to a variety of people, animals, and environments as puppies may grow up feeling unsure or nervous around new things. Genetics can also play a role—some breeds, like herding or guardian dogs, are naturally more cautious or reserved. Additionally, dogs who have had scary or negative experiences in the past may become more anxious or hesitant in similar situations. The good news is, with patience and positive support, many fearful dogs can grow in confidence over time.

WHAT BEHAVIOR DO WE SEE?

1. **Body Language** – cowering or keeping body close to the floor, tail tucked, ears pinned back, avoiding eye contact, trembling or shaking, dilated pupils or wide eyes (whale eye), pacing or restlessness, and freezing or holding stillness.
2. **Vocalizations** – whining or whimpering, alarm barking, growling.
3. **Avoidance Behaviors** – backing away or trying to escape a situation, hiding behind or under objects, refusing to approach people or objects, lack of appetite.
4. **Defensive Behaviors** – snapping or biting as a last resort when cornered, in extreme cases of fear we can see urination or defecation as an escape response.

TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR DOG'S FEAR

If your dog's fear leads to aggression, reactivity, or inability to calm down, work with a qualified positive reinforcement trainer or veterinary behaviorist.

1. **Recognize fearful body language.** Learn to spot early signs of fear such as tucked tail, yawning, lip licking, trembling, hiding, or trying to avoid a situation.
2. **Avoid punishment.** Punishing fear-based behaviors can worsen anxiety and teach your dog that fear leads to negative outcomes.
3. **Predictable routines.** Predictability helps fearful dogs feel secure. Try to maintain consistent feeding, walking, and bedtime routines.
4. **Provide enrichment.** Mental stimulation through scent games, puzzle toys, and training exercises can help build confidence and reduce overall stress.
5. **Don't force your dog into scary situations.** This can increase fear and damage trust. Instead, take gradual steps at your dog's pace.
6. **Create a safe space.** Give your dog a quiet, cozy area where they can retreat when feeling overwhelmed — such as a crate, quiet room, or corner with familiar bedding.
7. **Use counter-conditioning.** Pair scary things with something positive (like treats or play).
8. **Desensitize gradually.** Slowly expose your dog to things that cause them fear in small, manageable doses.
9. **Stay calm and reassuring.** Your energy affects your dog. Speak gently, move slowly, and offer reassurance without overwhelming them.
10. **Build Confidence by encouraging choice and autonomy.** Choice and autonomy give dogs control over their own experiences, which reduces fear and increases trust. When dogs learn that they can say “yes” or “not yet” without negative consequences, they start to see the world as a safer, more predictable place.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT VS. AVERSIVE PUNISHMENT

WHAT IS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT?

Positive reinforcement involves rewarding your dogs for behavior you'd like them to repeat. Rewards can come in many forms, including play, petting, food, and treats. The most important thing is that your dog enjoys it!

WHAT IS AVERSIVE PUNISHMENT?

Aversive punishment involves something that is painful, scary, or otherwise unpleasant. Aversive techniques include startle (using noise makers or compressed air), painful corrections (like leash jerking, e-collars, or pinch collars), and physical manipulation (like pushing a dog's butt down until they sit, or forcing them onto their side or back).

WHAT NOT CORRECT UNWANTED BEHAVIOR?

Correcting an unwanted behavior only interrupts your dog at the moment. It does not, however, teach your dog what to do instead of the thing you punished them for. Corrections and punishments also fail to improve your dog's motivation or desire to perform the behaviors you prefer. In fact, it is very common for dogs to resume the behavior they were previously punished for, and to learn to avoid or fear you instead.

HOW TO TRAIN POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

1. Using a treat or toy, lure your dog from one place to another or into a desired position.
2. Give your dog plenty of daily mental and physical exercise. A tired dog is a good dog!
3. Prevent unwanted behaviors using environmental management.
4. Use gates, leashes, or visual barriers so that your dog can't practice the unwanted behaviors.
5. Teach your dog new behaviors to replace the unwanted ones.
6. For more information, see the handout titled "Teaching Alternative Behaviors".
7. Ignore unwanted behaviors when they occur, and calmly direct your dog toward a more desirable behavior.

CONSENT PETTING

WHAT IS IT?

Consent petting is the practice of reading your dog's body language to determine if, when, and how they want to receive physical affection. This practice is about promoting autonomy and choice in your dog and can be extremely helpful for more shy or nervous dogs.

WHY ASK FOR CONSENT?

We ask dogs for consent to help build trust, ensure their comfort, and promote safer, more respectful interactions. When dogs feel they have a choice, they're more likely to engage willingly and build a stronger bond with you because you are listening to their signals and working with them, not against them.

HOW TO TEST FOR CONSENT

1. Pet or scratch the dog on their chest or shoulders.
2. Pet for 3 seconds and then stop.
3. If your dog says YES continue! If your dog says NO stop.

TRAINING TIPS

1. Signs for yes, keep petting!

- Paws at you for more
- Nudges you
- Moves into your space
- Loose body language

o

1. Signs for no, stop petting!

- Does nothing
- Shrinks away and avoids the touch
- Moves away after touch
- Licks lips, yawns, sniffs floor
- Stiff body language or growls

LONG TERM CONFINEMENT AREA (LTCA)

WHAT IS AN LTCA?

A long-term confinement area is a safe space for a dog to stay while unsupervised.

WHY USE AN LTCA?

Growing puppies will create habits that last a lifetime – including where they like to go potty, and what they like to chew on. Having a long term confinement area will allow you to prevent them from practicing behaviors you don't want them to repeat into adulthood, without having eyes on them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Long term confinement areas are also an invaluable tool when helping a shy dog transition into a new environment. It keeps them in one spot, so that they don't hide in a spot where you cannot reach them. Placing them in an x-pen in a main living area gives them enough exposure to the goings on of your household to acclimate, while establishing a safe space to retreat to if things get overwhelming.

HOW TO SET IT UP

1. Create a secure area - Typically, an x-pen works very well for this. If your dog or puppy is too large to be contained by an x-pen you can also use a bathroom, kitchen, or laundry room that is easy to block off using a baby gate.
2. Give them a place to hide – Add a covered crate or other hiding spot, ensuring the door is propped open so they don't get stuck in or out of that space. Make it an attractive place to rest by adding comfy bedding.
3. Add a place to potty – Fearful dogs who don't yet walk on leash, or young puppies still learning where to do their business should be provided with a pee pad or a patch of turf to eliminate on.
4. Provide for their daily needs – Include a water dish, a food bowl (when appropriate), toys to chew on, and other enrichment items your pup will engage with. This will help establish their LTCA as an awesome place to be, and keep them busy while you're not around to supervise.

TRAINING TIPS

1. Acclimating a shy dog to your home? Sit beside the LTCA and read a book so they get used to you being nearby without the pressure of direct interaction
2. For potty training success – set up your LTCA right by the door to the outside so that there's no room for error in getting out for a potty break.

TREAT AND RETREAT FOR FEARFUL DOGS

WHAT IS TREAT AND RETREAT?

Treat and Retreat is a method for building rapport with fearful or defensive dogs. The process involves using food and space to encourage interaction that the dog is comfortable with. Food is not used to lure the dog closer to us, because this often creates internal conflict in a fearful dog. Instead, food is used to encourage space and breaks by tossing treats away from us.

WHY USE TREAT AND RETREAT?

This game gives us a way to bond with our dog while creating a strong, positive association with human interaction. By tossing the treats away, your dog learns to take space when scared, which actually helps them calm down. Over time, increasing your dog's ability to choose to take breaks lessens your dog's fear.

WHY NOT HAND-FEED TREATS?

Hand feeding treats to a fearful dog sets the dog up for continued exposure to stress hormones. By requiring your dog to remain close to the scary thing, they may feel coerced. That's why hand feeding can increase fear and aggression.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Prepare pea-sized high-value treats. Preferably something stinky that the dog loves!
2. Using an underhand toss, gently throw a treat away from you and past the dog.
3. Remain relaxed and calm while the dog eats the treat.
4. Once they've finished eating, gently toss another treat - this time closer to you.
5. Repeat the above steps, varying the distance and direction of your tosses.

TRAINING TIPS

1. Body language is everything! Avoid staring directly at the dog. Soften your gaze, blink slowly, and look slightly off to the side or at the dog's feet. Relax your body and turn so that your side faces the dog while still keeping the dog within your line of sight. Sitting on the ground is ideal if there is room and the dog doesn't feel cornered.
2. You may notice the dog approaching after eating the treats. That's just what you want to see! It means they're getting more comfortable with you. Continue alternating treat tosses. Resist the temptation to offer treats from your hand.
3. If the dog is not moving towards or eating the treat, then try using something that's higher value - the stinkier the better! You may also try releasing a handful of treats on each toss, or moving to a space with more space and perceived exit routes for the dog.
4. If a dog is lying on their bed and not following tossed treats you may gently place treats on the bed in front of the dog, but do not linger near their bed. Step back and let them eat.

ENRICHMENT FOR DOGS

WHAT IS ENRICHMENT?

Enrichment is anything that improves the quality of your dog's life. It may involve an increase or a decrease in stimulation. Enrichment activities encourage your dog to participate in behaviors that are natural to them. In other words, they allow your dog to be a dog!

ENGAGE ALL 5 SENSES!

By focusing on engaging all of your dog's senses, you can be sure to offer them a healthy variety of enriching experiences. Variety ensures that your dog's mental and physical needs are being met. Keep in mind that daily mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise.

SCENTS: Your dog experiences the world through scents. Their ability to detect and analyze scents is staggering. Use your dog's sense of smell to engage their brain in problem solving.

- Take a Sniffy Walk! Allow your dog to smell what they want, for as long as they want.
- Treat treasure hunt! Hide treats around your home or yard for your dog to find.
- Introduce new scents to your dog. This could include dog-safe essential oil on a cloth, blankets that came from another animal, or store-bought animal scents (sold for hunting or pest control).

SOUNDS: In addition to their amazing sense of smell, dogs also have very sensitive hearing. Keep this in mind as you introduce new sounds, because playing sounds that are too loud or jarring may cause distress.

- Play soothing classical music, or dog-specific calming soundtracks to help your dog relax. Studies have shown that calming sounds can positively affect a dog's behavior.
- Play books on tape. This may be something you and your dog can enjoy together, or something to leave playing for your dog when they are alone.
- Play animal sounds to engage your dog's ears. This is only recommended as a supervised activity. Search online or for a sound-specific app to play with.

SIGHTS: Dogs don't see nearly as well as we do, but that doesn't mean they aren't interested in beautiful or interesting sights. They see best in tones of yellow and blue.

- Subscribe to DogTV on youtube, which is specifically designed to engage your dog's senses.
- Place a bird feeder outside a window where your dog can watch the activity.
- Vary your walking route to keep sights, and smells and sounds varied on each outing.

TASTE: Variety is the spice of life! Incorporate special treats every now and then to engage their taste buds in new and exciting ways.

- Does your dog have a favorite treat? Rotate treat types and flavors to keep their taste buds guessing. This prevents a high value treat from becoming boring over time.
- Some dogs love vegetables (raw or frozen). Be sure to stick to dog-safe options.
- Stuffed kongs are a great way to occupy our dogs for long periods of time. Fill them with many different tasty snacks - from peanut butter to bananas to baby food!

TOUCH: There are two types of touch - touch your dog initiates and touch that happens to them. Both types of touch can be enriching so long as it is enjoyable to your dog.

- Try a doggy massage! Use gentle pressure in circular motions on your dog's neck, shoulders and back. Avoid using too much pressure or causing discomfort.
- Walking on and rolling or digging in different substrates can be an exciting way to pass the time. Take a walk on sand, dirt, gravel, concrete, or grass. If your dog wants to roll around, or start digging, you know they're having fun!
- Water and ice can provide fun and interesting tactile experiences for your dog. Offer a baby pool with some water in it, or a frozen treat to your dog in the summer.

PLAY!

SOCIAL PLAY: This includes play with any other animal or human. Remember that dogs are social creatures!

- Playtime with age-appropriate social dogs is a great way to burn off mental/emotional energy, and to learn necessary social skills. Keep play frequent, but short and sweet.
- Parallel walks or group walks can also provide protected social contact between dogs, so long as all dogs are given freedom of movement and enjoy being around each other.

PLAY WITH TOYS: Dogs benefit from play with a variety of toys that they can chase, chew or dissect. These are natural behaviors for dogs, which help them burn excess energy.

- Playing fetch allows your dog to run, chase, and grab toys. The added benefit is that it encourages coming back to you and dropping objects on cue.
- Tug with Rules is a safe game to play between adults and dogs. When played with rules, your dog learns to collaborate with you, practice dropping on cue and to wait patiently for the game to resume. For more information, check out our handout "Tug With Rules".
- A flirt pole is a great alternative for the dog who loves to chase and tug. It is also a safe option for play between children and dogs. Flirt poles can be purchased online, or made at home using PVC pipe, bungee cord, and a toy.

PROBLEM SOLVING FOR FUN: Believe it or not, problem-solving can be fun for your dog! The goal of using problem-solving tasks for enrichment is to challenge our dogs without frustrating them.

- Foraging games involve encouraging your dog to scavenge for food. Store-bought and DIY food puzzles can be a great way to serve meals. For DIY options, use cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, or simply scatter food around the house or yard.
- Clicker training and other learning games mentally tire out your dog in a healthy way. Teach your dog a new trick, or take up a dog sport such as agility, treibball, or canine freestyle.

TEACHING A NOSE TARGET

WHAT IS A NOSE TARGET?

Nose targeting refers to your dog's ability to touch their nose to an object. Teach your dog to touch their nose to your flat palm. Once they eagerly do so, you can teach them to touch their nose to a variety of objects.

WHY TEACH YOUR DOG TO NOSE TARGET?

A Nose Target may seem like a cute party trick, but it is so much more than that! Nose Targets are useful for polite greetings, moving your dog into or out of position, and coming when called. Dogs who are skilled at nose targeting pay more attention to their handlers, always looking for body cues that give them direction. A reliable Nose Target can also help build a dog's confidence, and help fearful dogs learn how to explore new spaces.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Hold your hand flat, with fingers pointed downward or to the side. Tuck your thumb across your palm, and face your palm toward your dog.
2. Gently offer your hand directly in front of your dog's face, 2-3 inches from their nose.
3. Keep your hand still, being very careful not to move it toward or away from your dog.
4. Wait for your dog to look at your hand, sniff it, or touch it with their nose.
5. Click as soon as they offer any of these behaviors, then offer a treat.
6. While your dog eats the treat, remove your hand from your dog's view to reset. Repeat these steps 5-10 times, offering your hand at the same height and distance.

TRAINING TIPS

1. You can advance this skill by offering your hand at different heights and distances.
2. If your dog stops touching their nose to your hand, go back to an easier position.
3. Add a verbal cue. Say the word "touch", count 1-mississippi, then offer your hand.

LEASH DESENSITIZATION & COUNTER-CONDITIONING

WHAT IS IT?

Leash Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning (Leash DS/CC for short) is the process of changing a dog's emotions and desensitizing them to the leash. For some dogs, the leash can elicit fear or discomfort due to the lack of socialization with it or past scary experiences.

WHY TEACH IT?

Taking the time to slowly introduce a dog to equipment and walking on leash helps ensure that going outside is a positive experience for them. Forcing a leash on a dog and dragging them outside will make them less likely to want to go on walks in the future.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. **Build positive associations with the leash.** Show the leash to your dog, and mark and reward them whenever they look at or interact with the it. Troubleshooting: If your dog does not interact with the leash, start by placing it on the ground in front of your dog. You can toss treats on top of the leash to encourage interaction.
2. **Desensitize your dog to being touched around their collar or harness.** Gently pet around your dog's neck, chest, or back (depending on where you'll be clipping the leash). Mark and reward every touch with treats.
3. **Clip the leash to your dog.** Gradually bring the leash closer to your dog's collar/harness clip until you're able to clip it. Start farther away, and mark and reward with treats every time you bring the leash closer. **Troubleshooting:** If your dog doesn't want you to clip the leash, try using a "lure to clip." Hold a high value treat in one hand, and clip the leash with the other while they're eating. Do your best to open and close the clip quietly.
4. **Allow your dog to drag the leash around.** Mark and reward for each step they take. Gradually increase the number of steps between rewards.
5. **Pick up the leash and follow your dog around while they walk.** Keep the leash loose! Continue to mark and reward for movement, gradually increasing the number of steps between rewards.
6. **Start leading your dog around on leash.** Use treats to lure them to move with you. Gradually increase the number of steps between rewards. Start with short walks, and gradually increase distance as your dog becomes more comfortable. Troubleshooting: If your dog doesn't want walk, keep the leash loose and take even smaller steps. You may even want to crouch down to their level and encourage them to walk towards you. Try increasing the value of your treats as well.

TRAINING TIPS:

1. Start in a secure, quiet area such as in their room or in a quiet yard. The fewer distractions and noises, the better. 11
2. Have your dog's favorite treats ready. Pick a marker word such as "Yes!" or "Good dog!" (or use a clicker) to mark good behavior and let your dog know a treat is coming.
3. Watch your dog's body language closely and give them breaks whenever they show signs of discomfort or stress (tucked tail, crouching, whale eye, pinned ears, etc.).
4. Some dogs are uncomfortable with pressure on their neck. Try a lightweight leash or use a harness instead.
5. Do multiple short training sessions a day rather than one long one. Be sure to end each session on a good note!

RELIABLE RECALL

WHAT IS IT?

Recall refers to your dog's ability to come when called.

WHY TEACH IT?

Reliable recall keeps you and your dog safe. You want to know that your dog will return to you - even in those risky, unplanned moments of taking off after something. By following the rules below, you and your dog can build a reliable recall that will last a lifetime.

THE 5 RULES OF RELIABLE RECALL

1. Choose a special word

It's important to have a special word for recall that won't be used by accident, one that you promise to use only when necessary. Use a distinct sound or a word that is three syllables or less that you are comfortable shouting in public but don't say in regular conversation.

2. Always reward your dog for recalling.

When you use your Reliable Recall cue, be prepared to reward your dog with something they absolutely love. It's a good idea to keep something extra special just for recall practice. Some examples of very high-value foods are hot dogs, cheese, steak, or cheeseburgers.

3. Never punish your dog when they come to you.

No matter how long it might have taken them to come back to you, or how naughty they were behaving prior to coming back, you should never punish your dog when they come to you. Your dog won't connect the punishment to the naughty behavior, but they will connect it to coming back to you.

4. Teach your dog to sit when they arrive at your feet.

Recall is less valuable if it only results in a drive-by from your dog! Teach your dog to sit on their return. Alternatively, you can also practice physically getting a hold of your dog prior to delivering the reward. Either option gives you time to gather your dog or leash them up when you need to.

5. You're always working on recall.

Recall is not about how the dog is rewarded in the moment, but about how the dog has been rewarded in the past! Don't expect your dog to come when called if you are not regularly practicing and rewarding it. The more you use your recall cue, according to the 5 Rules, the more reliable it becomes. Remember to train in a variety of locations and over varying distances.

HOW TO TEACH IT

Your goal is to teach your dog that returning to you is always the better bet! Do this by making recall games fun for your dog.

GAME #1: MOONWALK RECALL

1. Click, then treat!
2. Repeat these steps, walking a little further with each repetition.
3. Give your recall cue in a clear, cheerful tone.
4. Walk backwards excitedly, 1-2 steps. Make it enticing for your dog to follow!
5. When your dog gets to you, gently take their collar or harness in your hand.

Training tip: This game can be played on leash or off leash in a safe space.

GAME #2: TREAT TO TROT

1. Place 3-4 pieces of low-value food (like your dog's kibble) on the ground.
2. Calmly walk away a few steps while your dog eats the food.
3. As soon as your dog finishes eating, give your recall cue in a clear, cheerful tone.
4. When your dog comes to you, gently take their collar or harness in your hand.
5. Click, then treat!
6. Repeat these steps, walking a little further away with each repetition.

Training tip: Give yourself more time to get further away by scattering the low-value food.

GAME #3: PUPPY PING PONG

1. Enlist the help of a friend. Prepare treats for both of you to keep in your treat pouch.
2. Stand 6 feet from the other person, and gently hold your dog's collar or harness.
3. Ask the other person to call your dog, using your recall cue. Then let your dog go.
4. When your dog arrives, have the other person gently take a hold of their collar or harness, then click, then offer a treat.
5. This time, call your dog back to you. When your dog arrives, gently grab their collar or harness, then click, then offer a treat.
6. Repeat these steps 5-10x times. Thereafter, vary the distance your dog must travel.
7. Advance this by adding more people to the game. Vary who calls, but be sure that only one person calls your dog at a time.

Training tip: Give your recall cue once. Avoid repeating the cue, or your dog will not learn it reliably.

FLIGHT TRAINING

WHAT IS IT?

Flight training involves teaching a dog to run away from the things that scare them. This is a very handy trick when the alternative is to charge and bark, or even bite.

WHY TEACH IT?

When animals feel threatened, they typically respond by fighting back, fleeing the scene, or freezing in their tracks. The tendency to fight back can become dangerous, especially when a dog is highly sensitive, and feels threatened by everyday interactions and experiences. When dogs learn to run away from the things that scare them, it increases safety for everyone who they might come into contact with.

HOW TO TEACH IT

Step 1. Lure your dog to perform u-turns while on leash walks, or off leash in a secure location: put a treat right up to their nose, and loop them around to start walking in the opposite direction.

Step 2. As soon as your dog is steadily moving in the opposite direction, say “yes” and give them the treat.

Step 3. After 3-5 repetitions luring your dog, start to build a cue: for example, say “run away!” just before you lure your dog into a u-turn.

Step 4. Fade the lure: use the cue, and move your body, without using a treat to move your dog from one place to another.

Step 5. Build in triggers: use your flight cue just after your dog has seen something new and interesting at a great distance. If they are successful with that, start to build on that, increasing the difficulty until they’re running away from something that is frightening or triggering to them.

TRAINING TIPS

Tip 1. One treat is great, but a whole jackpot is even better! Don’t be shy about throwing your dog a big party when they perform this behavior. That party can include multiple treats, toys, praise, and petting. Whatever your dog enjoys, they should earn for performing their flight behavior.

Tip 2. Toss treats out in front of your dog to gain speed and excitement.

Tip 3. It’s very important to practice this behavior A LOT before triggers are involved. If the cue is introduced in the presence of triggers, it could “poison” that cue, because it’s associated with something too scary.

Tip 4. When you do introduce triggers, start small. We can’t expect them to follow cues when they’re frightened, so we need to start from a place where they can definitely be successful, and build difficulty at a pace where they continue to have success. If at any point your dog isn’t able to follow your cue, take note of it and make sure you’re keeping things easier the next time you try it.