



# Shy Dogs

Fearful dogs avoid people or things that frighten them, and may do a barking display to make what they're afraid of go away. If you've decided to share your life with a shy dog, take heart. With patience, you can build his confidence.

## Different Kinds of Shyness

The most common kinds of shyness in dogs are:

Social shyness, where the dog is fearful of unfamiliar people. Dogs like this are sometimes described as "taking a while to warm up," "one man dogs" or "protective." They are usually fine with a person once they get to know them. Examples are dogs who are afraid of men or children, or bark at people with unusual gaits.

Context fears, where the dog is afraid of certain kinds of situations. Examples are dogs who are vet-phobic, panic during car rides or are uncomfortable in new places.

Sound sensitivities, where the dog is afraid of loud noises. They flatten and try to escape when a car backfires, or pace and salivate during thunderstorms or fireworks.

## Why Is He Like This?

Fear is common in animals. Although it's possible that a fearful dog has suffered abuse or a bad experience, most fear results from a combination of a genetic predisposition and some lack of experience in the first weeks of life. A dog may have missed becoming *socialized* to new people by simply not being around them enough when he was a puppy.

## Will He Get Better?

Most fearful dogs can be helped to gradually improve. This is a slow process in most cases and requires patience. Shy dogs are not for everybody. They need people who have compassion and patience.

The best thing is to expose him to what frightens him but at a **milder intensity** and combined with a **positive association**. A dog who is afraid of children might start to feel comfortable if he regularly sees children but at a distance where he doesn't feel worried. If you pat him and give him treats, he will start to see kids as good news: "Wow, great things happen to me when kids are around!" Dogs learn strongly from association.

## How Can I Help Him Settle in to His New Home?

The best strategy is to let the dog go at his own pace. Any kind of pressure or coercion to make contact makes things worse. Let the dog hide if he needs to, investigate things and come to you when he feels ready. Make the world safe for him and he'll improve.