

My Dog Is Afraid of Men!

(Please, PLEASE note that fear issues can be very tricky. While these training tips may help to start a dog get over her problem, it is always best to work face to face with a trainer or behaviorist who is comfortable dealing with aggression. Remember that a dog who feels trapped may feel that her teeth are her only defense. When dealing with a fearful dog, be sure that safety is the top priority, with setting the dog up for success coming a close second.)



It would be wonderful if everyone who got a puppy knew how to socialize it to a variety of different people and situations so that she would grow up to be a confident, well-adjusted adult dog. However, this isn't always the case. And sometimes, even in dogs that were properly socialized, traumatic events or basic temperament may make dogs afraid of certain people. For the basis of this article I will be focusing on dogs that are afraid of men. These training techniques can be expanded and altered to fit a fear of any type or gender of person and in some cases some objects.

If a dog is afraid of men, try to decide if it is all men, or just certain kinds of men. Some dogs can't stand beards, mustaches, hats, different skin color, glasses, etc. Once you determine what triggers the dog's fear response, you can try to work to desensitize the dog to this type of people.

If you can set things up in advance, that would be great, but if not, you can certainly work around it. Find out what treats your dog adores. In my house, cut up hot dogs work well, Natural Balance dog food rolls, and pieces of deli meat.



Whenever the dog encounters someone that scares her, ask the person to turn sideways to her, look slightly away (both of these things tell the dog that this person isn't a threat), and have him toss treats in the dog's direction. They might have to throw treats quite a ways to begin with, but can gradually get closer as the dog feels more confident and less scared.

Don't push her to accept anyone - if she feels really threatened there is always the possibility that she'll bite. If she can work toward someone on her own level she feels much safer.

Also, be sure that if you're talking to the dog that you're not scolding, which can make her think that men = scolding, and also that you're not reassuring her in a soft voice. That can sound an awful lot like praise and she may think that you're telling her that it's good to be scared of the man. As strange as this may sound, try laughing at the dog when she's scared (I usually tack on a "silly puppy!" when I laugh in these situations.) Your laughter may cue the dog that there is nothing for her to be afraid of. If that seems too weird, just be sure that if you talk to the dog when she shows fear, that you use a very matter of fact voice. Kind of a "Yes Molly, I see him, too. He's fine, you're fine, it's all fine. Let's get on with our

day." It may seem kind of callous, but dogs often take their cues from us and if you don't act like this person is anything special, then the dog shouldn't either.

You can also teach your dog to focus on you and not the scary thing. A very quick way to do this is to put a treat in your hand, hold it up to your face, waggle your finger and say "watch me!" in a happy voice. This way the dog is looking at something other than the man. However, many trainers (myself included) aren't crazy about this method since the dog doesn't really learn to look at your face, just the food.

I taught my dogs to look at me by putting a good treat in each hand and placing my hands at my sides. The dog smells the treat and tries to get it, getting more and more frustrated, because you're just standing there with a smile on your face, not saying anything or moving around. Eventually the dog will get frustrated and glance your way. To begin with, this is just a very short millisecond. As soon as the dog looks at you say "yes!" and give the dog a treat. Once you know that your dog is going to look at you, you can add a cue word such as "watch", "look", "eyes", "ready", etc. Then delay saying "yes!" and delivering the treat by a few seconds to build up the amount of time that your dog looks at you.



I also make my dogs focus on me to get their dinner. I stand with their dishes in my hands and wait for one to look at me. As soon as one does, and holds eye contact with me, I say "yes" and put down the food bowl. In addition, the dogs give me eye contact to come out of their crates and in from outside. I've found that this has really helped to make them more willing to make and hold eye contact.

Once you've established eye contact with your dog, you can cue her to look at you whenever she encounters something or someone that scares her. That way she's not watching the scary thing and getting more and more worked up. Ideally the dog will learn to automatically look your way whenever she sees something that she's not sure about. If she does look at you automatically, be sure to make a HUGE deal about it, which lots of praise and treats. You want to be sure to let the dog know that this makes you very happy and that she should try it again and again.