

Is Your Dog Getting Fearful or Anxious?

Methods to rein him in when his being ill at ease makes him aggressive

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| <p>1. A dog acts consistently aggressive toward other dogs, lunging at them, barking gruffly, and charging forward and then backward all the while. It's even worse when he's on leash. He also gives a warning bark if people try to pet him or otherwise act friendly toward him. The dog is</p> <p>a) anxious
b) fearful
c) confident</p> | <p>2. When the angry, barking dog lunges forward to scare another dog, the second dog doesn't bark back. Instead, he positions himself in a play bow with his rump high in the air to signal friendliness. He also stays in one spot. Finally, as the other dog continues his aggressive behavior, he slowly walks away. This dog is</p> <p>a) anxious
b) fearful
c) confident</p> | <p>3. A dog is more or less okay with other dogs and people outside, but he works to make it clear that he is the boss of his owner, growling if the owner goes to pet the top of his head and perhaps even lifting an upper lip if the owner goes to take his bone or other toy. This dog is</p> <p>a) anxious
b) fearful
c) confident</p> |
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■ We'll give you the answers right up front. Dog number 1 — the one who lunges forward and (by no accident) backward at the sight of other dogs and doesn't let strangers near him, either — is fearful. All the barking and prancing around is his version of smoke and mirrors to keep danger away. The theatrics masking his insecurity become worse when the dog is on the leash because escape is not possible; he feels he has to come off as even more aggressive to keep danger at bay.

Dog number 2 — the one who just "takes it" when the first dog is screaming at him — is confident. He feels good enough about himself and secure enough with his owner that he can stick up his rump in friendship and, if that doesn't work, not have to prove that it's actually he who's in charge. If truly threatened, he'll take care of himself, but he has no need to strut his stuff.

Dog number 3 — the one who works to keep his owner in line — is

anxious. His repelling of his owner is not a sign of confidence. It's a sign that the dog is confused about where he stands and what his owner is intending and is trying to make him stop.

Dog number 2 is a dream dog. Who wouldn't want a canine pal



The dog on the left is actually the fearful one. The other is confident.

who's confident enough to shrug off the occasional would-be bully and who shows no signs of reacting aggressively or otherwise poorly to other dogs or people? The fearful dog who acts aggressively to outsiders and the anxious dog who tries to order his owner around, on the other

hand, make life difficult. Their owners love them, but they constantly have to be concerned that their dog will either scare people and dogs outside (or even bite if they become afraid enough) or make them prisoners in their own homes. They spend the length of the dog's life in situations that cause no small amount of anxiety to themselves. It doesn't have to be that way.

Fear can be attenuated in a dog, as well as anxiety, both of which are flip sides of the coin of security, so to speak. You can never completely undo a dog's learned penchant to be fearful or anxious. "There are no extremes of cure," says Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, director of our Animal Behavior Clinic. But you can attenuate unfortunate aggressiveness to the point that you don't have to be nervous to take your dog outside for fear of an altercation or for your own safety when interacting with your dog in your own home. You can get your dog calm enough,

in fact, that he's a joy to live with. Here's how.

Re-tooling the anxious dog: the leadership program, or "no free lunch"

All dog rearing, says Dr. Dodman, should consist of the three Fs: fun, fair, and firm. But when your dog tries to displace you as a leader, it's important that "firm" come out in front of the other two. It doesn't mean you should ever be mean to your anxious dog or punish him. Such reactions are psychologically damaging to dogs and will further break the bond between the two of you. But you do have to make the ground rules clear.

The way to do it is via no free lunch. By that we mean it's important that you make your dog work for all the good things in life: food, toys, attention. If, for instance, your dog has a tendency to bark and nudge you when it's time for him to eat, make him wait patiently as you prepare his breakfast and dinner. Call him over when *you're* ready, and instruct him to sit *where* you want — and stick to your guns. If he refuses to sit, don't give him the food. Lying down instead of sitting isn't good enough. He has to follow your instructions to the letter. You're not being harsh. You're treating yourself with respect and, in so doing, making sure the dog

does, too. It's okay if the dog feels uncomfortable. Through discomfort comes growth and maturity, which is what you want.

By the way, we don't just *believe* making your dog wait until you're ready to give him his food will help blunt his sense of entitlement. It has been proven. Research conducted with puppies as young as nine weeks old has shown that those who tend to be anxious and unnecessarily self-protective become perfect angels when they learn which way is up.

This tactic extends to all resources the dog finds important, not just food. If the dog demands that you pet him or rub his belly, don't — at least not automatically. Make him work for the attention, either by sitting, rolling over, or doing whatever else it is you say he has to do in order to effect the result he desires. Similarly, if the dog comes over with his favorite ball looking for action, don't indulge him "for free." Have him follow a command first.

Along with making it clear that you are in charge of all resources and will decide when and how they are doled out, do not let your anxious, self-protective dog on high places — your bed or the couch, for instance. Dogs like this are more likely to repel an owner's authority when they are in an elevated position, so keeping one on the floor will keep everyone in the family safer.

Finally, do not engage in rough play. While it's fine for some dogs to have a tug of war with a stuffed toy or a ball, with an anxious, pushy one it brings out the beast. The last thing you want with such a dog is to provide the opportunity for him to show he has a stronger grip.

You still have to remain fair at all times. If your dog is taking a nap, for instance, you shouldn't wake him up to show you're in charge of his life. Also, never hit your dog or even speak to him harshly. The most effective punishment is a lack of reward when he behaves in a way you don't want him to. As pack animals, dogs don't like to be separated from their group, even psychologically. Thus, ignoring your dog when he acts in a way that's unacceptable to you is an extremely potent method for getting him to curb his poor behavior. You're not being a wimp by not punishing and simply withholding attention; you're taking the even stronger stance of simply brooking no nonsense.

Your dog will thank you in the end for setting some house rules and limits. By defining what is and what is not acceptable in no uncertain terms and letting your dog know that you're in charge, you make him more secure about everything. His becoming a more agreeable dog to be around will also make him happier because it will make you more disposed to want to interact with him and provide him with more attention.

Coaxing a fearful dog out of feeling spooked

Last month, in our article on "the Wrong and the Right Way to Ease Your Dog Past Fear," we touched on the fact that if your dog is afraid of people, the best way to inch him

Not Fearful or Anxious But Predatory

While both fearfulness that comes across as aggressiveness and anxiousness that looks like pushiness can be mollified in most any dog, a predatory nature is something else entirely. For example, herding dogs such as Australian cattle dogs are born with a drive to corral other living creatures — like children, or perhaps joggers or even cars. And hounds have an incredible inborn ability and motivation to track prey either by sight or smell. Pretty much what you have to do with such dogs is retrain yourself. Accept that the urge to herd or follow a scent or other sign of prey is going to be there for the length of the dog's life. You can't train him out of his instinct, even if you manage to curb his need to express it. Unlike fear or anxiety, it's always going to be there.



ISTOCK PHOTO

This dog has overstepped. Anxious rather than dominant, he is confused about his place in the household.

past his fright is not to let people come over to him and pet him at will. Instead, work through the problem gradually, instructing would-be approachers not to get in your dog's face but perhaps only drop a treat near your dog's feet and work up to more direct introductions over time. We can't stress the point enough. If your dog is afraid of people — or other dogs — to the point that he barks aggressively at them or lunges toward them, you are not going to get him over the hump by continually pushing him toward new people and dogs. Instead, he needs to know that you will *protect* him.

other dogs one at a time. Start with sweet, lovable dogs of your choosing, with dogs whose owners know how to keep their pets under control. That will teach your canine friend that meeting others of his species can be a rewarding rather than frightening experience.

Keep the first meeting with a new dog on neutral territory, perhaps a spot that neither of the dogs has ever been to. And keep the two pets at a respectful distance from each other, gradually reducing the space between them as your dog's reaction permits. It may take several sessions, and there may be

When outside, keep him on the leash so that you are there to support him at all times, and don't take him to dog parks where other dogs can run up to him out of the blue. Instead, introduce him to

some two-steps-forward-one-step-backward reactions, but you'll make steady progress overall.

Once your dog can be near the other one without a lot of barking and snapping, you can graduate to taking both to your home or the other owner's. Feed them together, play with them together, and lavish tons of praise on your dog for good behavior. For any moments in which your dog is getting along rather than guarding himself, give treats and compliments in a high-pitched, enthusiastic voice. Your dog may never become a social butterfly, but after multiple gradual introductions to 10 or more dogs, he will start to calm down, safe in the knowledge that you will not overwhelm him by throwing him without forethought into situations that make him overly anxious. He'll know that your presence will mean he's protected. It'll be quite a load off for you not having to constantly yank your dog away from other dogs in his path, worried that he will scare them or their owners by projecting his own fear. ■

What To Do If Fear Makes a Dog Cower

In some instances, a dog is so fearful he won't act aggressively toward people and other dogs but will try to hide or, if he's on leash, pull away. Most difficult of all, he will even shy away from you. In such cases, the tack to take is pretty much the exact opposite of the one you'd take with an anxious dog showing owner-directed aggression. Instead of showing him that nothing in life is free and that he has to work for resources, teach him that *everything* in life is free. Specifically, use a plan we developed at Tufts called the Reverse Dominance Program. It increases the confidence of an overly submissive dog by rewarding confident and independent behavior while ignoring scared or shy behavior. That, in turn, will change his perception of you to the point that he is no longer afraid but, rather, enjoys your company.

It works like this. Don't comfort your dog when he cowers or acts fearfully. That will send a message that the be-

nign situation in which he finds himself requires that he be soothed. But do reward confident, relaxed behavior, like direct eye contact and confident approaches. One way to elicit the new behavior it is to make a point of allowing your timid pet on high places with you, such as the couch. Also, spend more time down on the floor with him. When a dog is at eye level with a person, he takes that as a sign of his increased authority, which, in turn, will increase his confidence.

Furthermore, play tug-of-war games with the aim of letting your shy dog win no matter what. And let him beat you at "chase." Give him the run of the house as well. "Oh, you got me," say with delight as he comes over. Let him know in every way that you applaud his increasing boldness. He may never become captain of the family Frisbee team, but he'll happily become a player, enjoying your company as opposed to fearing it.