

# Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

## Golden Rule Dog Training

### Dealing with Extreme Fear in Dogs and Puppy Mill Survivors

*This article is dedicated to my dog Lilly*

#### Puppy Mill and Fearful Dogs

For the puppy mill dogs, the emotional damage starts from birth. At 16 weeks old, dogs have what is known as the imprint period and this is when they should be safely exposed to lots of new experiences and stimuli as well as socialized with lots of other animals and people. However, puppy mill dogs do not receive socialization and in most cases are severely neglected, which can have a big impact on their development. The longer a dog lives its life in a negative environment, the more time and patience is required to rehabilitate them. However, dogs like people, have various personalities, and some puppy mill survivors will come around much more quickly than others. It is both nature and nurture (or predisposition and experience) that will determine the speed at which your new puppy or dog will begin to acclimate to his new life.

Not all fearful dogs come from a puppy mill; the dog could have experienced another kind of abuse, neglect, or they were not socialized during the imprint period or a combination of all three. Fear can also be genetic, just as human personalities vary within a family, so do dogs within a litter.

Whatever the circumstance, most dogs have amazing resilience. Some adapt sooner than others, and not necessarily due to age; some pups may take a little longer to come around to trusting and enjoying human touch, but it is well worth the time and energy. Dogs have a huge capacity for forgiveness and the ability to overcome, even more than some humans! This takes time and tremendous patience, and it is not for everyone.

Specific behavioral challenges do exist and may include fear of being handled, house training problems, other fear and anxiety issues (which can sometimes be presented through reactivity with other dogs or people) and simply learning what it means to just be a pet. Many of these dogs have never seen grass or a toy or a bed. They have never been able to run or even walk on the ground. Everything is new and this can be both exciting and frightening for them.

#### Fearful Dogs 101

**No direct eye contact:** they are initially fearful of eye contact or stares, which can be considered a dominant behavior by humans. When looking at them, look to the side of their head, and resist the

urge to look directly at them or hold your face close to theirs. Eventually as the bond forms, they will look you in the eye. For one of my dogs, this took a year!

**Don't stand over your dog.** This is also a dominant act; instead step to his side, crouch down and do not make direct eye contact.

**Do not reach for the dog,** getting closer as he backs up! Stay still in the position noted above, and wait for the dog to come to you.

**GO SLOWLY!** Don't force your dog to come to you; this will only reinforce the idea that people are not trustworthy. Instead, sit calmly on the floor and wait for him to approach. Also, remember that many elements of everyday life may cause anxiety: objects in motion such as bikes and strollers, the sounds of a washing machine or hair dryer, car rides, etc. Introduce these new experiences gradually, and use treats to build positive associations and encourage exploration.

**No holding or cuddling the dog;** initially these rescues are quite fearful of being picked up. In their former life, this usually resulted in them being tossed or thrown from one cage to another. To feel secure, they need to be firmly held while gently rubbing their backs.

**Pet only under the chin** and eventually work up to the ears and top of the head. You have to earn that trust before you move towards their head. **NO PATTING** the head! Would you want someone to thump on your head? I say this for all dogs, but especially fearful ones.

**Do not chase your dog!** Whether you are trying to catch them or play with them, do not chase! Do not play the "catch me if you can" game! This is a sure fire way to never get a good recall! Instead, crouch down and throw treats out so they will eventually come near you. If needed leave the leash on so you can get close. Try holding the leash and dropping it, so the dog can get used to someone having a tether to them.

**Life in a new environment:** they do not know how to act in a household. They are not familiar with its ordinary sounds, do not know how to climb up or down stairs, and do not understand the concept of height (they do not know how to jump and will simply walk off high surfaces and fall flat on their chins). These are things that they must learn in their new lives.

**Potty training:** house training for your puppy mill dog may take longer than usual. Typically the concept is so foreign, they would typically potty where they eat, so the idea of separating the activities is not understood right away.

**Bedding:** these dogs typically have not seen bedding; they may chew it out of anxiety. If you want to see if they will chew, give them an old towel in their crate just to lie on. If they chew it, they are not ready for bedding. Watch carefully, if swallowed, threads can get stuck in the intestinal track and this would require surgery!

**Household Items:** be careful of leaving paper, socks, underwear, shoes, or anything else lying around that your dog can reach.

*I have come home to shredded bills, my shoes and the insoles torn up, socks taken outside, etc. Lilly is a shredder, so I have to be careful what is out when I leave the house!*

**Doorways and thresholds:** there may be a fear of going through an open door and/or past. Leave the door open wide and step aside or get out of the door way and let them go through.

**Provide a safe place.** These dogs can spook easily and can be frightened by sudden moves, loud noises, and sometimes even the touch of a hand. They tend to run or bolt if given an opportunity to do so and can be very hard to catch because they are frightened. Therefore, it is extremely important that you have a securely fenced yard and that everyone in your household remembers to close doors to the outside. *If they get loose, it most often will result in their death.*

Set up a safe den in your home. While particularly important for the shy dog, even the most confident dog may have reason to occasionally retreat to a private place. There will be times when you want your dog to be separated from specific people. For example, if you're having people over and it may get loud, you want to ensure your dog is safe and calm.

Establishing a place in your house where your dog can rest undisturbed is good for everyone. Preferably, the area can be closed off and your dog can get to it by himself when he feels stressed. Your dog may pick his own spot where he feels safe. Make sure everyone knows when he is in his place; no one is to bother him.

**NO YELLING!** No loud noises or even loud music! Some households that have people in and out or entertain a lot may not be a good environment for these dogs. A calm household is best for these dogs. Small children don't understand their needs and can easily scare them, corner them and they may bite. We typically do not recommend these dogs for families with small children.

**Grooming:** this is also new to them. Go slow and brush a little at a time. Try to give her a couple of treats and just brush a few times. Take it very slowly!!!! If they have mats, just be patient and don't go at the mats with scissors or an electric clipper! This could traumatize them further. They need to trust you with those objects before you can make any headway.

**Stay Positive.** If you catch your dog in the act of misbehaving, use an interrupt sound, such as "ah, ah, ah!" and praise her when she looks at you. If you discover the behavior later, ignore it; dogs don't understand correction when it's delivered after the fact.

**BE PATIENT!!!!**

## Common Behavior Issues:

To alleviate some of the behavior issues, and help the fearful dog feel more secure in their new homes, these dogs are best adopted out in pairs or there should be another dog in the family from whom they can learn how to be a pet. The other dog can't be overly dominant, or have behavior issues, such as guarding issues (food, toys, bed). A balanced, easy-going dog is best to teach the new dog how to be a pet! They can learn easily from a dog that has lived in the home and has experience with people.

Some common behavior issues in fearful dogs:

- **Human touch:** these dogs don't trust humans, so they will not come up to you. Don't expect your dog to come to you for petting or treats right away. Don't force them to be with you either, no sudden movements or hugs! Let them come to you in their own time. It's best to be near, without any eye contact and just "be". When he is ready he will approach. Food is a good motivator, toss some treats away from you and turn away. Little by little they will come closer for more! This could take weeks.

- **Food:** living in a cage or pen with other dogs required competing with the other dogs for food and some never getting enough to eat. Some can be food guarding while others may not eat unless they are paired with another dog. This is an easy behavior to correct; see the Golden Rule Library for the article on resource guarding.
  - Treats: Most of these dogs barely get food, so treats are new. Some have no idea what they are, but once they taste one, they are usually hooked!
- **Housetraining:** living confined in cages resulted in them living in their own waste. Consequently, they often do not understand the concept of housetraining. With a tremendous amount of consistency and patience the dog will learn. See the training section at the end of this article for more details.
- **Leash Training:** often their feet have never touched the ground so they do not know the feel of grass beneath their feet or how to act when attached to a leash. These dogs have never eliminated while being attached to a person. Leash training, which should be gradual and requires patience, is best if you follow with a loose leash. See training below for how to work with your dog.
- **Collars/Harnesses:** puppy mill rescues have a heightened sense of fear and react quickly, and if frightened can back out of a collar. For these reasons all of our dogs are fitted with a Martingale type collar; these collars are secure and humane. We also recommend the Easy Walker Harness® as it is easy to use, safe for the dog and does not put any pressure on the neck.
  - ***Do NOT pull or drag them by the leash as it is reminiscent of being grabbed by the neck. Keep a leash on and let them drag it around. This makes it easier to catch them if needed. See the leash training guide at the end of the article for detailed instructions. If needed coax them by tossing treats or kibble out in front of them to get them moving.***
  - Keep in mind most have not been walked, so their paw pads may be ultra sensitive. Try walking in the front yard, back yard, then venture out, ensuring they are not on hot concrete. Take it slow and try to check their pads after a walk.
- **Obedience Training:** not surprising, they have had no training; building a trusting relationship has to come first or the dog will be too stressed to learn any cues.

Most of these dogs have lived their entire early existence confined in a small cage with other dogs and they are forced to eat where they defecate. Typically, there is not enough food so dogs will eat their own or other dog's feces (which is a natural behavior for dogs); this is known as coprophagia. Also PICA is common, which is the eating non-food items such as rocks, bark, paper, etc.

To make the transition easier for the dog, we strongly recommend having another dog in the home to help ease them into a home, teach them how to be a pet and show them humans can also be kind and trustworthy.

## Degrees of Fear

Most fearful dogs avoid people or things that frighten them. They may seem depressed or disinterested and sometimes lunge or do a barking display to make what they're afraid of go further away. If you've decided to share your life with a shy dog, take heart. The following information can help you understand what he is going through and give you ways to help him get better.

### **The most common kinds of fear in dogs are:**

**Social shyness:** this happens when the dog is fearful of unfamiliar people or certain kinds of people. Dogs like this are sometimes described as “taking a while to warm up,” “one person dogs”. They are usually fine with a certain person once they get to know them; such as, are dogs that are afraid of men or a man with a hat, dogs who are uncomfortable around children, and dogs who bark at the sight of certain people.

**Dog to dog:** dogs can be shy with other dogs. Some dogs are very comfortable with other dogs and this is a refuge for them. It is amazing to see these dogs play with other dogs when they are so shy with humans.

**Situational and environmental fears:** the dog displays a fear of a specific environment or setting. The dog could be afraid of going to the veterinarian, panic during car rides, or are uncomfortable in new places and around too many people in an area.

**Noise phobias:** some dogs are sensitive to specific sounds and sudden loud noises. These dogs flatten and try to escape when a car backfires, or pace and salivate during thunderstorms or fireworks. They can “freeze” in place and lower their body to the ground and will not move.

Be mindful of the situations you put your dog in, and watch to see if they exhibit any stress. Your job is to be their advocate and keep them safe. Do not put them in situations that are overwhelming!

Make a point to study your dog’s body language so you know when they are relaxed and when they are stressed and need some help.

### **Signs of Fear or Stress**

- Heavy panting
- Excessive chewing or licking of the coat, which can lead to hair loss
- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Excessive barking
- Excessive chewing and scratching of furniture, floor and different objects
- Low-level growling
- Frothing at the mouth
- Drooling
- Pacing
- Sniffing the ground
- Whining
- Dilated eyes
- Whale eye (showing whites of the eyes)
- Visibly Shaking
- Freezing and not able to move
- Glued to the ground with the body as low as possible (belly crawl)

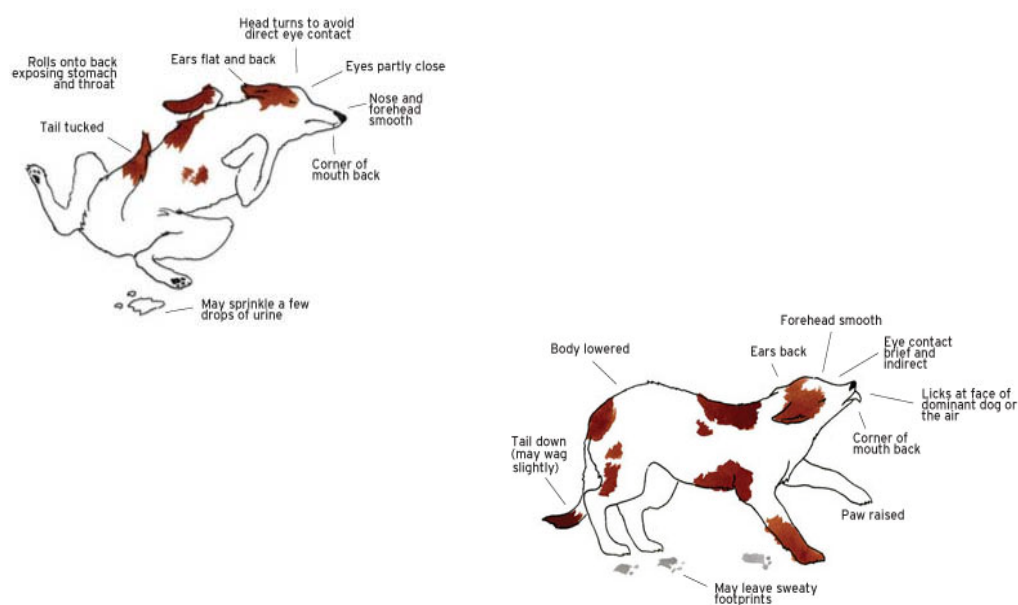
It’s important to let these shy dogs come to you on their own; this will take a lot of patience working with fears and anxiety. We work within the dog’s threshold, which means we work slowly up to the point BEFORE they show signs of stress. If we push them too far, we risk a set back! It takes time

for the dog to build trust, understand your schedule and how things work in the home. Once they are used to the routine, they clam down a bit and it is easier for them to enjoy their time with you.

## Body language of a fearful dog

Dog communication comes in various forms and is part of the foundation of dog social behavior. Dogs communicate with their body when they are happy, sad, nervous, fearful and angry. The body language canines are both detailed and complicated, however with study we can learn to recognize and interpret what they are saying. Once you learn how to read a dog's postures and signals, you can understand their feelings and motivations. These skills are valuable in understanding and keeping your dog safe.

Dogs use facial expressions, body stance, ear and tail positions to communicate. The goal is to study the entire body and the environment to determine what your dog is saying. Some postures are easy to read and others are more subtle (see the list above). Body language includes calming signals; these are postures that one dog uses to speak to another to get the approaching dog to calm down and leave them alone, move back, or change their play style to be more polite. Overall, body language is the key to understanding your dog and what he/she needs. Especially for a fearful dog, watch your dog carefully and do not put them in situations and expect them to adjust. This takes time and the slow approach is the only way to start the desensitization process.



As you can see above, the indicators for a fearful, submissive dog are the position of the dog's body, tail, mouth, and ears, telling you, "I'm no threat, please don't hurt me." This type of fear takes time and patience to overcome, but it can be done; or, it can be helped so the dog lives a less stressful life. The process is called counter conditioning and desensitization, which makes the dog less likely to feel shock or distress at scenes of new sounds, places, people and things they have never experienced before.

## Calming Signals

Calming signals are another form of a dog's body language and refers to actions and sounds dogs use to send signals to other dogs, animals and humans. The purpose of these signals is to calm another dog (or human) down so they don't get hurt. The ability to recognize signs of anxiety in a fearful dog is an important skill for humans to understand; below describes how to recognize common signals in an anxious dog.

**Overall Posture:** you may first notice a freeze with tense muscles, or he may turn away from what is threatening him. You may also see a dog crouch with his/her head and upper body close to the ground, or roll over to expose the belly.

### Common Calming Signals

- Turning the head away, turning the body away
- Curving the body, approaching indirectly
- Crawling while wagging his tail
- Sitting with his back to you or another dog
- Freezing, becoming a statue
- The body is leaning away from what is threatening him.
- Ear position may be pinned back
- Licking his lips
- Moving very slowly
- Averting the eyes
- The dog's mouth may be closed with the corners pushed slightly forward
- Dogs that are overwhelmed or "flooded" may shut down and refuse food.

In addition to the above calming signals, dogs may be obvious when they are stressed or anxious and want to leave a situation that makes them uncomfortable. They may display *Avoidance Behaviors*; these are typically behaviors that are out of context, or signals that don't belong. For example, these dogs don't know what to do, so they may start yawning or sniffing the ground to avoid a confrontation.

Never force a dog to stay in a stressful situation! Fearful dogs need a safe place to go when he/she feels anxious: such as a back room where no one will bother him. You would rather remove him from a stressful situation than possibly have him react by barking, lunging and even biting someone.

Make sure you are paying close attention to his signals to keep him safe.

## How to Greet a New Dog

**Below are a few guidelines to follow when meeting new dogs (both fearful and not):**

### Remember... Any dog can bite!

- Do not approach a dog, especially if it is tied up or on leash.
- Ask the owner if it is ok for you to interact with their dog before you do it.

- Stand still if a dog approaches you for a sniff, leave your hands relaxed and by your side and glance away from the dog.
- Squat down instead of bending over to talk to or pet a dog. Avoid staring at them, putting your face near theirs or hugging them!
- Do not reach over a dog's head to pet it, instead keep your body to the side, not directly over the dog and do not stretch your hand out. Let the dog come to you, and then try and scratch under the chin.
- Do not touch a dog that has rolled over.
- Ignore a dog that shows any indication of being timid or upset.
- No baby talk, reaching out with treats, or any attempt to connect with the dog that can backfire and cause the dog to react and/or bite!
- Do not feel like every dog you meet needs to be handled. Watch a dog's behavior and body language carefully.
- Respect the dog's space!

Learn about calming signals and other ways that dogs communicate their feelings. A dog that is not obviously happy to see you (open mouth, wagging tail and body) is telling you a lot about how they feel. If a dog is not inviting you to handle or interact with them, don't.

**Subtle Signs – when a dog does not want to be petted he may:**

- duck their head away when you reach for them
- move away
- look away and then turn their body away
- leave the area
- yawn
- scratch themselves
- lick their lips
- lift a paw
- show the whites of the eyes (whale eye)

## Handling a Fearful Dog

**Shy or fearful dogs can bite!** They are especially dangerous if they are backed into a corner, and the “fight or flight” instinct takes over when they feel threatened. When working with these dogs you need to be very careful! **No sudden movements, No direct eye contact and No backing them into a corner** are just a few points to remember.

Some fearful/puppy mill dogs have not been socialized with people and sometimes other dogs, so their fear is more complex than most dogs we rescue. They have never been in a home, so all of those sounds are new and scary. They have been in a situation that forced them to potty where they eat, so some of them take a little longer to house train. They eat very quickly, as they had to share food and water; they have never had treats, so this is new and the tastiest of treats will not be taken from your hand.

## Is a puppy mill dog right for you and your family?



Now that you know what some of the issues are, you can decide if a fearful/puppy mill dog is right for your family. Dogs that have lived their entire lives in a puppy mill often need a little more love and patience from their new guardians than other dogs. Since they know little about the world other than the inside of their (often filthy) cages, many challenges can arise when they are introduced to their big, new worlds. While this is the case with even some younger pups in these situations, older dogs that come out of mills can be especially overwhelmed by so many changes.

There are many things to consider; adopting a puppy mill dog is not like adopting any other dog you typically find at a shelter or rescue. Their spirits are broken and they are un-socialized to humans, so it will take a lot of time to rehabilitate them. They are not the type of dog that everyone should adopt, but for those who are willing to have enormous patience and be dedicated to helping them understand what it is to be in a family with a gentle hand, in time, a puppy mill dog can be a very rewarding experience.

Adopting a puppy mill rescue is not for everyone. These dogs have not had a normal existence, and their contact with humans, if at all, could have been very unpleasant. In a nurturing environment, however, they have the potential to become the awesome companions they were meant to be. This does not happen overnight and can take many months. It requires patience and lots of love. Starting from scratch, they have to learn how to trust.

These dogs can make good pets, but it takes a tremendous amount of patience, love and respect for what their fears may be. Most can't tolerate a loud household with large gatherings of people, or small children trying to play with them or treat them like a "normal" dog. The best place for them is a quiet place with a few people in the household and a solid routine.

## Living in a Home for the First Time

Imagine going from one confined area and now there are in a big area with unfamiliar people wanting to touch you, new sounds, new food, new bed (what's a bed?) and toys (what are toys and what do you do with them?). This is all new and for most very scary!!

The good news is getting used to a bowl of food (my own bowl of food), plenty of fresh water, treats (I was not sure about these, but I like them), and a nice soft bed (of my own) to sleep in comes pretty easy. The hard part is all the rest!

Although puppy mill dogs have never experienced the love between pet and human, they will respond to a warm and comforting environment. You will be rewarded on a daily basis to see just how responsive they can be to your love, although it may take several weeks, up to much longer, for your dog to be fully socialized. Lower your expectations; this is the best

All newly adopted dogs need to be taught what they can chew, how they may greet you, where to go to the bathroom and other house rules. If your adopted dog is afraid of new people or new situations, he will also need some extra help from you to adjust to his new home. In the hands of a patient and caring owner, a shy dog can be a great companion and can make gains in confidence over time.

House training may take longer so be prepared for accidents. DO NOT yell or punish the dog! This is true for any dog, but especially these fragile beings. They need your patience and support; they have already suffered cruelty and that should be in their past.

*Lilly took months to train using a dog door. I wanted her to use the dog door, but it made so much noise she was terrified. So, I left the back door open so she could learn to potty outside. Then I would teach her the dog door by replacing the door flap with a towel lowering it a little at a time. The next step was putting the original door flap back on and all of a sudden I'm looking for her and she is outside!*

**No Cuddling!** Although difficult, you want to pick them up and kiss them and make all their fears go away – WRONG! That would make it so much worse. They need to build trust over time and they may never want to be picked up and held in your arms. Also, don't approach the dog head on as this is threatening to most dogs, especially fearful ones. Try walking sideways to get near her, crouch down, coax her to you with a treat she likes. Also be aware that she will be sensitive to new things, sudden sounds, doors opening and closing, new people.

**NEVER let your dog loose outside.** These dogs take a while to bond and feel safe with you. If they get away before this happens, they will choose to starve over coming back to you voluntarily. Also be aware that until they have bonded with you, they may bolt out the open door. Always keep an eye on them.

**ID Tags and Microchip Registration:** immediately after adopting a puppy-mill rescue, you should buy and attach to their collar or harness, an identification tag with the dog's name and your address and phone number. This will help ensure his safe return if needed.

**Create a SAFE Place** for your dog. Most dogs will find one on their own; they may pick a place behind the couch, in a corner or behind the desk,

*As for my Lilly it was under the dining room table. She lived there for the first two weeks and eventually came out to see what was going on. I ignored her and watched out of the corner of my eye as she ventured into the living room. She looked at the television, and back under the table she went! She got used to that noisy box, but the ceiling fan was out to get her! Eventually, without forcing her or making a big deal out of it she decided it was not going to get her either.*

## Avoid Pressuring of New Things or Places

First impressions are lasting, so, when you first arrive home, make sure the dog isn't forced into any scary situations. As tempting as it might be to give him hugs, scrub him in the bath, take him to people's houses or invite over all your friends, it is much wiser to let him explore his immediate surroundings while you sit quietly, waiting for him to come to you when he is ready. When he does approach you, he may still be wary of your hands or of being touched. Be patient – physical contact is the hardest part for some – the best way to win his trust is to not rush him.

DO NOT take the dog for a walk or in the car for a ride or over to a friend's house right way! Let her acclimate and once she is comfortable, then slowly introduce the next thing.

## Feed by Hand

Try to hand feed with treats and/or meals. This is one way of teaching her she can trust you. Start with gently throwing a few pieces of kibble out in front of you, about three feet away. Let the dog find the food on his own; do not move towards the dog, you want the dog to come to you when he's ready. Little by little you can bring the food in closer (may take a few days) and eventually he will take it from your hand. Don't rush the process; this is how the dog will start to gain trust, so it's important for him to figure this out on his own.

Once he takes food from your hand try leaving your hand out a little to see if he will sniff. Once he shows interest and comes up easily to get his treat, you will start to progress! Next, try to pet under the chin while giving a treat. Then try touching the collar, and give a treat. If he is leash sensitive, gently pick up the leash, give a treat and drop the leash. Eventually you should be able to hold the leash with no reaction.

If he moves away, go back to feeding him without touching a few more times and then try a slower, gentler touch. If he is extremely fearful and hides for a long time once you get home, you can toss treats near to where he is hiding and then leave him alone. Once he feels better, he'll venture out and associate it with getting a tasty treat.

## Leaving the House

Fearful dogs are just as prone to developing separation anxiety as other dogs. Be sure to leave the house for a few minutes and come back a few times. Then leave for 5 minutes, and then 10 minutes, etc. Do this for a few days, then extend the time. He will learn that you are not always there and that whenever you leave, you come back.

Always exit and enter the house calmly and do not make a big deal about it. When you come in the door, ignore the dog, put your things away and then greet him in a gentle way.

## While you're away

You can try a crate and see if the dog will tolerate it; some dogs love the crate and find it a secure, happy place. For more information on how to select a crate and make the crate a good place to be, see the article on Crate Training in the Golden Rule Library.

However, some will fight it, panic and will try and chew their way out! This is very dangerous and stressful to the dog, so no crates for now. Instead, try an exercise pen and block the kitchen area. Or, close all the bedroom and bathroom doors and create a safe place for the dog to stay. If you close the dog in a bedroom, you may have a scratched door when you return! This is why you test to see what the dog will do when left alone.

If your dog can not stay at home alone, you may have to find a neighbor or friend to stay with your dog. Also there are doggie daycare services and in-home pet sitters available that may work. However, with a fearful dog, they usually like other dogs, but the new surroundings maybe a problem. I find having someone staying at my house is best.

Have something for your dog to chew on will help with any anxiety, such as a nylabone® or a stuffed Kong®. Another option is to have a second mild-mannered dog to keep your fearful dog company, usually that works well.

*I have three dogs and I never had a problem leaving Lilly. The only issue I had was in the first couple months, I was missing a few chunks out of my baseboards! After that she calmed down and loves her brothers, and does not care if I leave the house!*

## Medical Issues

In addition to no socialization, these dogs also have typically not had vaccinations, heartworm medication or flea and tick medication. Please have your veterinarian perform an examination, but wait until you have had time to build some type of bond.

Please take all of this into consideration when thinking about adoption. It's hard for these dogs to go from home to home and we want to see them find that forever home the first time. These dogs are the most innocent of creatures. Working with them through these issues can be a very rewarding experience, but only if you are up to the challenge. It requires time, patience, understanding, and most of all, lots of love. They will blossom and become awesome members of your family.

# Training & Desensitizing your Dog

## Determine the Triggers

First, watch your dog's body language and note when and whom your dog may be shy around. It may be men, men with a hat, or sunglasses; it could be women with a certain stature; it could be objects that move, like a ceiling fan. If the dog is fearful of someone in the family, consider the possible reasons. It could be the family member is inadvertently doing something to cause a fear reaction. Perhaps the person speaks in a loud voice, makes too much noise or sudden movements; in these situations, that person needs to be aware and curb his or her behavior.

*Lilly was afraid of the ceiling fan and the TV, then the hair-dryer and vacuum cleaner. Now she sleeps through it all or just looks annoyed when I vacuum!*

### **An example of a desensitization exercise**

Let's say you want to take your dog to an outside coffee shop or restaurant.

- Start by walking in the area. Stop and talk to your dog in a clam voice and see if she will take a treat.
- Next walk into the area and sit for a minute or two, then leave. Again, give her treats.
- The next visit may be to sit for about 5 minutes and next 10 minutes and so on. Again, give her treats.
- You'll know she is stressed if she won't take the treat. If this happens, back up and don't stay as long. I can't stress enough how introducing new things has to be a process, a slow process based on what your dog needs! Each dog is different and has their own speed, so honor this and you will start to see results. If you expect too much and "flood" them, forcing them to adapt you may find other behaviors as a result.
- Do not use baby talk, keep your voice low, calm with an even tone. This will help keep the dog clam too.

Learn your dog's "tells" so you can keep them safe and not overwhelm them.

**Plan ahead.** If you know July 4<sup>th</sup> or thunderstorm season is around the corner, prepare in advance. One way is to get your dog used to these noises a little at a time with a recording of the noise they fear. See the article on Noise Phobias in the Golden Rule Library on the Homeward Bound website:

<http://www.homewardboundgoldens.org/training/index.php#library>

Fear is very common in all animals. Although it's possible that a fearful dog has suffered abuse or a bad experience, most of the time fears result from a combination of a genetic predisposition and lack of experience or exposure, especially in the first months of life (the imprint period). For instance, a dog may have missed out on becoming socialized to certain kinds of people by simply not being around them enough when he was a puppy.

Once the dog is able to be touched and has acclimated to his new surroundings, you can start more exercises and training. This training is different as it is geared more for the fearful dog. We start with gaining their confidence and then move to more obedience skills.

## Training a Fearful Dog

It's all about making your dog successful in small steps. If the training is too much and your dog shuts down, then break the steps down into more manageable pieces so they can learn. If you have a more mature dog that is shy, help the dog gradually gain confidence. It's especially important to control any situation you introduce him to.

While avoiding eye contact with the dog, stay quiet and still, stand to the side of the dog (not towering over him), and keep a distance so the dog is more comfortable. Do not force the dog to approach and do not rush the dog. Instead, let the dog initiate contact and approach when he feels ready.

You can crouch down or sit in a chair or on the floor, maintaining no direct eye contact and still at a distance. The first day you make no moves to shorten the distance. If the dog backs up, he is not ready, so make sure you are paying attention to his body movements. Use small tasty high-value treats, which may mean something really strong like freeze dried liver treats, or Billjacks®, these are available at pet supply stores. You can also use bits of chicken or hot dog.

Drop a treat away from you and back up if the dog makes no move to come near you. Eventually the dog will sniff around and slowly approach. Typically you will see the take the treat and then retreat a little to eat it.

Make sure your body is relaxed and your voice is soft and calm. In addition, don't comfort a fearful dog when he exhibits fear, you do not want to reinforce the fear! You want your dog to understand calmness is the goal.

In time, your dog will start to show signs of self-confidence. Your goal is to have your dog approach, and take the treat from you; when he does say, "good dog". Dog's can sense when you're happy with them, so marking the behavior with "good girl" or "good boy" is important.

Next, when the dog approaches touch the leash and give a treat, then gently drop the leash (if you have a fearful dog that you can't catch, let them drag the leash around).

The next step is to try and touch the dog. Have a treat in one hand and try to slowly touch the dog under the chin and give the treat saying "good dog!" Once he will let you touch him, try to give a little scratch under the chin, or on the neck or chest (be aware that shy and fearful dogs are often frightened when people attempt to touch their face or head, so go slow).

Repeat the practice sessions in other rooms and then in the backyard, then the front yard. Gradually expose your dog to new experiences and whenever he shows the slightest sign of relaxing or sociability, reward him! Always carry treats with you. If he retreats, cowers, freezes, or tries to escape, it is too much and he is overwhelmed. Leave the area and go home. Try smaller steps next time. Your job is to keep him safe, so he can build trust; if you push too hard you will have the opposite effect.

It may take a few of these set-up sessions for the dog to feel comfortable enough to approach at all. Be patient, the results are worth it.

## Training, Where to Start

Shy or fearful dogs can be frightened and even traumatized by forceful training methods; only use positive reinforcement techniques! These are reward based, so use food as a motivator. Progress can be made much faster with this gentle approach as well.

It's important to let your dog start to build a trusting relationship with you before you start training. Eventually with the growing bond and new skills learned, your dog will start to gain confidence. Always encourage and reward the desired behaviors and ignore the behaviors you want to discourage. The most of a correction is a calm "Eh-eh" in a gentle voice. Punishing is off the table, as it will make your dog regress and become afraid of you; this means no yelling!

For Instance, instead of giving a leash correction (which is forcing your dog and is old school and not necessary for any dog) if your dog starts nervous barking, ignore the barking. Instead turn your dog around in the opposite direction and redirect your dog's attention to you by having her focus on you. When the barking stops, give praise and a tasty dog treat to reward the "quiet" behavior. Eventually, the dog will realize that nervous barking is not an effective response to whatever triggered her fear.

## Teaching Human Touch

Being touched by a human may be an unknown and scary concept for your dog. To help them acclimate, you need to be gentle in how you handle your pup.

Always let your dog know when you are about to touch her. It is best not to startle her or try to pick her up from behind, especially while you are still earning her trust.

As she gets more comfortable with you, gently get closer to her a little at a time. Start petting her under the chin a little at a time. Dogs do not like to be hugged (this is more for us than for them), so start slow and work up to picking her up (if she is small enough to pick up). Dogs also do not like to be patted on the head...would you? Keep your interaction calm, slow and gentle.

If your dog is nervous around strangers, don't force her always let her come to them on her own and when she is ready. When guests come over, tell them to ignore her; if she comes over to them have them gently put their hand down and let her sniff. They should also avoid eye contact. As she begins to get more comfortable you can ask your visitors to gently toss a treat on the floor towards her. Eventually, she will be able to take a treat from their hand!

## Dogs afraid of Children

Dogs can exhibit fearful behavior in a variety of circumstances. Some common dog fears include children. There are several things you can do to reduce your dog's fear around children:

**All interactions should be supervised**, and kept positive and upbeat.

**Don't force your dog to make friends with kids.** If a fearful dog is pushed too far beyond his threshold, and this may result in aggression. Don't put your dog in a position where he feels threatened!

**Discuss rules with your children.** If you have a fearful dog and children living in the same household, it is important that your children have rules to follow:

- Do not approach the dog while he's eating or sleeping, or try to take the dog's toys.

- Teach your kids the right way to touch and pet the dog (gentle petting - NO poking, prodding, or pulling the dog).
- No running towards the dog
- No yelling or screaming

Provide a quiet spot for your dog. He will need a quiet place he can go to when needed. When he is in his place, the kids are not to disturb him.

### **Teach Kids How to Give Dog Treats Safely**

Make sure your dog has a soft mouth when taking treats, then supervise when children have treats or human food in their hands. Teach children to use an open palm to give your dog a treat to ensure a safe interaction. Nervous children shouldn't be pushed any more than nervous dogs.

### **Teach Kids How to Properly Pet your Dog**

Fearful dogs are easily overwhelmed! If several children have surrounded your dog, gently insist that they take turns in petting and treating, and excuse yourself while your dog is still relaxed and having a good time. Be very careful, for example, if a child handles your dog roughly or has the bright idea of making loud noises, remove the dog from the area. Then explain to the child the proper way to treat a dog.

### **What to Do If your Dog Doesn't Like Kids**

If your dog is uneasy with children, protect her and the kids. Refuse requests to meet the dog. Step between your dog and rapidly oncoming kids. Keep your dog safe and away from children, it's not worth a bite from a scared dog! Some dogs cannot be desensitized to loud people or noises, in these cases it's better to keep your dog safe.

## **Walking on a Leash**

You may have to desensitize your dog to a leash. Leashes can be scary and an issue for fearful dogs because they do not understand a leash, and many of them will freeze when you put one on them. **Do NOT drag her by the leash!** It may be reminiscent of being grabbed by the neck. Never let go of the leash, keep it securely fastened around your wrist. A loose leash provides the dog the opportunity to run away.

*If you need to get your dog to come to you: toss treats way from you, and slowly decrease the distance getting the treats closer to you. Eventually you will be able to keep the treat in your hand as the dog comes closer. Once there, no sharp or fast movements! This will take awhile, touch her collar, give a treat then work up to holding the collar. Eventually you will be able to leash your dog easily with treats.*

## **Start Walking**

Start the walking process a little at a time. A harness is recommended so you have control and there is no stress on her neck. Also a six-foot leash and always have some yummy treats with you on your walks.

1. Start with letting your dog drag the leash around the house to get used to it. Call her over to you or when she is near you, gently pick up the leash and put it down.
2. Once you can pick up the leash without startling her, start to hold it and walk her around the house, use a gentle up-beat voice, "good girl!" and give her treats for walking with you. You may have to work on this for a couple weeks, depending how stressed she may be.
3. Next, pick up the leash and coax her outside in the backyard. If she seems stressed, let her drag the leash in the backyard too. Repeat this for about a week.
4. When you think she's ready, go out in the front yard, watch to see how she reacts, and walk in front of your house and the neighbors, just a few houses and go home. Praise and treat! Do this 3 to 4 times each day to get her used to the idea.
5. Start with short walks around the block and let her sniff and check things out.
6. Remember, sudden or loud noises in her new environment will likely frighten her. For now try to walk outside when it's quiet, later in the evening or early in the morning to limit possible stressors. You want her experience to be pleasant.
7. You may need the treats to encourage her, but sometimes this will not work if the dog is too overwhelmed, this is why we control the environment and go very slowly.
8. If a neighbors or people try to approach her, step in front of your dog and explain she is not ready to meet people yet.
9. When she gets comfortable with the walks, add distance to your walks, again a little at a time. She will start to associate walks with a good thing and then she can slowly start to meet people.

Dogs don't generalize like people do; they don't translate past lessons to new situations. This explains the dog that gets along well with another dog living in the home, but who fears other dogs encountered outside. Most likely, the dog has not been properly exposed to other dogs in a safe and controlled environment. Group obedience classes can be very helpful to help dogs acclimate.

## Potty Training

House training a puppy mill dog can be an overwhelming job, particularly with older survivors. It may or may not be effective to use crate training; it may work if the dog likes to spend time in a "den" type environment. However, he may not like the idea and it may frighten him. Unfortunately, puppy mill dogs have no other option but to defecate, urinate, eat and sleep all in their tiny cages. So one of the dogs is introduced to a new home, he has no idea what is appropriate or not, and this will take more patience to potty train.

For those that can be crate trained, see the article in the [Golden Rule Library on potty training for instructions](#).

If your dog cannot be crate trained, keep him contained in a smaller area like a laundry room or a bathroom with a baby gate. This gives them more room and is helpful when you cannot watch him and when sleeping. Put water, a potty pad, a bed (watch carefully, some dogs will chew them up as they are not used to a bed). You can put a Kong to chew on and possibly a stuffed toy if he does not rip them apart. You can eventually transition off of the pee pads once he can hold it for 8 hours and learns go outside.



These dogs may not know the rules, so it's necessary to care for even for an older dog as though she is a puppy. The key to house training is patience, supervision and consistency. It only takes a few seconds for an untrained dog to make a mistake if you aren't watching them, so set them up for success and be prepared. Keeping them contained in some way is imperative if you cannot watch them; too much freedom too soon is the biggest mistake most people make when house training any dog. Remember accidents are part of the process.

Expect and prepare for accidents! Do not yell at your dog, even if you catch him in the act. Calmly get him and put him where he should go potty. For more on potty training see the Golden Rule Library.

## Practice Love and Patience

Remember that with all of these behaviors and situations, you want to go at the pace that is comfortable for your new dog. Expecting more than he is ready to give or pushing him to offer a behavior that still makes him uncomfortable can cause big setbacks. These are living creatures with quirks and feelings and they must be given the space and time to learn at their own pace. Granting them this patience and time will result in faster progress in the long run.

Bringing home a rescued puppy mill or fearful dog can present its challenges, but it is also incredibly rewarding to watch your new family member experience so many novel things on an almost daily basis. The bottom line is that adopting a puppy mill survivor, while not always easy, is well worth the effort as the rewards far outweigh any challenges!

These dogs certainly deserve a second chance at life and will repay your kindness with years of loyal affection and love like no other! Adopting a rescued dog is one of the most compassionate things you can do as a human.

### A Fearful Dog Speaks by Kevin Myers

**You may not be the human for me.** Although my eyes seem to plead for a home, I am not easy to live with. My progress is often measured in months and years not days and weeks.

**My fears are not silly.** No matter how they seem to you, my fears are real to me. Forcing me to face something that you think is silly only serves to increase my fear and adds to my distrust.

**My life needs routine.** More than most, I need routine. It comforts me to know that there are certain things I can count on.

**Patience is not a virtue, it's a requirement.** Of all the tools you will need to help me, patience is above all.

**You may need help.** I am not like other dogs and some of the things that work on them may not work on me. You may need the help of people who have experience with fearful dogs like me.

**Others may judge you because of my fear.** People will often assume that you have done something to me if they see me acting fearful. You must be able to ignore this.

**I may never be the dog you want me to be.** Despite all your best efforts and intentions I may never be the dog that you envision. But I can promise you that the victories we share, both large and small, will feel like nothing else in the world.

### Resources:

**Thunder-shirt** – this is a great product for fearful dogs, it wraps around them and gives them a safe feeling.

<http://www.thundershirt.com>



**Food Bowls** – to slow down how fast the dog eats; since they usually had to fight for food this product works well so the can eat slower and digest their fc

<http://www.brake-fast-store.com/>



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Website Resource: <http://fearfuldogs.com/>

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