

LOVING A SHY DOG

by
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Developing a relationship with a shy dog can be so rewarding because, as her trust in you grows, your dog's personality will blossom and your bond for each other will deepen. It's not just an old wives' tale that good things come to those who wait! Patience is essential to building a loving bond with a shy dog.

The Body Language of a Shy Dog

A shy dog will:

- make herself smaller, keeping her body low
- keep her tail low or even tucked
- lower her head
- pin her ears back and down
- squint or blink her eyes
- roll on her back to reveal her belly
- lick her lips
- yawn



When Meeting a Shy Dog

The best way to approach a shy dog is not to! Let her approach you in her own time. The way humans greet each other – looking straight at someone, leaning forward, reaching out our hands – is very assertive to dogs. When polite dogs greet each other, they approach indirectly, avert their gaze, and then let each other sniff. So make these same sorts of gestures in your own greeting and allow the dog to come up to sniff you.

Lower yourself by crouching or sitting on the floor. Don't face or look at her directly; instead, turn your head aside. Offer her treats by tossing them toward her in a path that leads her closer to you, and finally feeding her from your outstretched hand. As she relaxes, you can start to stroke her under her chin and on her chest. Petting the top of her head is an assertive gesture, so start from underneath and let her warm up gradually before making more bold gestures.

As Your Love Grows

Over time you and your dog will become comfortable with each other and your love will grow. Your dog will act more confidently around you, but may still be uneasy with new people. So keep an eye out for what she's telling you around other people. Does she lip-lick, shrink a bit at your side, even hide behind you? Take note of these signals and do what you can to move her to a safer distance. Then ask the person to avoid looking at her while tossing her treats. As she gets more comfortable, ask him/her to crouch and offer her treats. She may even allow caresses under her chin or on her chest! Taking it slow definitely wins the race!

The sooner you begin exercises in meeting new people who offer her wonderful treats, the better. Strangers should be part of the landscape of her life so that she gains confidence with everything and everyone she comes in contact with. Gradually, over time and with many good experiences, she will learn that strangers often provide tasty gifts for her and she will grow to love them!

Helpful Hints

- If your dog is dog-friendly, arrange for her to go for walks with other dogs who will give her an added level of confidence on the street.
- Make sure that your dog's walking equipment is very secure, for extra safety in case she gets frightened and tries to back out of her collar or harness.
- Make sure that your dog has a collar with her tags on *at all times* and is properly micro-chipped should the worst happen.

Going Away

Remember that, especially with a shy dog, the bond she has with you is very special. She may not have the same level of comfort with someone else. This can be particularly worrisome when you go away on a trip, leaving her in the care of someone else with whom she's less attached. There are too many stories of shy dogs who, without their bonded human, have gotten scared and darted away from the caregiver. Here are some tips that might help:

- Have a dog-sitter stay at your home, where your dog is comfortable and happy. Have the caregiver follow as much of your dog's normal routine as possible.
- If a house-sitter isn't possible, consider using a boarding kennel. Having a secure kenneling facility with a staff of professionals caring for your dog will be the best safeguard against her getting loose and lost.
- Caution the caregiver to be vigilant around doorways leading outside or even playtime in the yard. A scared dog may try to escape by slipping through a cracked doorway or jumping a fence and, once loose, will not have the same bonded relationship that will lure her back to safety.

For more information on living with and loving a shy dog, buy the book *The Cautious Canine: How to Help Dogs Conquer Their Fears* by Patricia McConnell.