

# Fostering a Shy Dog



Thank you for fostering a dog who might need a bit more help! By following this advice, we hope to set you and the dog up for success. We believe that each dog is an individual and one or more of these ideas may not apply to every shy dog but the majority of the tips will be helpful if your dog is shy or fearful.

## **BEFORE bringing your foster dog home**

Inspect your yard and gates to ensure there are no gaps or areas where the dog could escape if he gets spooked.

Inside, you'll want to choose a spot in a low traffic area to create a safe space for the dog to retreat to if he gets overwhelmed. It's a good idea to set up a bed and some toys (or crate with bedding and toys inside and a blanket covering the crate except the front) in the 'safe space'. If the dog is slightly fearful then use a corner of your living room for the safe space or if the dog is extremely fearful, set up the bed/crate in a spare room where he can see you from a more comfortable distance. Keep water nearby at all times and the food can be 1-2m away.

It can help to have a radio on nearby that is tuned in to classical music (during the day). Spraying around the crate or plugging in [to a wall] a pheromone diffuser can also have calming affects on some dogs.

Close doors and use baby gates to limit access to other areas of the home initially. This can help prevent the dog from getting overwhelmed from too much unfamiliar space and save you from potentially having to locate a hiding dog.

## **Bringing home a shy or fearful foster dog**

When you have collected the dog from the shelter [or a house], play soft classical music or no music at all in the car on the way home. If you roll down your window for the dog, ensure that it is only rolled down a small amount so the dog can't jump out!

When you arrive home and have parked your car, ensure you have the dogs leash in your hand before you open the car door in case he gets scared and tries to escape. Once outside the car, let him sniff around and go to the toilet if he chooses to, whilst on the lead.

When you and the dog are both ready, walk the dog on the lead around your home to show him all accessible spaces includes his safe area, backyard and any other area. Keep him on lead throughout this process (even if the backyard is fully fenced, which it should be!) and allow him to investigate at his own pace.

## **Rules to follow**

When you bring the dog home, it's important to follow some basic rules AND ensure everyone who lives or visits your home follows the same rules.

Some basic rules are:

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1. Give the dog space. Don't hover over or crowd around the dog and make sure he has room to move away if he needs to.
2. Avoid forced interactions with the dog and respect the dog's body language. Eg. running away, backing off/retreating, cowering, freezing, growling, whining, whale eyes (big open eyes where eyeballs follow you but the head doesn't move) and raised hackles (fur by the top of the dog's neck standing on it) are strong indicators that the dog is uncomfortable and you should immediately stop what you are doing and you should leave the dog alone.
3. Let the dog approach you for interactions when he is ready to establish trust.
4. Be pro-active by giving the dog food puzzles, treats and toys to help prevent destructive behaviour.
5. Regularly encourage the dog to go outside to go to the toilet.
6. If you see undesirable behaviour like barking, DO NOT PUNISH – don't shout at the dog and don't say "NO!" - Instead, ignore it or re-direct the behaviour onto something you want, like going outside to the toilet. Behaviours that aren't reinforced will generally go away in time.
7. It's important to look for desirable behaviour and reinforce that. Eg. If your foster dog attempts to interact with you or someone else and walks towards you or moves forward in the crate to watch what is going on, gently encourage that behaviour. This can be done by simply smiling and saying "good dog" or by throwing a treat on the floor for the dog.

## More tips

- Give your foster dog time to get used to you and your home before taking the dog on outings. Don't take the dog for walks initially as he's already in a 'new scary environment' and we don't want to overwhelm him more when he isn't yet used to his new environment or the people he is now with. Spending time in the yard indoors with him is still beneficial.
- Avoid having visitors initially to allow time for the dog to de-stress and settle in.
- If you do have people over in the first few days, keep your foster dog in his safe space, separate from the visitor(s).
- If your foster dog seems stressed, you can give off calming signals to him by yawning or blinking your eyes. DO NOT stare at the dog.
- Each dog is different and some dogs may take longer than others to get used to his foster home and the people in it. Let the dog go at his pace and over time he should learn to trust you and other people.

## Introducing a shy dog to strangers in your home

This helpful video will guide you through this process to set up your dog for success with dealing with new people in your home! [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xljGDK56EAO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xljGDK56EAO)

*Thanks to Maddie's Fund and Dogs Out Loud for assisting with the information with this guide. It has been adapted for AWL NSW use with permission.*