

Thank you for choosing to care for a fearful dog. These dogs suffer from varying degrees of shyness, fearfulness, timidity or anxiety and may be particularly stressed by the shelter environment. They need special caregivers who will be patient with them and work with them to help them learn to trust people.

At the SPCA of Texas, we use the Fear, Anxiety and Stress (FAS) scale established by Fear Free™ to assess the level of distress that dogs are experiencing. Recognizing the subtle signs that dogs send us is critical to avoid worsening their fear. Dogs communicate with us the only way they can; using their body language. Ignoring what the dog is telling you and trying to force it into any interaction that it is afraid of can result in a bite and will harm the relationship you are trying to build with the dog. We encourage you to review the FAS scale, the handout on Reading Dog Body Language and watch the recommended videos so you can learn to avoid fear or anxiety provoking stimuli for your dog. To access the Fear Free FAS scale and more information click here: [Dogs 101 | Fear Free Happy Homes](#)

Tips for Reducing Fear

Arrange a place for the dog in a quiet area of your home, where its food, water and bed are all within easy reach. Leave the dog in that area and only allow it to explore your home with you supervising. Try to take the dog to the preferred spot for elimination every 2-3 hours. Otherwise, just ignore the dog and allow it to familiarize itself with your home.

Take everything very slowly at first. Be patient. Causing the dog to panic or fight to escape will damage any trust you are trying to build. Never force a fearful dog to do anything unless its immediate safety is threatened.

Wear a treat pouch and keep high-value treats (meat, cheese, special treats, etc.) readily available. Use very tiny treats liberally every time the dog approaches you so that they learn that coming to you is a good thing. Avoid doing anything unpleasant when they come to you. Don't reach out to pet the dog. Wait until it rubs against you with its head or paws at you with a foot requesting attention.

Don't push your dog to experience too many new things too fast. Don't invite all of your friends over to meet the new dog! Don't take the dog to places where you cannot control their experiences including parties, parades, ballgames, etc. Even walking outside in your neighborhood can be terrifying at first.

Dog parks are discouraged. This dog is likely to be difficult to catch and we do not know how he will respond if another dog is inappropriate with him. There is also the chance that he will be inappropriate with other dogs in that setting. Dog parks can be terrifying to shy or fearful dogs!

Too much freedom too soon is too scary. Keep them in a small area and offer treats and food there. Gradually allow them to explore a larger area. If they want to go back, let them. It will take time.

Punishment and corrections will significantly slow down the time it takes for them to bond with your family. They don't know they can trust you and corrections will be too scary. Instead reward what you want them to do and manage them carefully so that they can't get into trouble.

They need down time. Let them be alone for frequent breaks when you first adopt them.

Petting, hugs and up-close attention can be terrifying for the shy or fearful dog. Hugging dogs can make them feel trapped which can make them feel the need to fight or flee. Give them a chance to get to know you and trust you by giving them the chance to initiate contact with you. If they get too scared they may bite. Be sure not to give them more attention than they can handle.

This dog may not walk well on leash. Some dogs were never on a leash until they came to the shelter. We work with them bit-by-bit, but they still have a ways to go. DO NOT use a retractable leash. We discourage their use with all dogs for safety reasons, but with fearful dogs they can create significant problems.

This dog may slip out of their collar or harness and run away so keep them on leash AND in securely fenced areas. Nylon harnesses are typically safer than collars, but if they are scared enough they may break free. If they escape they will be difficult to catch. They do not know that they can turn to you for safety yet. Having you chase them will be scary. Use a long leash (15-25 feet, found in pet stores) so that if they won't return to you, you can use the leash to bring them inside.

We do not know how they will behave with unfamiliar children, adults or animals. Avoid introducing them to new individuals for the first few weeks that you have them in your home.

This dog may not yet be house trained. Do not allow your dog to have access to areas of the home where you cannot see them, in case they try to relieve themselves when you aren't looking. Use baby gates and exercise pens to block off areas of the home that you do not want your dog to go into and where you can't keep the door closed. If the dog is too afraid to go outside at first, you may need to offer "potty pads" for the dog to eliminate on instead.

A regular routine will help build confidence. Dogs learn best when there is a set schedule of predictable events including when and where they eat, when and where they go outside to potty, who is in the house and how they will interact with them.

Be generous with tiny bits of treats. This helps them learn that you are the bringer of good things in life.