

Treat Retreat is the perfect game for dogs that are shy, fearful and/or reactive when exposed to certain triggers such as guests entering the home.

Many people try having their guests feed their dog treats and are disappointed because the dog's behavior doesn't improve. However, what is often happening is that the dog is coming in close because they want the food; then they realize how uncomfortable they are in the presence of this unfamiliar person. Their response may be to grab the treat roughly and then run away or in some cases, they may even take the treat and then snap at the person, often waiting until the person turns their back. Either way, they are not learning to trust or like people, which is ultimately the goal.

The Treat Retreat game is not intended to get the dog close enough to just take treats from people. It is intended to *change the way the dog feels* and responds to people it finds scary. It doesn't put the dog in a position where it feels conflicted or stressed about food and unfamiliar people. It gives the dog a choice of moving closer or further away and it rewards the dog for moving away. This increases the dog's confidence and thus its comfort level regarding scary or unfamiliar people.

## Playing the Treat Retreat Game

In order to play the treat retreat game, you must have some tasty high-value treats, a dog leash, child gate or ex pen (for safety, if you don't trust your dog around people) volunteers, and a basic knowledge of dog body language and signs of stress. (See our handout for more information on [Reading Dog Body Language](#) )

Tell your volunteer guests to avoid making direct eye contact with the dogs when they enter your home, as many dogs find this threatening.

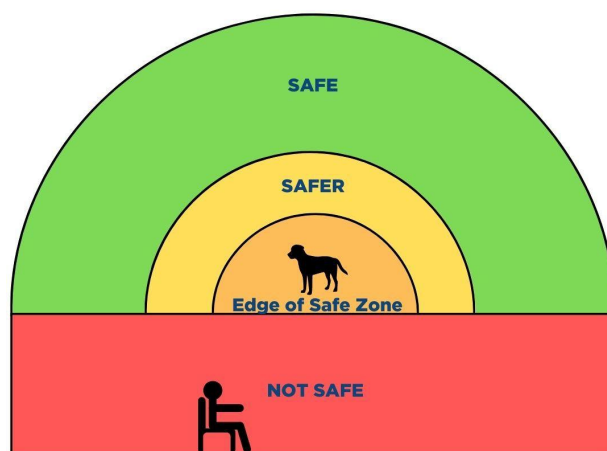
### Step 1

While seated, wait for the dog to approach the **edge of their safe zone**.

Once they have reached the edge of their safe zone, toss a treat toward the dog's feet.

- The treat should be tossed as close as possible to the dog.
- Don't use treats to lure the dog towards you into the not-safe zone.
- The dog should be able to stand watching but not feel like they have to run away.
- Food can be used to keep the dog back, especially if they like to come in hot, then realize they are too close for their comfort.

## TREAT RETREAT SAFETY ZONES



# Progression



## Step 2

Once the dog has eaten the first treat, toss a treat out deep into the **safe zone**

- Give the dog a chance to say they don't want to engage in this exercise anymore.

Then toss another treat into the **safe zone**.

- At this point, the dog might come to the same spot, move in closer, or reset and move further away.
- Only the dog will move the **edge of the safe zone**-refrain from moving yourself closer to the dog.
- Don't use treats to lure the dog toward you.

## Step 3

Repeat steps 1 and 2!

Watch for:

- Smooth movements
- Balanced stance
- No, stretching, leaning, or tucked rear-ends
- The dog should move away in search of food, not to get away from you
- The dog should have the reluctance to end the session