

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Handling Sensitivities

Protocol to be used on shelter dogs that exhibit sensitivities to certain types of handling procedures (touching body parts such as ears, tail, feet, mouth, being led by the collar)

The behavior modification techniques we use for this issue include Systematic Desensitization and Counterconditioning (defined below)

Systematic Desensitization involves slowly exposing the dog to the fearful stimuli, increasing the intensity of the stimuli over time, until he/she no longer reacts fearfully or aggressively when exposed to it.

Counterconditioning is a procedure whereby you work to change the dog's emotional response to the scary stimuli - from negative to positive - by pairing the scary thing with something desired (special food treat, toys, play, etc.)

Example – dog doesn't like his feet touched

Start by touching a part of his body he doesn't mind being touched (like his back). Touch his back and give him a treat. Do this over and over until he anticipates a treat when you touch his back. At this point he is happy when you touch his back. Next – start touching his upper leg and giving him a treat. Repeat this over and over until he anticipates the treat when you touch his upper leg. Then move to his lower leg – touch and give the treat. Repeat until he anticipates the treat when you touch his lower leg. Then move to his foot – touch his foot and give the treat. Do this over and over until he is completely comfortable with you touching his foot. He has now learned that this handling that used to be scary now predicts treats. You have successfully changed his emotional feelings about having his foot touched.

Make sure you go very slowly during this process. NEVER move to the next part of the body until he is completely comfortable with the previous part. If the dog growls or snaps at you at any point during this process – go back to where he was comfortable for a few more days or weeks and move forward more slowly.