

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Fearful Behavior

Protocol to be used on shelter dogs that exhibit fearful behavior. These dogs may appear frightened of new people, new experiences and/or the shelter environment in general.

It is quite normal for dogs to be afraid in the scary shelter environment. The kinds of dogs who exhibit fearful behavior are those who were not socialized well, those who have had scary encounters with people and/or those who are genetically fearful and find all new experiences overwhelming. The worse cases are those for whom all three contributing factors are at play.

The scary shelter environment is not conducive to helping a fearful dog so the best option for these dogs is a foster home.

If a foster home cannot be found stress reduction procedures should be implemented immediately. These include:

- consider an office foster (housing the dog in an office)
- if above is not possible provide some time in an office or real-life room during the day
- kennel placement should be in the quietest area of the shelter
- have a crate inside the kennel (door removed) to provide a hiding place
- hang visual barriers on cage front if fear is triggered by visible stimuli
- play calming music in the kennel (Through a Dog's Ear)
- consider an Adaptil calming pheromone collar
- consider daily Composure Pro calming chews (if cleared with veterinarian)
- consider Thundershirt (20-30 min per day) if dog allows
- consider anti-anxiety medication (as per veterinarian) if indicated

The fearful dog should also receive special human attention while at the shelter. At least one or two staff/volunteers should work with the dog daily. The below list of strategies should be worked through by each person. Each session should only last 5-10 minutes (at least to start – longer sessions are fine when the dog is feeling more comfortable). Several sessions each day is best. How long each step will take before the dog is comfortable enough to move to the next step depends on the dog. Use good judgement and do not rush the process or overwhelm the dog.

- sit quietly outside of the dog's kennel run
- talk, read, sing to the dog during visits
- toss treats to the dog during visits
- once dog seems comfortable with person – sit quietly inside of cage with the dog
- talk, read, sing to the dog during kennel visits
- toss treats to the dog while sitting in the kennel
- work up to hand-feeding the dog the treats
- begin to stroke and pet the dog in non-threatening ways (no over the head)

It is important to go very slowly with these dogs – the key is SLOW, GENTLE, and POSITIVE.