

## **FOSTERING OR ADOPTING A DOG WITH SOCIALIZATION AND/OR FEAR ISSUES**

Sometimes AGK takes in orphans who are not well socialized and fearful. These dogs usually present some common behaviors that may concern and even frustrate fosters and adopters. In addition, people often assume that these dogs have been abused because of their body language and actions - jumping/bolting away from petting or touch, tucking their tails, unable to make eye contact, shaking, nervous peeing or pooping, etc.

While some AGK orphans have suffered abuse in their past life, most of the dogs that we see in the rescue with these behaviors have not been abused; rather, they have not been socialized. They were left outside in a pen or yard where they rarely interacted with the family; crated all day while the family was away; rarely exposed to other people, dogs, sounds, and experiences; and basically not socialized during the critical socialization period (generally 4-16 weeks for puppies). Dogs that come to AGK from puppy mills also show these behaviors. While working with a mentor dog, training, socialization, and sometimes anxiety medications can help, these techniques may not completely remove all the fear and socialization issues. That said, these dogs can become much loved members of the family.

### How Does a Dog Show Socialization Issues and Fear?

In general, a dog will show fear and lack of socialization in three responses to new people and situations:

- Freeze - dog will not move, blink, or make eye contact, goes to ground on belly
- Flight - dog bolts away and is difficult to catch
- Fight - dog growls, shows teeth, bites, and/or lunges

\*DO NOT push dogs who are in one of these three response modes.

These responses are not necessarily exclusive; one dog may show more than one response.

### Getting Ready for a Dog with Socialization and Fear Issues:

Most experts agree that the best first step to help dogs with socialization and fear issues is to place them in a home with a mentor dog, a confident dog they can watch and follow. Delaware Valley Golden Retriever Rescue has a large program devoted to dogs with socialization and fear issues because they receive approximately 100 dogs/year from

Amish puppy mills. A copy of the DVGR document "Mentor Dogs and Their Role in Adoption" is attached. This information applies to mentor dogs in foster homes as well as adoptive homes.

Expect the dog with socialization/fear issues to be somewhat afraid of you initially. No matter how bad a situation they were in previously, it likely was the only situation they knew. Being removed from that situation, going to a vet (often for the first time in their lives), then to a foster home and eventually an adoptive home requires many transitions with new people, sounds, places, and other dogs. Understand that the dog is not deliberately ignoring commands or trying to frustrate you. They are doing the best they can. If something is not working, take deep breaths and realize that a different approach is needed.

Accept that many of these dogs DO NOT want affection and petting initially. In fact, touch can be very scary - almost painful - to them. Most of them will not climb on the couch and snuggle with you or come up to you for petting at first. Generally, these behaviors will happen eventually - though not always - but rarely in the beginning.

Make a safe place for the dog - where they can retreat when life is too hard. Crates make excellent safe places, as do laundry rooms, bedrooms, etc. The dog needs to know that when it goes to "place," it will be safe. If you have children, spouse, or friends, do not let them try to pet the dog or make it interact when it is in its safe place. The safe place can be in another room, or in the general area of home activity, but it needs to be a place that the dog can retreat and not be bothered or challenged. The dog can come out of the safe place when it is ready. Always refer to the safe place as "place" so that you can tell the dog to go to "place" if needed.

Manage your expectations. Prepare to be patient, very patient. Expect the dog to be scared and to show that fear in different ways.

### What to Expect:

Most dogs with fear and socialization issues will not show all these behaviors, but many of them will show at least some of these behaviors while they are in a foster home or new to the adoptive home. For some dogs, some of these behaviors will last forever.

- Fear of stairs - teach them to go up the stairs first - then down. Use the mentor dog and high value treats and lots of verbal encouragement. If stairs are slick, you may need to use stair runners or treads.
- Fear of a leash or harness.

- Unfounded fears of things most dogs see as normal - unexpected and loud noises such as dropping a dog bowl, having to step on something other than grass or dirt (a rock pathway), balloons, bicycles, motorcycles, etc.
- Difficulty with transitions - going through doorways, going from outside to inside, Again, use mentor dog and high value treats. Always keep the dog on a leash for the first couple of weeks - preferably at least a month - even if you have a fenced in yard - until you know it will follow the mentor dog or you or if will jump or climb your fence. It is much easier to leash a dog with socialization issues than try to catch it when it escapes.
- Difficulty peeing or pooping on leash. The dog may have always lived outside and not been close to a person when doing its business. If necessary, use a long leash or tie several leashes together. Also, always take it to the same place in the yard to do its business.
- Little or no interest in toys/treats. This behavior generally will get better with time. Watching a mentor dog play with toys or take treats from your hand also is a great strategy. Usually these dogs begin to show more interest in toys and treats with time.
- Fear pee and poop - clean it up with enzyme cleaner available from pet store or white vinegar - without scolding and take dog outside and show it where to go. In general, it is a good idea for dogs to pee and poop in the same area. You can take the dog to the place where the mentor dog pees and poops, and it will associate the smells with where it needs to go. You might consider hanging a bell by your door and ringing the bell every time you take the dog out to pee and poop. This action will teach the dog a way to communicate to you that it needs to go out.
- Turns away from you - avoids touch and eye contact.
- Yawning, licking, or blowing lips - moving away from you - side eye - all signs of stress.
- Expect the dog to make progress and then regress a bit at times - the two steps forward, one step back concept. Sometimes the dog wants to do things so much that it will push itself beyond where it is comfortable. When that happens, it may regress a bit for a few days, but then will make progress again.

## Things to Try in the Beginning

- Keep dog in smaller space at first in the house and expand its boundaries as it gets more comfortable.
- Do not let dog off leash in yard for at least a month until you know if will jump or climb your fence and that you can get it back inside.
- Assume that the dog will bolt if you open the door. If you do not have a fenced-in yard, make sure the dog is secure in the home in a crate or closed off in another area of the home before you open the door.
- Keep dog close to all the activities of the house so it can choose to participate when it is comfortable (ex: if mentor dog is getting treats, dog with socialization/fear issues may join mentor dog if its safe place is where it can see the mentor dog; if you are playing with mentor dog, especially using silly, high pitched voice, dog with socialization/fear issues may join you if it is watching.) This technique may require you to leave the bedroom door open if the safe place is in the bedroom. Or place the crate in the family room but to the side of the activity - this lets the dog observe and participate when it can, but also to be safe and removed from the activities.
- Teach the dog the "Touch" command. This command is useful for so many things. You can find many websites that explain how to teach this command - here is one: <https://positively.com/dog-behavior/basic-cues/hand-target-training/>. Once perfected, this command can be used to get the fearful dog to touch new things.
- If a dog with fear and socialization issues approaches you, rub its chest instead of its head initially. When it pulls away, do not try to reach after it. Let it be in control of the touch process.
- Stand to the side or get down on the floor or ground at the dog's level - do not stand over it. Sitting on the floor or ground is usually a good idea.
- Do not stare at the dog - ok to make eye contact as needed, but no direct stares.
- If the dog is very scared, try feeding it canned food or a high value treat from your hand - maybe with mentor dog close by sharing in the goodies.

- If dog is afraid to come out of the crate, sit a little distance away and toss high value treats - into the crate at first and then gradually farther back as the dog begins to leave the crate.
- If dog is a leash puller, get an Easy Walk Harness or a Sporn No Pull Harness.
- Do not host loud gatherings with many loud, new people (football game party, for ex).
- Routine is especially important to dogs that lack socialization and have fears. In the beginning, try to keep their routine the same - when they get up, when they eat, when they go out, etc.
- If the dog will walk on a leash or harness, daily walks with the mentor dog are good ways to begin the socialization process - new smells, sights, and sounds. You may want to double leash the dog for safety in case any new things are very scary, and you get a bolt reaction. Using a slip lead with an existing collar or harness and regular leash is a good idea.
- Some dogs with socialization issues do very well with clicker training. If you know how to clicker train, try it a few times and see what happens. If not, contact a trainer to help you learn how to use the clicker in training.

### Anxiety

Dogs can develop anxiety issues for a variety of reasons - often when left alone. Anxiety also is common in dogs that have gone through trauma or have been abandoned in the past, as is the case with many rescue dogs, especially those from backyard breeders and puppy mills. Generally, anxiety is brought on by a change in routine, environment, or activity (such as moving to a foster home or adoptive home).

There are many forms of anxiety, including separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, environmental anxiety, and social anxiety. These anxiety forms can have multiple causes and may occur in conjunction with each other.

Pay attention to your dog's body language. They cannot have a verbal conversation with you, but they can tell you many things through their body language.

- Excessive barking
- Being over-reactive

- Not being interested in food
- Panting
- Pacing or general restlessness
- Whining
- Ears back and/or tail tucked
- Shaking or trembling
- Drooling
- Aggression
- Urinating or defecating in the house
- Destructive behavior (tearing up furniture, chewing walls, eating remotes, etc.)
- Repetitive or compulsive behaviors
- Constantly looking for an escape (fight or flight)
- Digging or trying to escape enclosures

Always talk to your vet first to rule out any medical issues that may be the cause of these behaviors. If there are no medical issues, then identify some options for helping your dog cope with its anxiety. Please refer to this Blog from the Animal Surgical and Orthopedic Center in Shoreline, WA for more information on options to help your dog relax and handle its anxiety: <https://www.animalsurgical.com/anxiety-in-dogs/> . Note, these options may include professional help.

In addition, some dogs with anxiety respond well to the use of a thundershirt - <https://thisis.dog/en/dog-stuff/thundershirts-dogs/>.

### Medication

Medication is not a magic cure for dogs with socialization/fear/anxiety issues, but it can help the dog decrease the anxiety below the fear threshold, so that it is receptive to training and socialization. If your foster or adopted dog is not making progress after a month or so, you should discuss the pros and cons of anxiety medication with the AGK medical director or personal vet (in the case of an adopter). If you live close to Knoxville, your vet may refer you to Dr. Julie Albright at the University of Tennessee Vet School, one of 60 board-certified veterinary behaviorists in the US, and her assistant, Nelle Wyatt, a licensed veterinary technician and certified dog trainer. Dr. Albright and Ms. Wyatt will help you come up with a plan that addresses the socialization and fear issues through both medication (if needed) and training. It usually takes about a month to get an appointment with Dr. Albright, and you must fill out a history form on the dog ([vmcbehavior@utk.edu](mailto:vmcbehavior@utk.edu), 865-974-8387).

## Adoptive Homes for Dogs with Socialization and Fear Issues

In general, adopters for dogs with socialization and fear issues should not use radio controlled fences/collars; agree not to consult a trainer who uses shock collars/e-collars/electronic collars/collars (even if they describe these collars as similar to the tens unit that a physical therapist uses; have a confident mentor dog in the home; have a secure physical fence if the dog is has "flight" response to its fears; and have realistic expectations about what the dog needs and likes (dog may avoid petting and snuggling initially). Also, in most cases, two dogs with socialization/fear issues should not be adopted to a home at the same time, especially if the home does not have a confident mentor dog.

### Resources:

<https://www.preventivevet.com/dogs/how-to-help-adult-dog-with-socialization>

<https://www.dvgrr.org/education/puppy-mills/>

[https://www.dvgrr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Education\\_Puppy-Mills\\_mentor-dogs-and-their-role-in-adoption.pdf](https://www.dvgrr.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Education_Puppy-Mills_mentor-dogs-and-their-role-in-adoption.pdf)

<https://www.animalsurgical.com/anxiety-in-dogs/>