



## **Fears and building confidence**

How to react when your dog is in a fearful state:

In a well meaning attempt to calm their dog's fears, many people end up actually reinforcing the dog's shy behavior. In effect, the owner inadvertently trains the dog to be more fearful. Be careful not to reinforce your dog's fearfulness by offering reassurance. When a timid dog hides, barks defensively, whines, screams or snaps the human response is only natural; our protective instincts cause us to reassure the dog by talking soothingly, petting or even picking up the dog for a hug. These actions actually reward the dog for the behavior and will make it worse or reoccur. It is best to be there for your dog and leave if necessary but also to completely ignore your dog when it acts fearful. Let him learn by his own experience two things; there is nothing to be afraid of, if it's too much you can always leave and I have "got your back – as the leader of the pack." Save your praise and reassurance for times when your dog acts with confidence.

Building confidence:

In order to build a dogs confidence you must be ready to reward any brave behavior. For example: if you know your dog cowers everyday that you pass a neighbors home and then one day walks right past the house and ignores it... Throw a party! Tons of treats for the non fearful/reactive behavior is key to success. This way you are ignoring the behavior you do not want (fearfulness) and rewarding for the behavior you do want (brave behavior!). It is also very important to be a strong leader. Your dog needs to think that you are the one who will fight off anything scary, you will be the one to tell him to run, and you will be the one that "has his back". Agility training is also a great activity to help build a bond, and self confidence! Agility is also a great tool for dog's that need tons of mental stimulation; it is not only physical work, but mental work as well!

Adjusting to a new home:

Being in a new environment with new people can be very stressful! However there are many things you can do to help ease the stress and help the adjustment process begin. One important thing is to allow a "safe spot" for the dog to hide in if he/she is ever feeling overwhelmed. This is why crate training is highly suggested with most fearful dogs. Dogs are den animals and actually prefer to be confined. Keeping a dog on a set schedule is another way to help ease the stress. Think about it: if the dog knows the schedule and can predict what is going to happen every day, this is much better than guessing what big scary thing MIGHT happen! It is also a very good idea to keep your fearful dog in the house for a few weeks before venturing out into the scary world (stores, parks, or any other crowded places). Your dog needs to adjust to its home environment before he/she starts to venture into the real world! This also helps you create a bond and work on building that confidence.