

Fostering Fearful Dogs



Tips & Tricks:

- **Don't push the dog to do something that the dog is not comfortable doing!**

Watch for signs that the dog is not comfortable and back away.

- Don't take the foster dog to places where there are a lot of people or commotion. Try to find calm, quiet places to help build their self-confidence.
- **Keep the leash on- even in the house!** This allows you to have some control over the situation if they try to take off, or snap.
- Don't hover or crowd the dog. Make sure they always have the option to move away from you or to make sure the dog is making the choice to interact.

***Refer back to the "Dog Socialization" and "Body Language" page in your foster manual for more information about how to read your foster dog's body language.**

Most dogs coming into the shelter have unknown history, either coming in as strays or from our rescue partners in other states. These are dogs that are experiencing stress and change in their lives and are showing this through fearful behaviors. Some of dogs may never lived in a home setting or spent much time in the company of humans. Foster care gives them the best place to settle and allows us to assess their behavioral needs.

Setting Up:

Set up a crate in a quiet or unoccupied space in the house. Cover one or two sides with a sheet. Use baby gates and closed doors to limit space in the house and avoid overwhelming the dog.

GENERAL EDUCATION:

- Always keep soft, enticing treats with you. Ones that smell and appear jerky-like are usually preferable. Your Foster Coordinator can provide you with the supplies you need.
- Do not ever attempt to pull a dog from its kennel. Approach the kennel sideways, and try enticing it with soft words and food. It is never a good idea to force the dog into interacting or moving.
- Leash the dog without bending over them. Bend at the knees not at the waist. Standing over or looming over a dog is threatening and may end up with the dog snapping or biting. Squat down next to the dog and snap the leash on with your hand and arm going under the dogs neck. Bend at the knees, not at the waist.
- Do not allow new people or strangers to approach or interact with your fearful foster dog. For some dogs, it is best to avoid all interactions, for others you can allow the dog to approach new people when the dog is comfortable doing so.
- Having visitors to the house can be overwhelming for some dogs. It is best to provide a safe place for them- crated in a separate room to avoid interactions that will cause a fearful response.

What is Flooding? :

Flooding is forcing interactions on a fearful animal. Many think handling a frightened dog is desensitizing them to touch. True desensitization is done when a dog is not fearful and can tolerate and even enjoy the experience. Flooding causes learned helplessness and emotional damage, teaching fearful dogs to tolerate touch and contact instead of seeking it. NEAS does not use forced handling and will only use positive reinforcement training methods.

Expectations:

Fostering a fearful dogs allows them time to settle into a more comfortable environment, for us to understand their needs and what their ideal adoptive home could look like. Remember that fearful dogs can take several weeks or even a few months to fully acclimate. Adult dogs are past the point of socializing and are socially mature, but fostering allow the dog to show us their true personality. If you have any concerns, questions or need more guidance, please reach out to your Foster Care Coordinator immediately.



***As long as the foster dog is eating, drinking, going to the bathroom and not showing signs of illness, it is advisable to allow them to make the choice of when to start interacting with you.**

If you don't see improvement after one week, try these next steps and reach out to your Foster Care Coordinator:

- Try offering more wet food- the stinkier, the better. If still not taking the food from you or eating, try warming the food up in the microwave- this will make it more enticing.
- Try meat-flavored baby foods like ham, turkey or chicken, and wet foods like Ceasars and canned chicken- these are higher value treats and can be invaluable as enticements.
- Play soft music or utilize a white noise machine for a couple hours a day.
- Try hand feeding, or spoon feeding if they are is still too nervous to approach or take treats from you. Use a long-handled spoon, a pretzel stick or leave it on the ground in front of them.
- Toss treats near the dog and away from you until the foster dog is willing to approach you. For tips on Treat and Retreat protocol, consult the behavior team who is always here to assist.
- Reinforce good behaviors- whenever they move towards you or another person, toss treats. Keep your celebrations or encouragement calm and quiet.
- Try introducing any resident dogs slowly- refer back to the "Intro to Other Pets" page in your foster manual- to see if the foster dog will pick up on social cues from another confident, people-friendly dog. Be sure to have your foster dog see you providing your resident dog with treats and affection.
- Refer back to the "Under-socialized Dogs" and "Body Language" pages of the foster manual. Record all negative or positive changes you see in the dogs's behavior. This will help Adoption Counselors match your foster dog to potential families, Foster Care Coordinator and Behavior team to provide you and the dog with the best support. Behaviors to record may include the dog's daily habits, any incidents of reactive behavior and what led up to it, and any progress made in terms of social interactions.