

# Fostering Fearful Puppies



Some of our puppies come from situations in which they have not have enough proper exposure to people and urban living. Some signs of under- socialization in the puppy may include trembling, hunched body position, whale eye, reactivity, avoiding human contact, frozen in one place, hiding and/or reactivity. The goal is to have the puppy experience positive interactions, build confidence and get them more comfortable in this new setting with people. This is done through slowly moving slowly, using positive reinforcement and having patience.

Until five months of age, puppies are still developing the social skills needed to be confident dogs.

## Continuing Socialization in a Foster Home:

- Always keep soft, enticing treats with you. Ones that smell and appear jerky-like are usually preferable to hard, crunchy treats. For picky eaters, try things like cheese, peanut butter, or hotdogs. 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 puppy or pick them up to move them- it is preferable to help them along.
- Leash the dog without bending over them, bend at the knees not at the waist. Standing or looming over a dog is scary to them and may end up causing the dog to snap or bite. Squat down next to the dog and snap the leash on with your hand and arm going under the dogs neck.
- Introduce new people slowly using treats. Let the dog approach the person. It is important for the puppy to make the choice to interact. Explain that the dog is shy, and is still working on working with building trust with people.
- When having visitors or new people come to the home, some fearful foster dogs may need to be put in their crate or a unoccupied room to prevent overwhelming the pup. Set up the crate in a quiet room.
- Build confidence by teaching them basic obedience tricks like sit, come and down. Practicing these basic skills builds confidence and helps them bond with humans.
- Find the toys they really like! Engage in lots of playing to associate humans with fun activities. This also can be a good talking point when looking for their new forever home. Utilize food dispensing toys.

### Do:

- Do check in with your Foster Care Coordinator often.
- Give your puppy several hours to days to settle in to his new environment.
- Utilize treats, food, and playtime as an incentive to be around humans.
- Leave soft music or the tv on low to let them adjust to noise for a couple hours a day.

### Don't:

- Do not bring your under-socialized foster puppy to meet all your family members and friends on the first day.
- Don't Give the puppy free rein of the house.
- Do not "flood" them with information. Many think that handling the puppy is desensitizing them. This is teaching the puppy "Learned Helplessness" and is not what we want for our dogs.

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

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- 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 Caesars and canned chicken- these are higher value treats and can be invaluable as enticements.
- Play soft music or utilize a white noise machine.
- Try hand feeding, or spoon feeding if they are still too nervous to approach or take treats from you. Use a long-handled spoon, or a tongue depressor.
- Toss treats near and away from you until the foster puppy is willing to approach you.
- Reinforce good behaviors- whenever they try to move towards you or a person, toss treats.
- 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 dog's behavior. This will help Adoption Counselors when matching the puppy to its new family, and Foster Care Coordinator and Behavior team to provide the best support. Behaviors to record are daily habits of your foster dog, any acts of reactive behavior and what led up to it, and any progress made in terms of medical improvements and social progress.

**\*Progress will depend on many factors- some of which as fosters we can't control- past experiences, what the dog's mother was like, how long the puppies were without human contact, and will take time and patience. It is easy to be frustrated or discouraged by a lack of progress- but each puppy is different! Progress may also not be linear, and the puppy can have good days and bad days. This is to be expected. Don't hesitate to reach out to the foster department with any concerns or for more tips.**

