

# First Days with a Shy Dog

## Avoiding Coercion

First impressions are lasting, so, when you first arrive home, make sure the dog isn't forced into any scary situations. As tempting as it might be to give him hugs, scrub him in the bath, take him to people's houses or invite over all your friends, it is much wiser to let him explore his immediate surroundings while you sit quietly, waiting for him to come to you when he is ready. When he does approach you, he may still be wary of your hands or of being touched. Be patient: the best way to win his trust is to not rush him.

## Hand-Feeding

A great idea is to hand feed him treats and/or meals. At first, talk to him while you feed him piece by piece. After a session or two, try touching him with your other hand before each treat. If he moves away, go back to feeding him without touches a few more times and then try a smaller touch before feeding. If he is extremely fearful and hides for a long time once you get home, you can toss treats near to where he is hiding and then leave him alone. Once he feels better, he'll venture out and associate it with getting a tasty treat. In time, his forays out will happen sooner and sooner after you toss treats and your presence will become associated with the treats as well. Once he is out, you can switch to hand feeding.

## Finding Safe Distances

Take walks and let him sniff and thoroughly check things out. Sudden noises or changes in the environment will make him flatten or try to run for cover. Your best policy is to let him hide or to take him further away from the scary situation. Once he settles down, let him approach as close as he is comfortable to what frightened him. Feed him a few treats and then leave.

Be especially careful of people who think they are "good with dogs" and then try to approach him too quickly or too close. Being forced into more than he can handle is never therapeutic and can even make him worse. Take the initiative to coach people on how to remain passive and let the dog set the pace of contact. A good idea is to carry treats for people to toss to him – if he won't eat, it's a sign that he needs even more distance. Get him far enough away so that he's relaxed enough to eat as this helps him develop a positive association to new people.

Shy dogs warm up and bond strongly to people they live with but remain nervous around *novel* people. The time it takes to warm up to a new person may accelerate over time – whereas early on, it took dozens of visits from a certain person before that person was accepted into the dog's circle, later the dog is comfortable with a new person after half a dozen exposures. So, in the early days, don't become frustrated if it seems he is taking a long time to warm up to people.