



Nervous dogs fact sheet

Many of our dogs have known lives of neglect and cruelty and need time and understanding to heal from their pasts and learn how to trust humans again. It is heartbreaking to see a dog who carries the burden of trauma. In some cases, our dogs have received no socialisation with humans so to them we are aliens.

With nervous dogs, you will be able to identify triggers of their fear – certain movements, noises, objects, environments and so on. Once you have identified these triggers, it is helpful for the dog to remove them as much as possible and gradually introduce them at a pace which is comfortable to them, and create some positive associations.

With dogs who are afraid of humans, there are certain things you can do to help them feel a bit more at ease:

In the home, avoid sudden, quick movements. Think in slow motion. Do not approach the dog directly, try to move in an arc, slowly. Try not to give eye contact as this can seem threatening to them.

With nervous dogs, they need space, so avoid interacting too much. Just allow them to get used to your voice (making sure it is nice and gentle), and your presence. It is important not to rush them or force them into interacting with you. If they come for a fuss, then great, but you will need to let them approach when they are ready.

When giving treats, do not ask them to take them directly from you (doing so can cause a conflict of emotions for them). Make sure they are high value treats. You can start by placing treats on the floor away from them and walking away. Continue doing this until the dog is looking easier with this interaction. You can casually toss (careful of rapid arm movements) a few treats on the floor, pause a moment, then walk away. Again continue with this. Maybe for the next step you can sit in the room, armed with lots of tasty treats and again toss them away from you. If they move closer to you, try not to make a big deal of it, and carry on throwing the treats away from you.

Patience and compassion is key. Please do not take it personally. When they begin to trust, it will be so rewarding.