

Info shared by Pitbull SA.

Manjaro APBT kennel.

South Africa.

My Website www.pitbullsa.co.za

My E mail "manjaro@pitbullsa.co.za"

My Facebook "Gawie Manjaro"

My Facebook page "Manjaro Kennel"

My mobile +27827838280.

Zello.com "VoIP" – ask for info.

Fear behaviour in dogs.

Ron Hines DVM PhD

"I think I can make the dog love me or at least make them respect me"
Fear and aggression are the two most common behavior problems I see in dogs.

Sometimes, aggressive dogs are actually fearful dogs.

I am always saddened to see a dog cower, tremble or pull on its leash to escape from a situation that should not cause it to be frightened. Dogs that are frightened have specific postures and behaviors.

A dog that is frightened or worried stands with its head lower than its back.

It avoids eye contact and may freeze or attempt to escape.

Its ears are laid back against its head and its tail is tucked between its legs.

Its mouth is closed or slightly ajar.

It may tremble and keep distance between it and the person or thing it fears.

Some dogs growl when they are frightened or feeling threatened.

Females, in particular, may urinate or, in extreme cases, defecate.

If the dog runs away, it looks back over its shoulder to be sure it is not being pursued.

Why is my dog frightened?

There are three reasons that dogs become fearful in multiple situations.

Basic temperament of the dog:

Some dogs are just wired more fearful than others – this can be a genetic attribute.

Dogs are just like people in this respect.

Some are braver than others.

There is a good side to moderate fearfulness.

These dogs tend to stay close to home and not get into the dangerous situations overly outgoing dogs do.

These are the scary dogs that take several days to recover after a visit to the vets or have to be carried in on their next visit.

Early socialization most important:

Some dogs were not properly socialized when they were puppies - fact.

Bad experiences in the past:

Some dogs are fearful of a specific situation because of a bad experience that occurred in the past.

They may have been yelled at or hit in circumstances they did not understand.

Fearfulness in a single situation is much easier to overcome with training than dogs that are fearful in multiple situations.

Often fear and obsessive/compulsive behavior occurs in the same dog.

What to do?

Dogs rarely get over fearfulness without some help from you.

If you do not correct the problem it may get worse with time.

Dogs that are in pain can be fearful that you might touch a specific area of their body.

Sometimes, tender infected ears are the reason dogs are fearful about having their head touched.

You should rule out problems of this through a veterinary exam.

Separation anxiety is a special type of fear.

Treating fear is much like treating allergies, one minimizes the problem through desensitization and conditioning.

In doing so, you need to be confident and unambiguous with your dog.

If that's just not you, enlist the help of a professional dog trainer or a cooperative friend. Sometimes you have to make the changes - not your dog.

Desensitizing your dog through repetition:

Begin by determined what the stimulus is that is frightens your dog.

Often there are only one or two stimuli that upset your dog.

It can be an object, a noise or a specific odors.

It can be a person or another dog or animal. It can be a noise like thunder or traffic.

It can be dependent on the setting or place in which the event occurs.

Once you have determined what it is that frightens your dog, arrange a way to recreate the situation when you need to.

If it is the vacuum cleaner or some similar object, move it to the center of the living room so the dog can become used to the sight and smell of it.

Introduce your dog to the object as you calm and praise him.

If the object smells like something he really likes (food?) he is more apt to accept it.

Remain relaxed because your dog will clue off of your emotion. Give your dog some treats as you praise him.

You can even hide some treats under or around the object.

It is best to do this while the dog is on a leash and quite hungry and the machine is off.

Leashes, bandanas and harnesses add a sense of security to your dog – if the dog is used to it.

When your dog remains relaxed near the object, turn it on or make it perform whatever action it is that frightens the dog while the dog is some distance away.

Slowly, in multiple sessions, lead the dog closer to the object while praising and reassuring him and offering him treats and praise.

Conditioning a dog not to fear human beings is much the same.

In this case, the person substitutes for the feared object.

If your dog has snapped at a particular person or at people in particular situations, replicate the situation while the dog is muzzled so he cannot nip.

Use an all-cloth muzzle that fits snugly but not too tight.

The strange person should crouch down and let the dog approach the person rather than the person approach the dog.

When the stranger pets the dog it should be on the chest rather than the head.

Give a cooperative stranger plenty of food treats to reward your dog.

Modification and counter- conditioning:

Modification introduces new thought patterns to your dog while in the presence of the feared object.

If you instruct your dog to perform a pleasant activity that does not cause fear while in the presence of a feared object, person, animal or situation you will decrease the fear factor.

If your dog has ever bitten from fear, begin with the dog muzzled. Start by teaching your dog to do get use to training exercise – like fetch or pulling or chasing or tease.

After the successful exercise, give the dog a treat and praise him effusively.

Then, gradually allow the dog to perform the exercise over while in the presence of the feared stimulus.

In this way you will gradually get your dog to associate pleasant sensations with the stimulus or event - rather than fright.

If you feel that you cannot instruct your dog alone or if progress is too slow, seek the help of a professional dog trainer or a friend whom the pet trusts. Dogs, like children, learn better from certain individuals more than from another.

Medication.

Sometimes tranquilizer tablets, given thirty minutes before desensitization lessons helps during initial sessions.

“Acepromazine” is an option.

If your dog has a true phobia, clomipramine “Clomicalm” is an option. It takes several weeks before the full effect of this medication is reached.

There are dog trainers and veterinarians who believe that dogs with under-active thyroid glands tend to make bad social decisions.

I have never seen a documented case of this, but a simple blood assay called a T-4 level would detect it.

Dogs that do not receive enough exercise during the day react badly in social situations.

Dogs are social animals and spending time isolated and alone is hard on them.

Dogs tied out in the yard tend to over react and become hysterical both when people approach them and when they are released.

More about counter- conditioning:

Counter conditioning interrupts your dog's fearful behavior by diverting its attention to a command behavior or action it is comfortable with.

Distracting the dog to an obedience command, trick or game can break the pattern of fear in these situations.

Food treats help too in fearful situations. As soon as your dog begins to exhibit anxiety command him to "sit" and then give him a reward.

Lag as long as possible by showing - but not giving - the treat in order for the dog to focus on your hand rather than on the stressful situation.

Things that don't work:

Do not punish your dog.

Punishment never works in fearful situations. It only makes the problem worse.

Do not raise your voice to your dog.

Do not force the dog into obedience or drag it toward fearful encounters.

Any intervention you make must be done while the event is in progress.

Dogs do not project themselves backward or forward in time & they will not understand what you are fussing about after the event has occurred.

Do not attempt to train your dog if you yourself are apprehensive or tense in the same situation.

How to handle dog to dog situations:

Some dogs react with fear to the introduction of other pets that do not wish your dog harm.

These dogs may react with a combination of fear and aggression or self-defense.

APBT will fight – best to keep them safely separated from other pets. Sometimes your dog will only exhibit this behavior with specific other dogs. Big dogs, multiple dogs, same sex dogs, or overly boisterous dogs may set off a fearful or aggressive response.

Your dog may give mixed signals in such situations such as wagging its tail at the same time it growls to tugging tail between legs.

For dogs other than APBT ... a helpful exercise is to bring your dog to the doggy park but keep the dog in the parking lot observing the other dogs coming and going. Give your dog rewards when he remains calm. Slowly decrease the distance to the park entrance until the dog can enter without fear.

These activities should be performed with your dog on a leash and wearing a muzzle or head halter.

Ideally your dog should focus on you and the expected treat every time another dog comes into view.

It should remain calm and happy with its tail wagging.

Obedience training.

All dogs gain self-confidence and an enhanced ability to deal with new or threatening situations when they develop obedience skills.

Putting your dog through regular five-minute obedience sessions prior to having to face stressful situations is always helpful.

The more voice commands your dog learns to respond to, the more likely it will be to trust your advice in fearful situations.

Snug-fitting muzzles, leashes with choke collars and head halters all give the dog a sense of comfort and place you, as the owner, in control. I prefer cloth sleeve muzzles over plastic or wire ones.

Fear of thunder.

Some pets become frightened when they hear thunder or loud noises.

Your dog may bark or howl or run off or hide and refuse to come out. If the dog is outside it may try to escape from the yard and run away. The problem is usually worse when the dog is out-of-doors.

These frightened dogs are often destructive and the problem is often progressive.

After first being only afraid of thunder your dog may become afraid of wind, rain storms, firecrackers or flashes of light.

To correct this problem, first establish a safe place for the dog to go when thunder occurs. A quiet closet or under the bed or other safe place is OK.

Giving some favorite treats and praise (talk to) the dog in the "safe place".

You can make a tape recording of the thunder or loud noises for after training purposes.

You can also wait for lightening and threatening weather to begin to play with your dog and put the dog through a series of tricks such as catch, roll over, etc. to draw his attention away from the noise.

Not all dogs can lose their fear of thunder or loud noises.

But most dogs will improve or learn to manage their fears.

It is OK to give your dog "acepromazine" tranquilizer before stormy weather.

Most veterinarians will dispense some or a "similar product" for you to keep on the shelf.

"Valium" does not work well in dogs.