TREAT AND RETREAT FOR FEARFUL DOGS

WHAT IS TREAT AND RETREAT?

Treat and Retreat is a method for building rapport with fearful or defensive dogs. The process involves using food and space to encourage interaction that the dog is comfortable with. Food is not used to lure the dog closer to us, because this often creates internal conflict in a fearful dog. Instead, food is used to encourage space and breaks by tossing treats away from us.

WHY USE TREAT AND RETREAT?

This game gives us a way to bond with our dog while creating a strong positive association with human interaction. By tossing the treats away, your dog learns to take space when scared, which actually helps them calm down. Over time, increasing your dog's ability to choose to take breaks lessens your dog's fear.

WHY NOT HAND-FEED TREATS?

Hand feeding treats to a fearful dog sets the dog up for continued exposure to stress hormones. By requiring your dog to remain close to the scary thing, they may feel coerced. That's why hand feeding can increase fear and aggression.

HOW TO TEACH IT

Step 1. Prepare pea-sized high-value treats. Preferably something stinky that your dog loves!
Step 2. Using an underhand toss, gently throw a treat away from you and past the dog.
Step 3. Remain relaxed and calm while the dog eats the treat.
Step 4. Once they've finished eating, gently toss another treat - this time closer to you. Step 5. Repeat the above steps, varying the distance and direction of your tosses.

TRAINING TIPS

Tip 1. Body language is everything! Avoid staring directly at the dog. Soften your gaze, blink slowly, and look slightly off to the side or at the dog's feet. Relax your body and turn so that your side faces the dog while still keeping the dog within your line of sight.
Tip 2. You may notice the dog approaching after eating the treats. That's just what you want to see! It means they're getting more comfortable with you. Continue alternating treat tosses. Resist the temptation to offer treats from your hand.
Tip 3. If the dog is not moving towards or eating the treat, then try using something that's higher value - the stinkier the better. You may also try releasing a handful of treats on each toss, or moving to a space with more space and perceived exit routes for the dog.
Tip 4. If a dog is lying on their bed and not following tossed treats you may gently place treats on the bed in front of the dog, but do not linger near their bed. Step back and let them eat.
Body Language of Fear in Dogs

Slight Cowering
Major Cowering

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety

Licking Lips
when no food nearby

Panting
when not hot or thirsty

Brows Furrowed, Ears to Side

Moving in Slow Motion
walking slow on floor

Acting Sleepy or Yawning
when they shouldn’t be tired

Hypervigilant
looking in many directions

Suddenly Won’t Eat
but was hungry earlier

Moving Away

Pacing

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6 TOP TIPS for DESENSITISATION

Turn scary things into fun, positive experiences!

1. Show the scary object just before feeding for at least a week, so the dog learns it becomes a precursor to good things.

2. Start with short moments of exposure followed by good things only (IE don’t clip their claws, give 3 liver treats instead)

3. Break down the scary thing into a process of small steps (IE putting the clippers near the dogs claws, then touching the claws, then holding the claw in the clippers then cutting), praising and rewarding heavily for each step.

4. Be patient, proceeding to the next small step only when your dog is 100% comfortable.

5. If your dog seems unhappy or sensitive to the scary object at any time, go back a step and spend more time on that step.

6. If your dog is scared of several things, work on one at a time maintaining a happy voice, rewarding with lots of treats and remaining patient.

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**CALM and RELAXED? or SHUT DOWN?**

**Calm, attentive, responsive**
- Ready for incoming signals!
- Lying down, TAKING A BREAK
- Soft faces and bodies, wiggly
- Belly rubs!
- Lying down, OFFERING belly, soft and wiggly body
- This is a positive memory!
- Responding to handler and environment, free and easy body movement

**Frozen, unresponsive**
- Tucked in, staying very still
- Lying down, OVERWHELMED ("Flooded")
- "whale eye" Ears pinned
- Tense face and body
- Lying down, FORCEFULLY RESTRAINED to have belly exposed - stiff scared
- Staying very STILL, guarded posture
- It's useless.
- Overwhelmed, unresponsive and avoidant
- Tail tucked

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**Body Language References**
eileenanddogs.com/2013/11/21/shut-down-dogs-part-2/
https://paws4udogs.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/belly-rub-redux/
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**THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS**

**RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)**
- Offensive Aggression - lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive Aggression - hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.

**RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)**
- Flight - ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret - tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.

**YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)**
- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.

**YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)**
- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.

**GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)**
- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.

**GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)**
- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but lips loose, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.

**GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)**
- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but loose lips, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.

**GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)**
- A: Sleeping.
- B: Neutral - ears in neutral position, not perked forward, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed but lips relaxed, body loose, tail carriage neutral, pupils normal dilation.
- C: Friendly greeting - slow back and forth tail and butt wag, ears just slightly back, relaxed brow and eyes, may have mouth slightly open with relaxed lips and loose tongue.

[www.fearfreepets.com](http://www.fearfreepets.com)
8 Key Points of Observation

1. Overall body posture
   - Loose and wiggly or tense and stiff? Upright or crouched? Leaning toward or away?

2. Hair coat
   - Standing on end or lying normally against body?

3. Eyes
   - Looking at or away? Pupil size? Eyes wide or squinty? Hard stare or soft gaze?

4. Ears
   - Flattened down or held naturally? Forward, sideways, or neutral position?

5. Mouth
   - Open or closed? Loose or tense? Teeth showing? Panting? Lip licking?

6. Tail
   - Tightly tucked or held away? If wagging, stiffly or loosely—high/low?

7. Vocalizing?
   - High- or low-pitched bark? Whine? Growl? Hiss, yowl, meow, purr?

8. Animal in Context
   - What's the situation? Seeking or avoiding contact? Specific stressors?