

## In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Fearful Behavior

*Protocol to be used for shelter dogs that exhibit fearful behavior. These dogs may appear frightened of new people, new experiences and/or the shelter environment in general.*

Dogs who exhibit fearful behavior may be genetically fearful or they may not have been socialized well as puppies or they have had scary encounters with people, other dogs or novel experiences in the past. The worse cases are those for whom all three contributing factors are at play. It will be impossible for you to know which of these factors are contributing to the dog's fear.

The scary shelter environment is not conducive to helping a fearful dog so the best option for these dogs is to find a foster home or to get the dog adopted quickly.

If a foster home cannot be found stress reduction procedures should be implemented immediately. These include:

- consider an office foster (housing the dog 24/7 in an office)
- if above is not possible provide some time in an office or real-life room during the day
- kennel placement should be in the quietest area of the shelter
- have a crate inside the kennel (door removed) to provide a hiding place
- hang visual barriers on the cage front
- play calming music in the kennel (i.e., Through a Dog's Ear)
- Adaptil calming pheromone collar
- Thundershirt (20-30 min per day) if dog allows handling
- consider anti-anxiety medication (as per veterinarian) if indicated

The fearful dog should also receive special human attention while at the shelter. At least two staff/volunteers should work with the dog daily. The below list of strategies should be worked through by each person. Each session should only last 5 minutes (at least to start – longer sessions are fine when the dog is feeling more comfortable). Several sessions each day is best. How long each of the below steps will take before the dog is comfortable enough to move to the next step depends on the dog. Use good judgement and do not rush the process or overwhelm the dog.

- sit quietly outside of the dog's kennel run ignoring the dog completely
- talk, read, or sing softly to the dog during visits
- toss treats to the dog during visits – working up to the point where the dog is comfortable enough to come to the cage front for the treats and takes them from the person's hand
- once the dog seems comfortable with person – if it is safe (meaning the kennel is large enough and the dog has not exhibited aggressive behavior) - sit quietly inside of cage
- talk, read, or sing softly to the dog during inside kennel visits
- toss treats to the dog while sitting in the kennel
- work up to hand-feeding the dog the treats
- begin to stroke and pet the dog in non-threatening ways (no over the head)
- take the dog to a quiet place outside the kennel and repeat the above steps in this new environment

It is important to go very slowly with these dogs – the key is SLOW, GENTLE and POSITIVE.