

Under-Socialized Dogs

Some dogs come to the shelter, and we believe the dogs are severely under-socialized. They very likely never lived with people before, and so most experiences will be new and scary. Many things we expect dogs to know, they will need to be taught, such as walking on leashes, going potty outside, and even being touched by people. This is more than just nervous or scared. When you get them home, they will not warm up immediately, and will likely be more fearful at first due to the big change in their environment. They will try to dart away from you and hide.

They are food motivated, and with treats can learn to be affectionate with people. Right now, petting them is not comforting, it is scary. They will need to be taught with treats first, that being touched is something that is good. Allow them to come to you at their pace. Start by tossing treats on the ground close to them. When they get up to take them, you can slowly put them closer to you. Once they are comfortable coming close to you, you can hold the treat in your hand and allow them to take it from your hand. Do not attempt to pet them yet. It is important for that they learn that they can approach you to get treats without you petting them. Eventually they will start to seek attention from you. This may take days or even weeks and will not happen right away. Once they start seeking attention, you can slowly start to desensitize them to your touch. Start by offering treats, holding both hands next to each other, with the treat in one hand, so that they brush their chin against your hand to take the treat. Do not move your hand to pet yet. Let them get comfortable with touching you. They should start to leave their head near/touching your hand. When they do this, you can start to slowly pet their chin, giving slow small movements with your fingers.

While you are working with them, look for signs that they are comfortable: tail wagging, holding head held high, ears are forward, approaching you.

Also, look for signs that they are not comfortable: ears are pinned back and tight to the head, tail is tucked, body is crouched and low to the ground, licking lips, lifting a front paw, pulling away from you, freezes or flinches when you touch them, looks away from you and avoids your gaze. If they are showing these signs, you are moving too quickly and should slow down, or even go back a step to where they were comfortable.

New changes in environment will be scary and they will need time and encouragement to get used to everything. It will be important to introduce them very slowly to new things, giving them lots of treats when they approach new things, or enter new places. You should start by keeping them in one room for the first few days and using a crate with a blanket over it to help them have a safe space to relax. Slowly introduce them to new rooms one by one.

It is important to take things slow, and to use food encouragement. If they do not like one treat, use something else. Hot dogs are often a favorite. Smelly, soft treats are often best. Remember, fearful dogs are just as likely to bite as an aggressive dog when their boundaries are pushed.

Below is a more detailed resource for understanding and to help you with training:

<https://www.marinhumane.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Under-Socialized-Dogs.pdf>