

THE INNER DOG



POSITIVE SOLUTIONS FOR NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

For Dogs Reactive to Visitors

1. Your entryway is a place of excitement- for fearful dogs, the ringing of the doorbell or the knock on the door not only signals an intruder, but also the trigger for the fear.
2. DON'T allow your dog to be at or near your entryway; not in it, not in sight of it, not near it.
3. Create a safe place or a 'Zen Room' where your dog can be BEFORE visitors arrive (30 minutes prior to their arrival)
 - a. A room or area away from the front door that is quiet and relaxing
 - b. Play spa music or Through a Dog's Ear music (throughadogsear.com)
 - c. Use calming scents; chamomile, rose petal, lavender, etc.
 - d. Let your dog have a marrow bone, stuffed Kong, bully stick etc.
4. Once your guests have entered your home and have been seated and settled and the initial excitement of their arrival is over, then you can allow your dog to be brought into the room ON LEASH.
 - a. You must be relaxed
 - b. You must be concentrating ONLY on your dog
 - c. Your dog should be wearing a harness with the leash attached to that and not his collar. If the dog becomes reactive and pulls against the leash, the collar begins to restrict his airway and the dog associates what he is afraid of with the restriction, not with the collar. This then only exacerbates the fear.
 - i. Harnesses like the Freedom Harness or Easy Walk are best
 - d. You must watch your dog's body language for signs of stress
 - e. If your dog appears stressed or you think he might be or you are stressed, take him back to his safe place
 - f. Your initial entry to where the guests are is to be at a distance, with treats on the floor and no one paying attention to your dog.
 - g. Only begin to shorten the distance to your guests if your dog is showing calm behavior and even then, shorten the distance slowly.
5. Your guests are to ignore your dog- DON'T TOUCH, LOOK OR TALK to your dog, even if he approaches them to sniff.
 - a. When he is sniffing, he is gathering information that will help him decide if he can cope with the environment: he's NOT looking for interaction from your guests.
6. Praise and reward for calm and appropriate behavior
7. Keep the initial meet and greet short and then return him back to his safe place
8. Repeat at moderate intervals

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9. As your dog gets more comfortable, you can have your guests' toss him treats: friends bearing gifts are a great thing.
10. If your dog appears comfortable AND you or another family member can be paying attention to him only, you can drop the lead but let him wear it in case you have to guide him from the room due to stress. Using your leash instead of grabbing for his collar is less likely to increase his stress level and also be safer if he is stressed.
11. Before your guests get up and move, have them verbally tell you they are going to do so that you can make sure your dog will not feel cornered or be startled. A safe thing for all is for you to take his leash and walk him from the room or to an out of the way area before your guests begin to move around.
12. NEVER reprimand fear; create distance from what makes your dog fearful to lessen the fear. Either remove the fear or your dog, whichever is safest, fastest, easiest.
13. Remember, up to this point, he has always been reactive to visitors and it's gotten him what he wants- for them to go away. NOW however, we begin the process of trying to change his perception, his fear of visitors and the most important way to do that is by creating trust: trust that you won't put him in a bad situation where he feels that he must show reactive behavior in order to make the scary people go away; trust in that visitors can be something good- friends bearing gifts, friends being respectful of his fear; trust that is built over time and with lots of POSITIVE reinforcement, POSITIVE association and POSITIVE repetition.