



Building confidence

Just like us, all dogs are individuals, so some are naturally more confident than others. How confident a dog feels may also be affected by experiences they've had in the past.

It's important to help cautious dogs grow in confidence because dogs that develop anxieties can experience problems and find life extra difficult at times. For more tips please read our handout on **Building Confidence Outdoors**.

Preventing problems

Puppies need to encounter a range of different people, dogs, noises, and experiences during their 'socialisation period' (between about 3 and 12 weeks of age) so they accept them as a normal and positive part of life. This will give them the best chance of coping well and feeling confident in various situations throughout their life.

The introduction of new experiences needs to be gradual and controlled. It's important that puppies are not anxious or fearful when experiencing new things, as this will increase the risk that they will associate the new thing with these negative feelings.

Our Dog Schools across the UK provide the perfect opportunity for puppies to learn these vital skills in their puppy classes.

For your nearest class see dogstrustdogschool.org.uk.

Supporting your dog

Learn to recognise signs of fear or anxiety in your dog. Being able to recognise how your dog is feeling will help you to respond appropriately. Our **Body Language** handout describes signs to look out for.

Try to avoid things that your dog finds scary. Once you can recognise how your dog behaves when they're worried, you can start making a note of the types of environments, situations or interactions that bring about this behaviour.

This could include loud noises, visitors to the house, grooming, or meeting other dogs on walks. Work your way through the list and think about which things can be avoided and how. For example, if your dog is frightened by the Hoover, could you Hoover whilst your dog is outside the house?

If you can easily avoid some of these things do so, however if you can't, think about how to lessen their impact. For example, muffle loud noises by having the radio on, or make the car as comfortable as possible by adding a familiar blanket.

If your dog is frightened, move away from the situation. Getting your dog to "face their fear" could make matters worse, and if they feel they cannot escape a scary situation there is a risk that they may show aggression.

Providing a cosy den at home can help give your dog the option to hide away for some quiet time should they choose to.

Have fun with your dog

Engage your dog in things they enjoy, to build up a bank of positive, confidence-boosting experiences.



Try to do something your dog loves every day, for example:

- practising tricks with reward-based training
- playing hide and seek with treats or toys
- having some quiet time with you
- destroying cardboard boxes (look through your recycling and save anything safe and fun to play with)
- playing a variety of different games, such as tuggy, fetch or with puzzle-toys that release food
- going on walks in areas they enjoy
- playdates with known doggy friends that your dog really likes.



Reward your dog

Always reward brave or investigative behaviour. If your dog is a little nervous but comes forward to sniff something by themselves, or they hear a noise they usually react to but remain relaxed in their bed, this is the perfect time to reward them with praise and extra tasty treats.

Make sure rewards are always given in direct response to your dog's brave behaviour, rather than using a treat to coax them into a scary situation. Luring your dog into a situation that frightens them doesn't remove the fear itself and so can make the problem worse.

Avoid training techniques that cause pain, discomfort, and fear. Using punishment could worsen the problem by making your dog confused about you and even more worried.

Changing your dog's behaviour using positive, reward-based training techniques is much more effective and is great for building a strong bond with your dog. As you'll always be rewarding your dog's 'good' behaviours, they'll enjoy being trained by you and will have greater confidence in you!

Our handout on **Training with Rewards** explains how to do this.

If your dog is struggling

You may need professional support to help your dog to overcome established fears, especially if they are easily triggered or cause aggressive behaviour.

You should also consider seeing a qualified behaviourist if your dog is experiencing high levels of general anxiety, for example, if they show a fearful reaction to a wide range of things or seem constantly 'on edge' and unable to relax.

First speak to your vet to check your dog is in good health. Your vet will then be able to refer you to a qualified behaviourist.

For advice on sourcing a behaviourist please visit:

dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/behaviour/finding-behaviour-and-training-support

Contacts for further support

We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust dog please email:

postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:

dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.