

ANXIOUS PUPPIES

New research shows that anxious, timid puppies often become anxious, fearful adult dogs and are more prone to separation anxiety, social anxiety and even fear-related aggressive behavior. Shyness is an inherited trait which can be made better or worse depending on how a puppy is raised and trained. The sooner we know that a puppy will be anxious or fearful the more we can do to keep shyness from becoming a much more serious problem later on.

When a puppy first visits the veterinarian at 8-16 weeks of age, 90% of the time we will see the following behaviors:

- It will be actively exploring the exam room

- It will be silent and it won't be panting or whining

- It will ignore the veterinarian for the most part and will be passive for the examination

- It's ears will be in a normal position – not flat back in submission

- There will be no yawning or lip licking, both of which are signs of anxiety

- The whites of the eyes won't be visible

Anything that deviates from this normal pattern is cause for concern.

Normal human behavior and responses can make anxiety worse. It is instinctive for us to hold and cuddle a child or a pet who is frightened. Unfortunately, this will sometimes make the issue worse because when we do that we are rewarding the fearful behavior instead of calm, relaxed behavior. It is difficult to train yourself to reward a puppy who is being brave but it's very helpful to do so. Praise whenever your puppy is exploring its surroundings or new people and try to ignore the puppy when it is hiding or cowering.

Socialize your puppy as much as possible. This means exposing the puppy to as many people and experiences as possible, with lots of praise and rewards. Keep to a regular, predictable schedule as much as possible. Even changing the puppy's feeding schedule on the weekends can make him or her more anxious.

Provide lots of play and mental stimulation – this usually means a puppy socialization class either here or at a humane society or training facility and obedience class when the puppy gets a little older. This will help you to learn to be consistent with praise and corrections and gets the puppy more exposure to different people and pets. Consistency is important because puppies, like children, get confused and worried when they are unsure what to expect. In other words, if you ignore him getting on the furniture or jumping up some of the time but correct him at other times he won't know what he's supposed to do or not do.

Training should be reward-based. Punishment worsens fear and anxiety and impairs learning. Nervous dogs should never be trained with choke chains, prong collars or a raised voice. We strongly recommend that you read behaviorist Patricia McConnell's booklet *The Cautious Canine* (about \$6).