

B-6 TIER 2: PROTOCOL FOR DESENSITIZING AND COUNTERCONDITIONING A DOG (OR CAT) FROM APPROACHES FROM STRANGERS

The "Protocol for Desensitizing and Counterconditioning a Dog (or Cat) From Approaches From Strangers" is written primarily for dogs, but the clever client can adapt it for cats. It is intended to be started after "Protocol for Deference: Basic Program" and "Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1" have been successfully completed. This protocol will work for animals that respond inappropriately (fearfully, aggressively, or fearfully aggressively) to either strange animals (primarily dogs) or people. The execution of this protocol requires the cooperation of several people and sometimes another dog or cat. If the dog's problem involves other dogs, a second dog will be required. If the dog is very aggressive toward or fearful of other dogs, the first dog that works with this one should preferably be one to which this dog is accustomed and to which it does not respond. Later another dog, generally one not in the household, will be required.

It is best to set these tasks up in a T-shaped hallway. If you do not have a T-shaped hallway, the dog can be placed in a room off a hall. The point of this physical restriction is to allow the dog, even when using its peripheral vision, to see a stranger for only a brief moment at the outset of the protocol. A momentary glimpse lessens the dog's anxiety and allows the desensitization techniques emphasized in Tier 1 to be used.

Ask the dog to sit and stay, or to lie down and stay if this is more relaxing for the dog, in the doorway or hall. Have the dog facing the hallway where the person or dog will approach. The further the dog is from the door or hall, the less the dog will be able to see of the approaching stranger, and the more momentary any glimpse of the person or dog will be. Use this. If your dog is very anxious, move the dog far away from the approacher. Only when your dog has become relaxed at this long distance should you gradually move it closer to the approacher and repeat the tasks described in this protocol. As soon as your dog sits, stays, and relaxes, reward it with a small treat. Make sure that what you are rewarding is that the dog remained relaxed and was attentive to you. As the stranger passes, the dog is permitted to quickly glance at the stranger but should not react inappropriately or anxiously by putting his hair up, whining, growling, barking, trembling, salivating, or looking distressed. At all times the dog should look happy and look at you adoringly. If the dog looks at the approacher for more than a moment, as soon as you say the dog's name (in a happy, upbeat voice), the dog should look at you and be relaxed. Remember that a tone of voice that conveys that you are worried for the dog or angry that the dog is not instantaneously responding only increases the dog's anxiety. If you approach this task gradually, the dog will eventually respond instantaneously; it just may be unable to do so right at the outset.

The dog must look at your face and eyes—not at the food rewards. Once the dog does not react at all, you can make the rewards intermittent, but at the outset you need to reward the dog for its constant attention. Be very quick with the food rewards: as soon as the dog responds to your call or voice command, give the reward. The potentially anxiety-provoking event—the movement of the approacher—should be timed to coincide with and take place during the reward phase of the exercise. The following tasks can be varied by having the stranger approach the dog from the front

and from the back, but you should start with the dog facing you and sitting sideways to the approach of the stranger.

If cooperative strangers are not available or for further practice, these exercises can be performed in shopping centers, parks, or other busy places using fortuitous strangers *if* and only if you have good control over the dog's head and can be confident that it does not pose any risk to the strangers (dog or human). For dogs that need reassurance or a little more restraint, practice these exercises using a head collar. This not only prevents the dog from bolting but also allows you to safely turn the dog's head away from someone else and toward you within the time frame (the first few seconds of the behavioral process) that will allow the dog to learn from and be rewarded for the correction.

These same tasks can be used for dogs that have problems with interdog aggression. Instead of having a stranger walk by, have someone (preferably a person with whom the dog is comfortable) walk by with another dog. Begin the exercises with the strange dog walking next to the wall in the hall. This places the approaching dog as far away as possible from the one with the problem *and* uses the person as a buffer and signal to relax for the dog with the problem. After all tasks have been successfully and calmly completed the first time, repeat the same exercises with the strange dog walking on the *opposite* side of the person who is walking down the hallway.

If a strange dog is not available, you can first use another dog of your own or use dogs that are behind fences or in the park, leashed. Remember, other dogs may have problems, too, and you not only need to protect other dogs from your dog (use a head halter), but you also want to protect your dog from them. This is often not easy to do if any of the other dogs run free. Use sound judgment and err on the side of caution.

If your dog has problems only with a particular dog or a particular class of dogs, start with a dog or class of dogs with which there is no problem and then gradually begin to use the problem dog. You may need to do so intermittently at first.

You will need the cooperation of other people and dogs to succeed in this protocol. You can get this cooperation by being cautious and ensuring that your dog can injure no one else. Head halters can speed the rate at which the dogs can learn these exercises because they correct the dog before it can become fully upset and experience a cascade phenomenon of inappropriate behavior. Head halters also can provide an extra degree of protection for the approacher dog and should be used for both dogs in all circumstances when the problems exist between the dogs. If you cannot find appropriate strangers (dogs or people) with which to practice the approaches, ask if your veterinarian can set these up in his or her practice. If at first you practice under extremely controlled circumstances (the veterinarian's office), you eventually need to practice under less controlled circumstances.

Again, for each step you are rewarding the dog, not just for not reacting, but also for relaxing and being happy and confident while it does not react. If you have difficulty with any of the following tasks, break them down into simpler, smaller, more manageable tasks. Your dog's behavior will tell you what is manageable. Do not make the dog more fearful. It is better to work for three 5-minute periods that the dog enjoys than for one 15-minute period when the dog becomes distressed.

The intent of this program is to teach the dog that someone can walk quickly up to it, touch it while making noise, and keep going. If the problem is with another dog, the intent is to teach the dog that another dog can pause in front of it, sniff, and then pass without ensuing problems.

Dog's Task

The dog sits, stays, and relaxes while:

A stranger passes quietly and quickly down the opposite end of the hall
A stranger passes quietly and at a moderate pace down the opposite side of the hall

A stranger passes at a slow pace down the opposite side of the hall, making a slight noise (i.e., scuffing of feet)

A stranger passes at a slow pace down the opposite side of the hall, making slightly more noise (i.e., the jangling of keys)

A stranger passes quietly and quickly down the center of the hall

A stranger passes quietly and at a moderate pace down the center of the hall

A stranger passes slowly down the center of the hall, making a slight noise

A stranger passes slowly down the center of a hall, making more noise

A stranger passes quietly and quickly down the near side of the hall

A stranger passes quietly and at a moderate pace down the near side of the hall

A stranger passes quietly and at a slow pace down the near side of the hall

A stranger passes at a slow pace down the near side of the hall, making a slight noise

A stranger passes quietly down the near side of the hall, pausing momentarily in the doorway

A stranger passes quietly down the hall, taking one tiny step into the doorway and momentarily pausing

A stranger passes quietly down the hall, taking one brief step into the doorway, pausing briefly, and glancing at the dog

A stranger takes two steps into the doorway

A stranger takes two steps into the doorway and briefly pauses

A stranger takes two steps into the doorway, briefly pauses, and glances at the dog

A stranger takes three steps into the doorway

A stranger takes three steps into the doorway and briefly pauses

A stranger takes three steps into the doorway, briefly pauses, and glances at the dog

A stranger walks quietly and quickly through the doorway and passes the dog

A stranger walks quietly and quickly past the dog, and reaches slightly toward the dog

A stranger walks quietly and quickly past the dog and briefly reaches close to the dog

A stranger walks quietly and quickly past the dog, briefly reaching slightly toward the dog

A stranger walks moderately quickly past the dog, briefly reaching slightly more toward the dog

A stranger walks at a slow pace past the dog

A stranger walks at a slow pace, briefly reaching toward the dog

A stranger walks at a slow pace, briefly reaching slightly closer toward the dog

A stranger walks at a slow pace, briefly pausing next to the dog

A stranger walks at a slow pace, briefly pausing next to the dog and glancing at it

A stranger briefly pauses next to the dog, glances at it, and reaches slightly toward it

A stranger briefly pauses, glances, and reaches slightly more toward the dog

A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 5 seconds

Comments about response or difficulty

- A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 10 seconds
- A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 20 seconds
- A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 30 seconds
- A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 45 seconds
- A stranger pauses and looks at the dog (*do not stare*) for 1 minute
- A stranger pauses next to the dog for 1 minute then reaches slightly toward the dog
- A stranger pauses for 1 minute and reaches closer to the dog, almost touching it
- A stranger pauses for 1 minute, reaches closer to the dog, and touches it
- A stranger pauses for 1 minute, reaches down, and pets the dog

For Future Repetitions

- Repeat all tasks in different locations.
- Repeat all tasks with all family members.
- Repeat all tasks with only every second or third task being rewarded with a treat. (Remember praise!)
- Repeat with only intermittent treat reinforcement. (Remember praise!)

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs that otherwise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it *in addition* to the behavior modification, not instead of it.