

Marie's Den by Kelly Alver  
Help! My Dog Is Afraid of Men

There are several reasons why dogs may be afraid of men. As a puppy, the dog may not have been exposed to men often enough and is not familiar with them. Without realizing it, some men exhibit natural behavior that can appear threatening to a dog. Men often stand tall with their arms out to their sides, look directly into a dog's eyes, or wear baseball caps that hide their eyes. Men aren't intentionally trying to scare a dog in these scenarios, however some dogs may react to these situations with fear. Another possibility is that the dog could have been abused or previously frightened by a man. Whatever the case may be, there are steps you can take to help desensitize your dog to men.

For puppies, proper socialization is critical, particularly within the first four months of life. Puppies need to interact with a variety of people, environments and other animals to help them become comfortable in all types of settings. It's important that puppies are provided an opportunity to meet plenty of men, women and children in a safe, positive manner. The more people and places a puppy experiences, the more likely the puppy will grow into a confident, well-adjusted dog. Dogs also need regular socialization throughout their lives, so continue to expose your dog to a range of diverse people and situations.

Introducing dogs to men gradually will help desensitize them. The goal is to enable the dog to gain trust – and restore its confidence – by ensuring a positive interaction with men. This work takes time. Use your dog's favorite treats and praise for positive reinforcement. Some good choices include hot dogs, cheese and chicken. It's important to associate pleasant things with your dog's experiences with men, so don't punish your dog for being afraid because this can make him/her even more fearful. Instead, have your dog focus on you when a man enters the room. Place a treat in your hand for your dog to see and smell. Keep your dog's attention by waiting a few moments before releasing the treat – this will help the dog maintain focus on you rather than on the man.

Other activities include having a man take care of the dog's daily needs: feeding, grooming, exercise and affection. If a man can feed the dog regularly and spend time each day working with the dog, either by taking a walk on a leash or through other training exercises (using your dog's favorite food rewards), the dog will eventually develop positive associations.

Most fears won't go away by themselves, and if left untreated, may worsen, so talk to your veterinarian and/or animal behaviorist about your dog's fear. Dogs with severe aversion to men typically have other issues as well. Our Companions' dog trainers can put together a behavioral plan with several options, to work with you and your dog to overcome its fears. ##