



### The Fear Period

Puppies go through a phase in their development that is known as the "fear period". Some puppies seem to show more evidence of this than others. For example, a puppy who has been gregarious, outgoing, confident and happy to explore new things, suddenly shies backwards from a new object/person/noise/dog, puts his tail down, hides behind you, or lays down submissively. You think to yourself "This is out of character! I hope he isn't developing some kind of weak temperament." Rest assured, the fear period is a real phenomenon and with your help, your pup will get past it. Fear periods usually last 1-2 weeks.

There are steps you should take to help your puppy in this formative time. While most pups outgrow this sudden reversal of character, you do not want to inadvertently reward this type of behavior, nor do you want to overwhelm the puppy.

The fear period can vary, but it generally occurs in the 9-12 or (even as late as 12-14 week) time frame. There are actually several fear periods, but not every puppy shows signs during each. (For example; 9 weeks old, 5 months old, 12 months old, coming 2 years old.) During this time, take cues from your puppy. If he seems suddenly reticent to greet new people, when he was happy to greet ANYONE a week ago, do not coddle him, do not praise his shyness, or offer a safety net. This tells him he is right to be afraid. Ignore puppy when he backs off or hides. Try to get the person to kneel down, speak in the sweet happy dog voice, and perhaps offer a treat. (Not staring at puppy while doing so.) If puppy approaches, THEN you can praise, "Ohhh look, the nice person has a cookie for you!! Good puppyyyy."

If puppy has begun to react to cars on walks, or stationary objects, simply make very little fuss when he backs up or shakes or barks fearfully, & praise puppy for conquering his fear and agreeing to step forward, or walk by such monsters.

This is not a good time to overwhelm your puppy. Don't suddenly bring him to a crowded city to walk for the first time right now. Don't plunk him in the midst of 6 strange dogs at a play group, where owners are not being vigilant about how their dogs are allowed to greet. Don't have a noisy party so all your friends can see puppy.

Puppy Kindergarten is a better choice for meeting other pups - it offers more structure and supervision. If your dog is shy at puppy K, ignore his attempts to Velcro himself to you, and praise any attempts at joining and playing or approaching others.

One of my exceptionally confident males had an unusually sensitive fear period. Overnight, he became fearful of all dogs, new people, and objects he had not previously encountered. It was MY first experience with a puppy having an extreme fear period. I took him with me to places where I knew he could meet a couple people, quietly, not overwhelmed. I brought him to a friend's home, where he had already visited, pre fear, to play with her well behaved and puppy tolerant dogs. I ignored him when he ran to hide at my legs, and I encouraged him for chasing balls and Frisbees with the others. At first, he shook, stayed against me, clawed at me to pick him up, and shrieked if a dog came in his direction! He would improve after a few minutes of playing... but the next day he reacted as if he had never seen the dogs before,, and we were back at Square one ! Socialization continued, but in a very structured way.

After almost two weeks of this behavior, he suddenly returned to his former (obnoxiously) confident self!

- Praise appropriate behavior and ignore inappropriate behavior. No huge corrections, just ignore.
- Continue Socializing, and try to do so in controlled situations, and situations that the puppy has already been comfortable with. Do not do a lot of new things while puppy is in this phase.
- Do not overwhelm puppy by attending an event with too many people. Dogs, stimuli at once.
- Do not unnecessarily scare puppy during this time, as it can affect his ideas on particular things for his whole life. All it takes is one bad

experience with a dog attacking him to change puppy's behavior long term or even permanently.

- Continue exercise, training, and play.

Remember, once you have safely passed the fear period and your puppy is happy, gaining confidence, has attended puppy Kindergarten, and is growing up... your work is NOT finished. It is of the utmost importance that you continue to socialize your puppy/young adult dog. It is NEVER enough to socialize and expose puppy to life and the World only as a baby, then leave him at home for two years and act bewildered when he begins to react to new dogs, strangers, new places. You should make it a rule for puppy to go new places and see new people as he grows up and matures. As your training progresses, you can test your mastery of commands and good behavior by asking puppy to walk on leash as you stroll through a crowd or on a beach. Make sure to continue taking your dog to other places, having him meet other pups/dogs when appropriate, and having other pups/dogs come visit at home.