





# Fear of Men

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Fear of men is a common phenomenon in dogs, especially rescue dogs. Sometimes this manifests as the dog running and hiding, but often it causes more concerning behavior like growling and barking. It can be really hurtful when the new dog is afraid of one of the adoptive family members, but it's important not to take it personally and do our best to help our new pet work through his fear and teach him that the men in his life just want to love and cherish him forever! Lets go over some of the potential causes of this specific type of fear as well as ways to solve it.

-  **ABUSE.** Much of the time, when someone reaches out to me because their dog is fearful of men, they automatically assume that the dog must have at one point been mistreated by a man. While certainly not the most common reason for fear of men, abuse or mistreatment by a man can cause a dog to generalize that fear to all men. Usually in abuse cases the fear is situational rather than general and a behaviorist can often determine whether the dog suffered abuse or not.
-  **TRAUMA, but not in an abusive incident.** Sometimes the fear is caused because a man is interacting with the dog when something traumatic happens. This could be that the dog is lost and scared and a male was the one to catch the dog, or maybe a man is holding the dog and a firework goes off nearby. In these cases, the man was not mistreating the dog, but the situation was scary and the dog associated the presence of the man with that scary incident.
-  **LACK OF SOCIALIZATION.** Socialization is incredibly important for young puppies. They need to be exposed to all manner of new things in a positive way while they are going through their big windows of social development. If they are not exposed to a multitude of men in a good way, then often fear is a default behavior. Especially if a puppy is genetically predisposed towards being shy or fearful, a lack of good socialization can

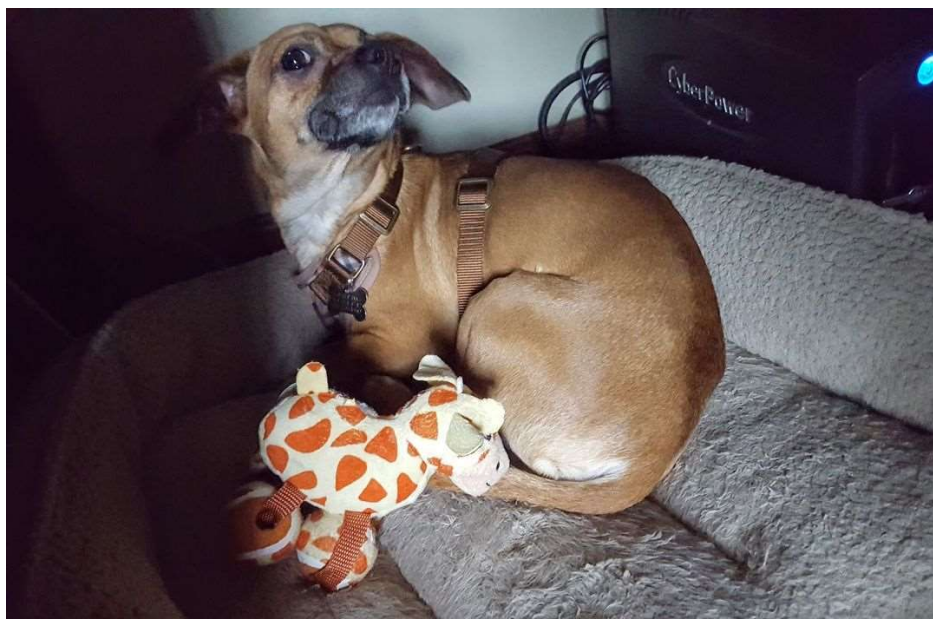
have lifelong fearful consequences. This is likely the MOST common reason for fear of men.

-  **PERCEPTION OF DANGER.** This category combines a number of different theories that men just appear more dangerous than women to dogs, even if their intention is kindness and love.
  - A recent study shows that even when standing still, men appear to be moving forward, possibly because of their higher center of gravity and the way that affects their posture. Feeling like they're always being approached by someone can be scary for a timid dog, even if that person is not actually approaching!
  - Men often have wider jaws than women. A wide jaw is often associated with a stronger bite force. This can make men seem more dangerous.
  - Men often have a deeper voice than women. Deep voices are often scarier to dogs and associated with something that is larger and potentially more dangerous.
  - Men are often taller than women. For small dogs especially, those extra few inches can count.
  - Men have more testosterone, which is a hormone that is associated with aggression. When we sweat and breathe, our bodies excrete a lot of different things, and its thought that dogs can smell the increased testosterone in a man's sweat and react to that. They can tell when we have cancer and low blood sugar, so this is definitely not out of the range of their capabilities.

## Solving Fear

So, now that we've discussed some reasons why men might be feared by pups, how can we solve the issue?

- Understand subtle fearful body language. Often, humans miss the little signals our dogs give to show that they are uncomfortable. When we miss these, the dog feels like they aren't being heard and so they resort to "louder" forms of communication like growling, barking, and snapping. Forcing interactions when the pup is giving these lower level signals is a common reason for an escalation of defensive behavior. Things to watch out for include:
  - Wide eyes
  - Avoidance behavior or moving their head/body away
  - Side-eyed staring
  - Stiff body posture
  - Tightly closed mouth
  - Furrowed brows
  - Making body posture as small as possible



This dog is showing classic fearful behavior. He is making himself small and leaning away from the camera. He is looking out the side of his eyes and you can see the whites (whale eye). His brows are furrowed and his mouth is tightly closed.

- ✓ Make every interaction with men a positive, enjoyable thing. Fearful dogs often don't like being approached, even to be petted or given treats. Have the men stay at a distance and toss good things to the pup. Man appears = tasty goodies and no forced encroachment into my comfort zone! Do not make the dog approach the man to get the food. Often the fear experienced while approaching is not outweighed by the benefit of the treat and the overall interaction is viewed as negative by the dog.
- ✓ Remove as many of the "Perceptions of Danger" as you can. Have the man make himself small by sitting or laying on the floor. If his side is facing the dog, the dog cant get the perception that the man is approaching when standing still. Have the man talk in as high pitched and quiet voice as they can. Then toss the treats like above and invite the dog over rather than approaching the dog.
- ✓ Have the men of the household perform all of the "good" doggie chores. This means feeding, walking, playing, etc. Dont force a close encounter, but by having the men provide for the dog all of the best things the dog loves, they will soon realize that the man = provider of good things, not scary or fearful things. This means that the women and children of the house should avoid doing these things as much as possible.
- ✓ Time. Time is a big factor. For a dog with trust issues that has either a past history of scary events, no history of good events, or has a perception of danger about a man's smell or appearance, it is going to take time for them to overcome that. Don't rush the relationship! Take it slow and let the dog learn at their pace. Rushing things will just overwhelm the pup and create a fearful experience, which will make training go backwards.
- ✓ Take arguments away from the dog or remove the dog from a tense situation. If a dog has a fear of men and a perception of danger around them, being around a man that is arguing can be a very negative experience. Even if the argument is at the TV over a bad referee job, the

dog wont understand the difference. Preventing bad experiences is one of the most important steps to overcoming this fear!

Slow and steady wins the race. Dogs that are dealing with fear issues have a lot to overcome. We often don't know a rescue dog's past and what may have caused their specific fears. Making a good first impression and slowly teaching the dog that they can lower their barriers and trust that men will mean good things for them will help new relationships blossom!