

ARE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO YOUR MASTIFF'S SHYNESS - Jeanne A. Cook

Everyone has heard of the importance of socializing your pup/dog, but unless these situations are handled correctly, you may be praising your pup for his shyness and making things worse. This is multiple choice; what has your reaction been to these situations?

SITUATION 1: When you take him to the vet's office, he slithers into the waiting room and lays under or behind your chair with apprehension.

YOUR REACTION:

- a) Soothe him by petting and talking to him under your chair.
- b) Put him on a "sit-stay" beside your chair.
- c) Look surprised and tell other people watching he's never acted like this before.

SITUATION 2: On your walk around the neighborhood, you meet a friendly neighbor who admires your dog. Your dog keeps backing up a foot at a time in apprehension.

YOUR REACTION:

- a) Keep backing up with him, soothing and reassuring by petting and talking to him.
- b) Hold your ground, keeping him on a "sit-stay" beside you.
- c) Suddenly remember your roast in the oven and rush home, vowing never to take him out again.

SITUATION 3: When a new friend comes to your house, your pup runs under the kitchen table, hiding and growling.

YOUR REACTION:

- a) Sit under the table with him, talking and petting to reassure and soothe him.
- b) Put him on a "sit-stay" in the middle of your living room with your friend seated.
- c) Explain to your friend that he is a protective watch dog and is therefore very leary of people.

SOLUTION TO ALL THREE SITUATIONS: b) Put him on a "sit-stay". Teach him what you expect from him. Using your leash and collar, insist that he stay not only in the sitting position, but also at that spot on the floor, and not a foot away from where you left him. Be assertive. This keeps his mind on you and pretty soon he will realize that nothing horrible really happened to him. He will begin building trust in you and relaxing. Place him away from furniture, walls, fences, etc. Show him he can find the confidence to sit in the middle of the room, and not beside or under things to gain reassurance. And don't forget to lavishly praise him for the correct behavior.

Remember, he interprets your soothing voice and petting as praise. NEVER PRAISE HIM DURING UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR. People often touch and pet their dogs without thinking about it when they are nervous. Be conscious of your responses to your dog's actions in all new situations. You will do him no favors by allowing him to slink and withdraw; it will only reinforce his fear.

For incentive to solve this problem now, if enforcing a "sit-stay" seems difficult with your pup, just picture the scene when he's gained a hundred pounds.