

Treat Retreat

INTRODUCING GUESTS TO NERVOUS DOGS

Setting up an introduction

If you have a nervous dog, you want to give them opportunities to figure out that guests can be a positive experience while preventing stress. Nervous dogs do not need to meet everyone who comes over! Have a plan in place for how to manage your dog when you have guests over. A great solution is to have your dog in another room with a food toy and some background noise on.

When you have a guest over that you want your dog to meet, treat retreat is a great game to practice. We don't want to have guests feed nervous dogs from their hand, because the dogs will approach for the food and then realize they're too close. This increases stress rather than reducing it. Instead, we have the guest throw a treat behind the dog to offer the dog two rewards (food and distance from the scary thing).

Safety Considerations

Safety should always be a big consideration when introducing a nervous dog to new people. It's best to start this game with your dog behind a gate or on leash so they cannot approach your guest.

Make sure your guest knows not to try to pet your dog or stick their hand out. Dogs don't need a hand in their face to be able to smell someone (and it's quite rude in terms of dog body language!). This game is about forming a positive association with people, and if your dog approaches a person to smell them and they suddenly get a hand in their face, that will likely strengthen their fear of approaching guests in the home.

Watch your dog's body language and advocate for them. If your dog is getting stressed or your guest is having trouble following your instructions, end the game and put your dog away.



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1. Have your guest loaded up with big, easily visible treats. It can be best to have your guest sitting and avoiding prolonged eye contact with your dog.
2. The guest tosses a treat behind your dog.
3. After your dog finishes the treat, wait. If they take even one step forward, the guest can throw another treat behind them.
4. Repeat this for a few minutes. Your dog is always setting the pace of this game. Avoid prompting or calling your dog forward after they eat the treat.

