



Habituation for dogs...

Start as early as possible

All dogs need to learn about the environment they live in.

If they don't, they can have problems coping with many situations, including simple things like being left for short periods.

This can lead to unwanted behaviours, such as chewing, howling and barking at things they are afraid of.

Ideally this learning should begin when that are 12 weeks old, but if they don't have it, it's never too late to start.

Our environment is generally very busy, dangerous and frightening. When dogs aren't used to our world, they can react with a 'fight or flight' response.

This reaction is difficult to cope with, and really needs resolving. Otherwise related fears and anxieties can become very much worse.

Every dog needs to experience the world around them, it's a basic requirement for building confidence.

It also helps to remove insecurities and allows dogs to live a relaxed and happy life.

Take it slow to start

If you have a dog that is nervous of any situation, then taking them out and about to experience the world can be a big help to boosting confidence in other areas.

Shopping centre car parks are a good place to start. You can begin by walking them round the quieter areas, moving to the busier areas and times as their confidence increases.

It is important that you don't react to them unless they are coping with things that are going on around them.

Then it is best to give them quiet but confident praise, either a quick stroke or a really special treat, that they don't normally get, such as a tasty training treat or sausage.

Giving rewards little and often is the fastest way to gain benefit from this strategy.

It is better that they stay in a situation for 2 minutes and don't have any reaction to things, rather than stay for 10 minutes and be end up reacting to their fears.

Build slowly in stages

It is best to take things really slowly with this exercise. This is about getting them used to things going on around them, it is not intended to overcome specific fears.

Once they can cope with the quieter areas of the car park, you can walk closer to the busier parts, always ensuring that they are happy and reasonably confident to get closer to busier places.

If they become scared then simply go back to the stage you were at before, and repeat that until you feel they can cope with a little more pressure.

Once they are happy with a car park it is important that you take them to other places, so they can gain more experience of life. Any public place where there are activities they can cope with, is good.

Other areas

The basis of this exercise should be applied to all other areas of a dog's life.

Introduce them to the more frightening household events such as hoovering and grass cutting.

It is important not too make a fuss, this is an every day occurrence and that is the feeling that you need to convey.