



Overcoming Fear for dogs...

Fear can be a big problem to overcome. It is a very basic instinct that is there to keep us all safe from danger.

When dogs are scared, they can literally fear for their lives. The best way to prevent fear is to ensure that dogs are exposed to absolutely every stimulus that they may come into contact with, during their lives.

Gentle exposure

The best way to overcome fear, is to gently expose dogs to the things they are frightened of. The exposure needs to be frequent and short, and must never cause more fear than is already there.

The best way to achieve this is to expose them to their fear in very small doses, little and very often.

For instance, if a dog is afraid of thunder or fireworks, take them outside for a few seconds but repeat this every 15 to 20 minutes. Overcoming their fear can take anything from one day to several months, but eventually there should be a changed reaction to the exposure.

Either they will accept the noises and not worry about them too much, or they may accept that it is safer to stay out of the way. Either way, exposing them to the source of their fear should produce a situation that is far more manageable.

An owner's attitude and reactions are very important while solving this problem. They should never overly reassure a dog when they are anxious. They should also understand that fear takes over entirely.

Dogs will not respond in the same way that they would normally. This may appear to make them disobedient or obstinate, it is extremely important that owners do not react to this negatively.

Working through the fear

The best attitude to adopt is to think that owners are a part of solving the fear and that they are doing it together. This can be very difficult but if you introduce any more anxiety, this will only increase the fear.

While they are frightened, dogs will learn very little, all they will be concentrating on is relieving the fear. As the fear subsides, they will start to learn from the experience.

This is why we need to expose them to the fear for short periods, so they can have positive experiences as the fear subsides.

The ideal situation is to aim for a time where the fear can subside while the stimulation is still present. That way, they should overcome it reasonably permanently.

If their fear is so great that this isn't going to happen then the next best thing is to realise that going to a safe place makes the fear subside.

It is impossible to say how each dog will react to being fearful of things but repeated short exposure to the source is the best way to start looking for a solution that suits them.

A word about drugs

In some instances, owners may be advised to use drugs to help overcome fear. This is never an ideal situation, as drugs can only mask the problem, they can never resolve it.

It could be argued that drugs are useful for a one off situation, where fear needs to be reduced.

If a dog is continually subjected to a fear stimulus, the only long term solution is to overcome it or teach them to seek a safe haven from the fear.