



# Building Confidence Outdoors

'Walkies' should be an enjoyable part of everyday life, getting out and about together to play, have fun and explore, but the big wide world can cause some dogs to become worried! There can be many reasons for this, such as the sound and movement of traffic, noises, people and other dogs for example. Don't worry if your dog does seem reserved, as there are lots of ways to help them to enjoy walks, and you'll be helping their confidence to grow at the same time!

## Safety first!

If you find that you are having to reduce time outdoors because your dog appears scared, then it's okay to stop walks completely, or head straight home once they've been to the toilet. If they ever don't want to leave the house, then don't make them. You'll risk them panicking when they really need to know they can trust you! Instead, seek the help of qualified professionals – your vet first, to make sure there isn't a medical cause, and then a behaviourist! And don't worry, there's lots you can do to keep your dog active and exercised inside the home and garden – our ENRICHMENT hand-out has some useful, easy and fun ideas!

## Short and Sweet

You want your dog to always be happy, so if they only enjoy the first few minutes then it's perfectly okay to keep walks this short for now. If you have a garden then start here, spending time outside doing fun things such as scattering food and playing with toys. Make sure your dog can always choose to come back inside if they want to and respect their choice – they know how they feel! Come inside with them and carry on the games indoors, and they might feel more confident next time!

## Plan for success

Darkness or bad weather might be making your dog worried, that a scary thunderstorm is coming for example, so walk during daylight and dry weather.

Plan where you're going! Head for quieter areas where not much is happening that might take them by surprise.

Don't feel pressured to have your dog interact with other dogs if they're worried by them. It won't make them feel better as they'll feel out of control. It's okay for them to play with you instead if they prefer to stay away from other dogs. Be prepared to politely ask people not to touch your dog if they want to and if your dog is worried – your dog needs you to help them feel safe. Explain that your dog is a little nervous and they can help by admiring them from afar! Help your dog out by keeping your distance from any sort of activity that might worry them, and they'll feel safer!

If your dog seems scared of anything then they'll be much happier getting away from it. Calmly lead them away and try to distract them with your attention, treats and toys. If you can't distract your dog and they remain scared, then calmly head home to safety.

## Have Fun!

Doing fun activities outdoors that your dog LOVES at home will help them learn to enjoy being outside. Bring your dog's favourite toys with you and have a game!

You can start close to home, or by the car if you've driven to the park, and just play, have fun, then go home again – then gradually build up to walking a little further then playing!

Use extra tasty treats to run through tricks your dog already knows so they can be confident they'll get them right! Play food-chasing or catching games, or trail treats along the ground to encourage them to sniff them out. This can keep them distracted from anything scary, build confidence and make them happy!



If your dog doesn't want to eat or play outside, then where you are might just be a little too scary for them. Lead them away to somewhere quieter and less distracting and try again. Following this advice should build your dog's confidence steadily and your walks can gradually become longer, with more variety. However, at any point should you feel that your dog's confidence is deteriorating, or they are generally scared a lot of the time, then contact your vet to ask for a referral to a behaviourist as they might need a little extra support.

Every dog is unique! Use your dog's **FAVOURITE** things to make them feel extra special and happy when they are outdoors!

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The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice.

Registered Charity Number: 20057978