

# Working with Shelter Dogs

What Type of Dog do you have?



Shut Down, Overly fearful	Shy, Nervous, Fearful, Timid	Practically Perfect	High Volume, Excitable	Highly Reactive, Out-of-Control
Need to build trust with these dogs	Build distance slowly Use woman's card Lots of patience Celebrate small wins	Follow typical training guidelines Vary treats Most Practically	Calm Confidence with these guys Sit can help calm them Use man card	Will need to repeat yourself with these guys Use man card

Dogs that need extra behavior help typically fall into one of two categories:

- Anxious, Shy, Broken
- Over-the-top, pushy, rude

Although there are similarities in training and relationship-building in the different types, the initial way we meet and work with them and our day-to-day interactions are very different – and crucial to create lasting change.

**Anxious, Shy, broken dogs** are also typically soft dogs. If they were people they'd be the quiet ones, the shy ones the ones that are happy working by themselves and living alone.

Although many individuals tell us they've had and helped broken or shy dogs before the truth of the matter is very few people work on the front-lines of animal welfare, as we do. The dogs they've come across are typically people friendly or at least willing to trust.

Another factor we're dealing with is that these dogs are still in a shelter – if they were kids they'd be in a foster home – no one person is looking out for them, therefore they still have to look out for themselves. Let's face it when our defenses are up, we are typically not our best selves. I've found the same to be true for dogs.

Living in shelter setting also means that as much routine as we try to incorporate into their lives, it's still going to be different from day-to-day. Each of us brings something different to the dogs and therefore the dogs have to be 'on' enough to read and interpret each person that day. One of the basic and crucial tools we use to help these dogs heal is a strong routine and low chaos environment – typically the exact opposite than one that's found in a shelter setting.

## Blue Dogs

- Terrified
- Don't want contact
- Not motivated by treats

**Give them Space!** These are the dogs we sit with over and over again - *without trying to pet* – dropping and leaving treats

**Be Patient.** Show them you don't have an agenda except to be there for them

**Be their Advocate.** Take their side – if talking to someone about them, enter the kennel and sit on their level. Use your body language to communicate



that - you've got their back - and therefore they can start letting their defenses down.

## Green Dogs

- Scared
- Often love contact once trust is created
- Treat motivated

**Curiosity or Fear?** Is the dog guided by fear and therefore too scared to engage with a person or the environment? Or is the dog allowing curiosity to overcome their fear and are they reaching toward new people and experiences?

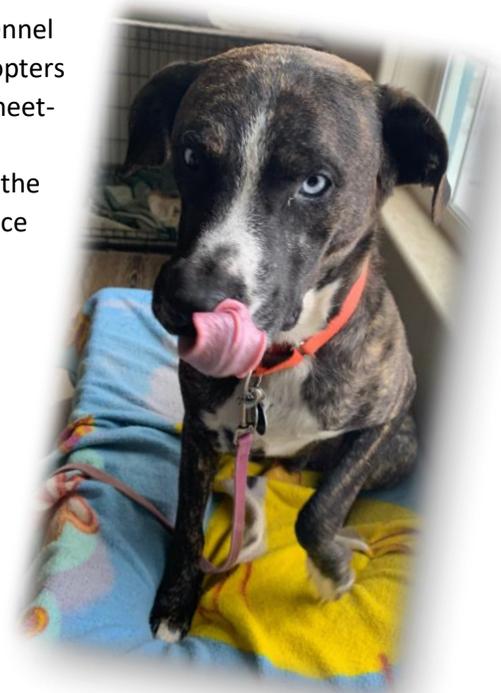
**The goal for these dogs is to get them to let go of their fear and begin engaging with their environment.**

## To help Green Dogs

**Watch Bottlenecks.** These dogs are crazy-aware of tight spaces such as doorways, places that look like there's no way out etc, if you're walking or handling a green dog and they freeze, take a second to scan the environment and determine if something could be causing it. If you can coax them through it, do it. If not (and definitely when first building up a relationship with them) walk them around it or at the very least put your body between the 'scary thing' and them.

**Announce Yourself.** Anticipating what's coming – for people and dogs – is a big deal. If you were a dog and you were sitting in a kennel and all of a sudden the door opens and someone puts a lasso around your neck and pulls you forward, you may resist or at the very least be taken aback. But if instead you're lying there and you hear your name being called and the announcement that it's your turn to go to the yard. You now have a second to stand up and at the very least stretch before walking the conduit of dogs.

**Be their Advocate.** Often we find these dogs warm up quickly to the kennel technicians and volunteer handlers but slower to visitors, potential adopters and seldom-seen-staff. Help them overcome their fears by going into meet-and-greet sessions and staying with them until they've shown they're comfortable with the people. Explain to the people your experience as the dog has learned to trust you and encourage them to visit more than once to see the dog's true personality.



## Have a little extra time in the kennel?

**Blue dogs are driven by fear and not motivated by much we can offer.**

Sit near them, provide tools such as a Thunder shirt, calming oils (StressAway, T-Away, Rescue Remedy), calming drugs (CBD), soft-background music or white noise and as much routine and grounding as possible. Don't try to pet or touch these dogs – everyone does that. Instead sit with them and wait for them to come to you. Let them smell you – don't reach for them when they do! Sit in different directions so they can smell your shoes, your butt (sorry but they're dogs), your head (seriously they want to smell our hair), etc

**Green Dogs – once they trust and are comfortable with you it's time to begin expanding their environment.** It's crucial to do this with someone they trust. Think small. A trip to the exam room is stressful to many dogs. So try walking them in there and sitting on the floor with them while they explore - then grabbing their weight (or a similar benign procedure) and giving them a treat - before walking them back to their kennel. Our dogs rarely go to other parts of our building unless there's a reason, but in reality bringing them and exposing them to different rooms (ones that are safe) or in similar environments for different reasons (medical room for a quick sit, stay exercise then back to their kennel) is a great way to build their confidence and help the dog get their feet under them. Try bringing them into the meet-n-greet room without any people in there and work them for a minute.

Dogs build their confidence just like we do – by taking small wins and building on them – so encourage the dog to sit (no hands, no negativity) then have them repeat it over and over, in different areas, on different beds and floors, etc. Don't encourage these dogs to lie down – instead we need them to reach forward – stretch their necks, stand tall and feel good about themselves. Lots of positive praise – and if you have to do any corrections – small and with as little energy and volume as possible.

## Over-the-Top, Pushy, Rude Dogs



I find that many people (myself incl) have difficulty working with these dogs when we're young because they push-our-buttons so well. They go, non-stop, ignoring seemingly everything we say – causing us to repeat ourselves and get more and more frustrated with each occurrence.

If these dogs were kids, they'd be the ones that would be psyched that they didn't have any parents around and would be taking advantage of the situation. Not bad dogs (or kids) just ones dealing with the stress in a different way, a way doesn't seek human affection to conquer it.

Although I always use treats to establish a relationship (let's face it, most of these dogs have come thru something, letting them know I'm generous is a great way to let them get to know me) I use less for these dogs than anxious dogs. Often these dogs get amped up quickly with too much petting or treats. So it's best to establish how much you're going to use before starting so you don't go over or be a constant PEZ dispenser of treats.

These dogs are the ones that learn how to quickly manage us. So be sure to only give them treats on a variable basis. Switch it up constantly. At first give them a treat as soon as they sit, but the second time they sit wait 2seconds before treating them, then 5seconds and so forth. It's a great way to slow them down too! Also once they're doing sits consistently, give them a treat for one sit then ask for 2 or 3 sits before giving them their next treat – don't be predictable.

**Patience!** These dogs are busy figuring out the world and looking out for themselves. You have to bring something of value to table to make being with you worthwhile for them. Curiosity drives them so consider bringing them new toys/games to play with or checking out new places with them. And be sure to give them time to explore with their noses!

**Calm confidence and Repetition** – Take a breath and accept the fact that these dogs will take a bit longer to work – they're just busy. If you let them amp you up, it'll take even longer. Calm, confidence is key. Breathe! Chances are they've already dealt with unpredictable

And note that you'll be repeating yourself often. Sure that's not perfect, but it's not forever, it's just until we can be a stronger influence in their lives than the environment. And let's face it, in a shelter these dogs are still looking out for themselves - the environment is everything to them until they're adopted by one person/family.

**Slow, Steady - Respect first then Trust** – You'll need to build respect with these dogs to gain their trust. By respect I don't mean show them how heavy-handed humans can be; instead **be consistent, be fair, don't lose your cool or overreact at little things**. Be the solid human they need to see – the one that is a role model to the public.

Often these dogs are **mentally and physically bored**. You can help a lot by expanding their world with games, outings, exercise (a walk is NOT exercise for these dogs, it's a walk that's all) these dogs need to run. Really run, and play without a human correcting them for being vocal - they're typically Rough and Rowdy players!