

TIER 2: PROTOCOL FOR DESENSITIZING AND COUNTER-CONDITIONING A DOG OR CAT FROM APPROACHES FROM UNFAMILIAR ANIMALS, INCLUDING HUMANS

This protocol is written primarily for dogs, but clever clients can adapt it for cats. It is intended to be started *after* the **Protocol for Deference**, the **Protocol for Teaching Your Dog to Take a Deep Breath and Use Other Biofeedback Methods as Part of Relaxation**, and the **Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1** have been successfully completed.

This protocol is intended to help animals who respond inappropriately (with uncertainty, fearfully, aggressively, or fearfully aggressively) to strange animals, primarily dogs, or people. The successful and useful execution of this protocol requires the cooperation of several people and, sometimes, another dog or cat. If your dog's problem involves other dogs, a second dog will be required. If your dog is very aggressive toward or fearful of other dogs, the first dog who works with your dog should be one to whom your dog is accustomed, and with whom he is comfortable or, at least, to whom he does not respond or react. Later, another dog, generally one not a member of the household and who will likely provoke the response we are seeking to treat, will be required.

It is best to set practice of these tasks in a T-shaped hallway. If you do not have a T-shaped hallway, your dog can be placed in a room off a hall, a few meters away from the door or entryway. The point of this physical restriction is to allow the dog, by using his peripheral vision, to see a stranger (the "approacher") for only a brief moment, at first. A momentary glimpse will generally not provoke the dog and so will lessen the dog's anxiety, allowing the desensitization techniques emphasized in **Tier 1** to be used.

Starting This Protocol

Ask the dog to sit and stay, or to lie down and stay, if this is more relaxing for the dog. Reward the dog for sitting or lying

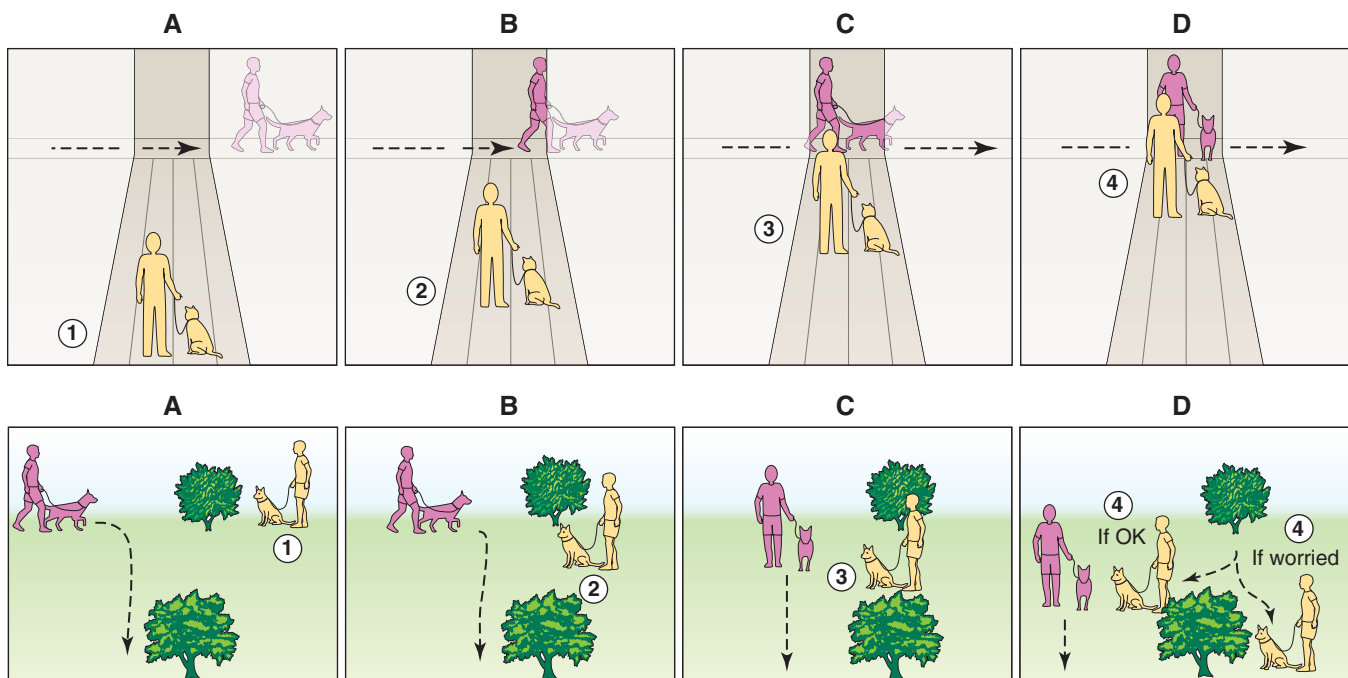
down, being calm and attending to you. Position the dog either in another room or in the stem of the T-shaped hallway. The dog should face the hallway where the person or dog will approach. The greater the distance between the dog and the door, the less the dog will be able to see of the approaching stranger, and the more "momentary" will be any glimpse of this person or dog. *See the accompanying illustration for an example of how to position everyone involved.*

Remember that with desensitization techniques we wish to teach dogs that they will be rewarded if they do not react to the person or animal approaching them. If we start at a level below that at which they will react, we can gradually work up to more challenging interactions.

If your dog is extremely anxious, move him away from the door/hallway and the person or dog acting as the "approacher." In this way, the "approacher" is within your dog's visual field for only a second or two, allowing you to reward him for not reacting. When you are sure that your dog can repeatedly look to you as the "approacher" passes, and truly relax (see the **Protocol for Teaching Your Dog to Take a Deep Breath and Use Other Biofeedback Methods as Part of Relaxation**), knowing that the "approacher" has passed, you can gradually move your dog closer to the door or hall. By moving your dog closer you expand his field of vision and allow him to have a longer period of exposure to the person or animal to whom he reacts.

Make sure that what you are rewarding is the dog remaining relaxed and being attentive to you. This is very different from just rewarding sitting.

As the "approacher" passes, your dog is permitted to quickly glance at him ("Look at that (LAT)" or some variant), but should not react inappropriately or anxiously by putting his hair up, whining, growling, barking, trembling, salivating, or looking distressed. **At all times the dog should look calm and relaxed.**



By asking your dog to take a deep breath and relax you will be able to monitor whether the “approacher” was too stimulating and provocative for the dog.

If your dog looks at the “approacher” for more than a moment, as soon as you say your dog’s name (in a happy, upbeat voice), he should be able to look at you and relax. If he stares at the “approacher”—whether or not the “approacher” is visible—your dog may be concerned.

Things to Remember

Remember that a tone of voice that conveys that you are worried for the dog or angry that he is not instantaneously responding will increase the dog’s anxiety. If you use these exercises in the gradual manner intended, your dog will eventually respond instantaneously to your request and look at you first to learn if the “approacher” is a threat. No distressed dog can do all of this at once in the beginning.

Remember that your dog must look at your face and eyes, not at the food rewards. Once your dog doesn’t react at all you can make the rewards intermittent, but at the outset you will need to reward him every time he looks at you, and then periodically for not reacting.

Practice your timing so that you can deliver the rewards quickly. Ensure that you use your voice to praise him for good behavior as soon as you know that he may have reason to react but did not do so. To do this you will need to anticipate when the “approacher” will cross your dog’s visual field, so communication with the people helping you is important.

Be very quick with the food rewards: As soon as the dog responds to your vocal request, reward him. *The potentially anxiety-provoking event—the movement of the “approacher”—should be timed to coincide with and take place during the reward phase of the exercise if you hope to benefit from the counter-conditioning aspects of this program.* Counter-conditioning programs require rewards for a behavior incompatible with that previously exhibited.

Varying the Tasks

If your dog continues to not react as exposure increases, vary the tasks by having the “approacher” come toward your dog from the side, and then, finally, from the back. Approaches from the back will cause more dogs to react than approaches from the front, so they are best left until your dog is really good at these exercises.

If cooperative strangers are not available, or if you want more practice, these exercises can be performed in shopping centers, parks, or other busy places using fortuitous strangers. Please remember to behave responsibly. You can only take advantage of these fortuitous, natural-setting situations if, **and only if, you have good control over your dog’s head and he does not pose a risk to any dog or human.**

For dogs who need more help, a head collar can help you to remind your dog to look at you. Additionally, head collars and no-pull harnesses will prevent the dog from bolting if he becomes scared.

Special Hints for Dogs Who React to Other Dogs

This protocol and these exercises can be used for dogs who have problems with humans or with dogs. If you are using

these exercises to help your dog learn not to react to dogs, you can make some changes that will help your dog.

- The person handling the “approacher dog” may or may not be known to your dog. If your dog worries a lot, using a known person may help.
- The “approacher dog” will always be accompanied by a human. If you start these exercises with the “approacher dog” on the far side of the human partnered with him, your dog will see that there is a human buffer between him and the “approacher dog.” This may help calm him.
- After you and your dog have completed all the tasks with the “approacher dog” on the far side of your dog, repeat all of them with the dog on the near side to your dog.

If an unfamiliar dog is unavailable, you can first use another dog of your own, or use dogs who are behind fences or in the park, leashed. Please remember that other unknown dogs may have problems, too, and you need to not only protect other dogs from your dog, but you want to protect your dog from them. This is often not easy to do if any of the other dogs run free. Use sound judgment and err on the side of caution.

If your dog has problems only with a particular dog, or a particular class of dogs, start with a dog or class of dogs with which there is no problem and then, gradually, begin to use the problem dog. You may need to do so intermittently at first.

Final Considerations for Success

You will need the cooperation of lots of other people and dogs to be able to succeed in this protocol. You can get this cooperation by being cautious and ensuring that your dog can injure no one. Head halters can speed the rate at which the dogs can learn these exercises because they help to turn the dog’s head before he becomes fully engaged in the upsetting behavior. This early interruption can prevent a cascade phenomenon of inappropriate behavior that can be hurtful to your dog’s learning process. Head collars also provide an extra degree of protection for the “approacher dog,” too, and should be used for both dogs in all circumstances where the problems exist between the dogs.

If you cannot find appropriate strangers (dogs or people) with which to practice the approaches, see if your veterinarian can arrange staged approaches at her practice, or if a trainer in your area is certified and trained to use these protocols. Trainers often have access to large spaces where staged encounters can occur. If you start to use these exercises under extremely controlled circumstances (e.g., your vet’s office), you will eventually need to practice under less-controlled circumstances.

Every time you add a layer of complexity, please remember that at each step you are rewarding your dog for relaxing and being happy and confident while he does not react. You must ensure you do not reward a reactive dog who is sitting still.

If you have difficulty with any of the following tasks, break them down into simpler, smaller, more manageable tasks. Your dog’s behavior will tell you what he can manage. *Do not make your dog more fearful. It is better to work for three 5-minute periods that your dog enjoys than for one 15-minute period where your dog becomes distressed.*

What We Hope to Accomplish

The intent of this program is to teach the dog that someone can walk quickly up to him, touch him while making noise, and keep going, without causing your dog distress.

If the problem is with another dog, the intent is to teach your dog that another dog can pause in front of him, sniff, and then pass without ensuing problems.

Will Medication Be Helpful?

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs who otherwise are not able to succeed in this program. Please remember that if it's decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it **in addition** to the behavior modification, not instead of it.

Task Sheet Instructions

These tasks are meant to give you guidance only. They are designed to use very, very, very gradual changes. Such tiny steps allow you to reward aspects of the behaviors that are good, without accidentally rewarding aspects of behavior that are not so good.

Built into these programs are the concepts of desensitization (DS), where you teach the dog not to react to some situation by exposing him to the situation at a level below that needed to have him react and become distressed, and counter-conditioning (CC), where you reward behaviors that are in direct opposition or contrast to those that are undesirable.

If you open any applied psychology text or article on learning, you will see similar programs. There is nothing magic or novel or original here; these tasks are those that are common to most dog and cat training and behavior modification programs, and you will see similar task sheets in a number of books, articles, and online sources.

Please remember that what *is different here* is that you are rewarding the physical signs that the dog is less distressed or worried. You are rewarding *only* relaxed behaviors (review the **Protocol for Teaching Your Dog to Take a Deep Breath and Use Other Biofeedback Methods as Part of Relaxation**).

The tasks involve only common situations in which your dog may respond inappropriately or undesirably. Some of these situations may not be relevant to you, and others that are relevant may be missing. Please feel free to customize or alter this program, but please do so using the pattern of approach used here (i.e., gradually work up to the task, frequent returns to something easier, always ending on a good note, et cetera).

The task is listed on the left. There is space for you to make comments about how easy or hard the task was for the dog, how many times it had to be repeated, or other questionable behaviors that appeared during the task. You should discuss these with your veterinarian at your re-exam appointment.

Try grouping these tasks into segments that you work through in *no more than 15 minutes*. Shorter, calmer sessions will help the dog to better consolidate memory and learning.

If your dog is learning to approach another animal, they need not sniff or touch, but your dog should be able to stand there for 15-30 seconds and remain calm. This exercise has a real-life application since such scenarios are common when dogs receive veterinary care.

Dog's Task

The dog sits, stays, and relaxes when:

- An "approacher" passes quietly and quickly past the door or hall opening through which the dog can see

- An "approacher" passes quietly and at a moderate pace past the door or hall opening
- An "approacher" passes at a low pace past the door or hall opening and makes a slight noise (i.e., scuffing of feet)
- An "approacher" passes at a slow pace past the door or hall opening, making slightly more noise (i.e., the jangling of keys)
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening quickly and quietly
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening moderately quickly and quietly
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening slowly and making a slight noise
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening slowly and making more noise
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening quickly and quietly, veering toward the dog at the opening
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening moderately quickly and quietly, veering toward the dog at the opening
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening slowly and quietly, veering toward the dog at the opening
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening slowly, making a slight noise, veering toward the dog at the opening
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening quietly, veering toward the dog at the opening and pausing momentarily in the doorway
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening quietly, taking one very tiny step into the doorway and momentarily pausing
- An "approacher" passes the door or hall opening quietly, taking one brief step into the doorway, and pauses briefly, glancing at the dog
- An "approacher" takes 2 steps into the doorway or opening
- An "approacher" takes 2 steps into the doorway or opening and pauses briefly
- An "approacher" takes 2 steps into the doorway or opening, pauses briefly, and glances at the dog
- An "approacher" takes 3 steps into the doorway or opening
- An "approacher" takes 3 steps into the doorway or opening and pauses briefly
- An "approacher" takes 3 steps into the doorway or opening, pauses briefly, and glances at the dog
- An "approacher" walks quickly and quietly through the doorway and passes the dog
- An "approacher" walks quickly and quietly past the dog, and reaches slightly toward the dog
- An "approacher" walks quickly and quietly past the dog, and briefly reaches slightly closer to the dog
- An "approacher" walks quickly and quietly past the dog, briefly reaching slightly toward the dog
- An "approacher" walks moderately quickly past the dog, briefly reaching slightly more toward the dog
- An "approacher" walks slowly past the dog
- An "approacher" walks slowly, briefly reaching toward the dog
- An "approacher" walks slowly, briefly reaching slightly closer to the dog
- An "approacher" walks slowly, pausing briefly next to the dog
- An "approacher" walks slowly, pausing briefly next to the dog and glancing at him

- An “approacher” briefly pauses next to the dog, glances at him, and reaches slightly toward the dog
- An “approacher” briefly pauses, glances, and reaches slightly more toward the dog
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 5 seconds
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 10 seconds
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 20 seconds
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 30 seconds
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 45 seconds
- An “approacher” pauses and looks at the dog (DO NOT STARE) for 1 minute
- An “approacher” pauses next to the dog for 1 minute, then reaches slightly toward the dog
- An “approacher” pauses for 1 minute, reaches closer to the dog, and almost touches the dog
- An “approacher” pauses for 1 minute, reaches closer to the dog, and touches the dog
- An “approacher” pauses for 1 minute, reaches down, and pets the dog

For Future Repetitions

- Repeat all tasks in different locations.
- Repeat all tasks with all family members.
- Repeat all tasks with only every second or third being rewarded with a treat. (Remember praise!)
- Repeat with only intermittent treat reinforcement. (Remember praise!)