Adopting a Shy Dog

The Animal Rescue Fund of the Hamptons strives to rescue all types of dogs. Many of the rescued dogs have been adequately socialized with people, so they are friendly when they meet someone new. While most rescue dogs are very socialized with other dogs, some have not been adequately socialized with people so it can take longer for them to warm up to people with whom they are unfamiliar. Although these dogs are shy, they are nonetheless wonderful dogs, deserving of a forever home.

It could take several months before your shy dog begins to warm up to you. It will be difficult for you emotionally because you will not understand why the process is taking so long given all of the love and care you're providing. You may become very frustrated and disheartened at first. Please do not take it personally and please do not give up on your shy dog. Since shy dogs are not adequately socialized during a sensitive period of development, ~7-12 weeks of age, they missed a very important learning stage in their development. This is not to say that they are incapable of bonding. The majority do bond, typically only to members of their household, and in many cases only to particular members of that household. The reality is that they may never be social butterflies with all people. As long as you can accept this, adopting and then watching a shy dog blossom into a loyal and loving pet is a gratifying and rewarding experience.

Preparing the home for a shy dog
1. Make sure that your backyard is fully fenced and that the fence is high enough so that the dog cannot jump or climb over it. Also check the entire perimeter of the fence to ensure that there are no holes.
2. Purchase a dog crate that is the appropriate size (tall enough for the dog to stand in, long enough for the dog to lie down in). Some shy dogs feel more comfortable in a crate, and the crate can protect them, and household items, from destructive chewing, ingestion of potentially dangerous objects, and from escaping from your home when you're at work or out doing errands (even though doors may be closed and locked, if frightened enough some dogs will jump out of window screens). Some dogs may be petrified of any crate, in which case they should be enclosed in a small secured and blocked area off with baby gates.
3. Purchase a nylon leash, 5-6 feet in length, collar (if not provided by the rescue organization), and a body harness, preferably a no-pull harness (good for those dogs that do pull on leash). Shy dogs may be afraid to walk on a leash, or become frightened by a loud noise or passing cars or trucks. To ensure that your dog doesn't slip out of the harness or collar, walk your dog with the leash attached to both the collar and harness for extra security.
4. Purchase high quality dog food, treats, and non-squeaky toys because noisy toys may scare your dog.
5. Always ensure that all doors close and lock properly, and windows are not left open.
6. Once you receive all of your dog's paperwork, go to your local town hall to purchase a dog license. Dog licenses are required by your town, and they can help locate your dog in case your dog gets lost. It is also important to attach the microchip tag to the dog's collar and to purchase a separate name tag with both the dog's name and your current phone number.

Working with your shy dog

1. If your dog already responds to his name, either try not to change it or if you choose to change it teach it to your dog by saying the new name first, followed by the old name. After several weeks, slowly phase out the old name.
2. Designate a small, quiet room for your dog. Place the crate, food, water, and bedding in the room. Be sure to dog-proof the room if your dog is not going to be crated while unsupervised. For the very shy dog, allocate a couple of hours of alone time, peeking in occasionally to make sure your dog is okay. Traveling, having parties, or introducing your dog to a lot of new people who are not part of your household is not recommended at this time.
3. Establish a regular feeding, sleeping, and walking routine.
4. Walk your shy dog on leash in your yard for the first week, or simply attach a long line to your dog's collar. This will help you bring your dog back inside in case the dog's too timid to come to you.
5. Walk your dog on the street with a leash attached to both the harness and collar. Do not force your dog to walk. It may take time before the dog becomes comfortable walking on leash outdoors. If the dog will not walk on leash, have him get used to the leash by attaching it to the collar or harness, and have him drag the leash around the house while being supervised. Hand your dog treats while attaching the leash to the collar to help establish a positive association with the leash, and give some more treats while the dog is walking around wearing the leash. Walk around the house holding the leash loosely at first, and then increase the resistance slightly so that your dog feels a bit of tension against the collar or harness. Periodically say your dog's name, then hand the dog a treat. Then say the dog's name and then wait for the dog to look at you, and then offer the treat. Lastly, begin to walk the dog outside, in the yard at first and then up and down the driveway, or simply from the front door to the curb and back.
6. If your shy dog is dog friendly, and was accustomed to walking on leash at the rescue organization but is afraid to walk on leash in the area around your home, recruiting a friend or neighbor with a dog friendly dog to walk with you may encourage your dog to walk.
7. Over the course of the next several weeks allow your dog to explore more areas of the house if he seems interested. If not, that's fine too. Do not push the dog to do anything that will make him uncomfortable. Spend quiet time with the dog, perhaps just sitting and reading a book while in the same room. To gain trust, sit and pet the dog while giving him some treats. If the dog is uncomfortable being petted, then just try to offer treats, or try playing with him. Some dogs are more play driven. Move slowly around the dog and avoid sudden movements and making loud noises (please, no vacuuming in your dog's area). Introduce new people slowly and individually. Always have special treats for your visitor to offer your dog.
8. Finally, many dogs gain confidence by engaging in basic obedience training, or by attending socialization classes, depending on the age of your dog (typically socialization classes are only for 2 – 6 month-old dogs). Check www.arfhamptons for upcoming classes.

What to do if your shy dog gets loose
1. Contact ARF immediately (or the rescue organization from which you adopted your dog if not ARF). In some cases, the rescue organization will send out staff to help locate the dog since the dog may be bonded, thus respond to, a staff member. Rescue staff are also experienced at capturing loose dogs.

2. Contact your local animal shelter and veterinary hospitals to inform them that your dog is missing. Local shelters are experienced and skilled at setting up traps to capture your dog.
3. Try calling your dog's name if you see him. Never chase a dog. Remember that your dog is simply frightened and will run even farther if chased.
4. Leave a food bowl and water out near your home, or in the area where your dog is hiding if you know the location. If you do know where your dog is hiding, inform your local animal shelter so that they can set up a trap in that area. Food can then be placed *only* in the trap to help capture your dog.
5. Post "lost dog" flyers in your neighborhood and on social media websites with your dog's name and current photo, and your contact information.

Lastly, many shy dogs gain confidence and learn from other confident, outgoing dogs. Since many of these shy dogs are very dog friendly, adopting them into households with another dog friendly dog is recommended. If you have a social and friendly dog already, consider adopting a shy dog known to be dog friendly.

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