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THE AUTHORITY ON ALL THINGS DOG

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TRAINING Rx

AFRAID OF EVERYTHING NEW

→ Some dogs might feel a little apprehensive while encountering a new situation, but when a dog becomes so fearful that he refuses to go anywhere, it's a problem. Here, Antoinette DiVittorio of Alexandria, Va., tells how extreme shyness kept Ollie, her 2-year-old Boxer-Rhodesian Ridgeback mix, from leaving the house. Expert trainer Tammy Rosen gives tips for confidence building.

THE DOG

DiVittorio adopted Ollie from the Lucky Dog Rescue in Alexandria when he was 10 months old. The dog's original owner gave him up because he grew too big. At his first foster home, he jumped the fence and hid in the woods for three weeks until someone found him. He went to a second foster home, where he shied away from any interaction with people or dogs. Once DiVittorio saw him, she was drawn to his sad eyes and volunteered to give Ollie a forever home.

THE SITUATION

"During the first month he was here, I took Ollie to new places and introduced him to new situations," DiVittorio says. "I also signed him up for an obedience class, because at 70 pounds he's a big dog, and I wanted to establish a firm foundation." But after one month, the dog became fearful of everything and refused to leave the apartment. When he heard a loud noise or people entering the building, he urinated on himself. "I had to drop out of the obedience class because Ollie wouldn't get out of the car, and I couldn't lift him," DiVittorio says. But she refuses to give up on Ollie.

THE EXPERT

Tammy Rosen, CPDT-KSA, began her career with dogs in 1999. A certified professional dog trainer, she is the owner of Fur-Get Me

Not, a large dog training school and pet care company in Arlington, Va. Fur-Get Me Not received the 2012 Best Trainer and Best Kennel awards from *Northern Virginia Magazine*. Rosen works with dog owners to give their dogs a great start.

THE PLAN

"People or other dogs aren't the only things that shy dogs are afraid of," Rosen says. "Many dislike new settings, objects, or activities, and they may not benefit from a one-size-fits-all obedience class. Dogs with these issues need to attend a class that builds confidence and introduces novel things."

Rosen suggests a few tips to try prior to enrolling. To build confidence and expand your dog's comfort level with new experiences, she recommends gradually introducing her to these new sights, sounds, and activities around the house:

- **Blow up a balloon**, or repeatedly turn on and off household appliances, such as an electric toothbrush, vacuum cleaner, blender, and musical instruments. Shake noisy children's toys, drop metal objects, and set off alarms or timers.
- **Put on a scary mask**, place a paper bag over your head, or wear different hats.
- **Move objects to new places around the house.** For example, put small kitchen appliances on the floor or place safe garden tools in the hallway. When the dog encounters new objects and realizes they don't hurt her, she'll feel empowered.
- **Play games and practice tricks.** This helps a dog learn problem-solving skills,

which are useful when she encounters difficult situations.

Add more experiences as your dog becomes more comfortable.

For a dog who's afraid to exit the car in new places:

- **Take her to different dog parks** so she can play with friendly dogs. Gradually park a distance away from the entrance before walking to the park so the destination isn't predictable.
- **Drive to recreational areas** and encourage your dog to leave the car for a fun walk. "During outings with a dog who might be fearful around people, always give him small food treats when you stop and talk to someone," Rosen says. "Or, sit outside a busy store and feed your dog multiple treats as you watch shoppers walk by." Helping your dog establish positive associations with people and new experiences takes time and patience. Every dog deserves to enjoy life, rather than hide from it. — Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz



COURTESY ANTOINETTE DIVITTORIO



COURTESY TAMMY ROSEN