

## Treat and Retreat for Fearful Dogs

### What is Treat and Retreat?

Treat and retreat is a method for building rapport with fearful or defensive dogs. The process involves using food and space to encourage interaction that the dog is comfortable with. Food is not used to lure the dog closer to us, because this often creates internal conflict in a fearful dog. Instead, food is used to encourage space and breaks by tossing treats away from us.



### Why use Treat and Retreat?

This game gives us a way to bond with our dog while creating a strong positive association with human interaction. By tossing the treats away, your dog learns to take space when scared, which actually helps them calm down. Over time, increasing your dog's ability to choose to take breaks lessens your dog's fear.

### Why not hand feed treats?

Hand feeding treats to a fearful dog sets the dog up for continued exposure to stress hormones. By requiring your dog to remain close to the scary thing, they may feel coerced due to the lack of encouragement to move away. This setup often increases fear and aggression.

### How to Teach It

**Step 1.** Prepare pea-sized high-value treats. Preferably something stinky that your dog loves!

**Step 2.** Using an underhand toss, gently throw a treat away from you and past the dog.

**Step 3.** Remain relaxed and calm while the dog eats the treat.

**Step 4.** Once they've finished eating, gently toss another treat - this time closer to you.

**Step 5.** Repeat the above steps, varying the distance and direction of your tosses.

### Training Tips

**Tip 1.** Body language is everything! Avoid staring directly at the dog. Soften your gaze, blink slowly, and look slightly off to the side or at the dog's feet. Relax your body and turn so that your side faces the dog while still keeping the dog within your line of sight.

**Tip 2.** You may notice the dog approaching after eating the treats. That's just what you want to see! It means they're getting more comfortable with you. Continue alternating treat tosses. Resist the temptation to offer treats from your hand.

**Tip 3.** If the dog is not moving towards or eating the treat, then try using something that's higher value - the stinkier the better. You may also try releasing a handful of treats on each toss, or moving to a space with more space and perceived exit routes for the dog.