

Treat & Retreat Game

Coined by respected dog trainer Suzanne Clothier, the treat and retreat dog game is the perfect game to play when dealing with dogs who are on the shy and fearful side that become reactive when exposed to certain triggers such as strangers entering the home.

- Arm your guest with bite-sized treats that are very high-value (hot dogs, shredded chicken, cheese, etc).
- Tell your guest to avoid making direct eye contact with the dogs when they enter as many dogs find this threatening.
- Upon entering the home, have your guest toss the high value treats past the dog. This way your dog must retreat to get the treat.
- Once your dog gets a hang of it, and is comfortably retreating (relaxed body, no vocalizations), it's time to raise criteria. Have your guest toss a treat between himself and the dog so the dog must move closer to the person, but right afterwards, toss another treat **past** the dog.

Tips:

- If your dog remains uncomfortable with the guest, continue tossing treats behind the dog and skip step 4.
- Strangers should never try to lure your dog to them by keeping treats in the hand. This can increase stress and frustrate your dog.
- If your dog rushes toward strangers, I recommend having your dog on leash when visitors arrive or behind a physical barrier, such as a baby gate, that will allow your dog freedom of movement but prevent them from making “bad” choices such as lunging at or nipping visitors.

Management:

If your dog is not ready to meet visitors at all, that is okay! Every dog, like every person, varies in their sociability and, especially if your dog is new to your home, he/she may not be prepared to greet guests. If this is the case, set your dog up for success by providing a safe space for them to hang out in while your company is over.

- Create a safe space for your dog. This could be a spare room, a crate, it is up to you.
- Before guests arrive, positively lead your dog to this area.
- Provide high value treats and toys—ideally items that will take your dog some time to work on.
- You can further enhance the relaxing environment by playing soft music (classical, soft rock, and reggae work best)