

Tips on Building Confidence for the Lower Confidence Dog  
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The temperament of your dog is part hereditary and part what you do with it. If you have a dog that has serious genetic shyness issues, it may be a long row before your dog has confidence if ever. Serious fear may turn into fear aggression and you should seriously consider consulting with a behaviorist (ideally look for a veterinary behaviorist or at least a person with an advanced degree in animal behavior from a good college). However, several things can build confidence: setting a puppy up to succeed; good and proper socializing; consistency in the family. Let us look at each one:

**SETTING UP TO SUCCEED:** Setting a pup up for success means having reasonable expectations as well as not pushing the puppy to mature too fast. For example, if you allow your twelve-week-old puppy full house freedom you are setting him up to fail. He is not fully housebroken, mentally a baby and is not ready for this freedom - period. He will be more apt to potty in the house, chew undesired items and develop from lack of proper supervision bad behaviors. You will get angry and punish a lot. This drops self-confidence as the puppy is always in trouble as opposed to being set up for successes in age-appropriate settings which means you will have to correct a lot less. Alternatively, puppy is barely able to do a thirty-second sit/stay and now you expect puppy to sit and stay for three minutes. You have set puppy up to fail by asking him to do something he is definitely not able to handle and he gets frustrated.

**SOCIALIZING:** In brief, socializing is exposing puppy to as many positively based experiences as possible. If puppy seems afraid, never force something on him, instead, back up and give him a chance to acclimate and relax before bringing him closer. Too much too fast can be just as devastating for some pups as not enough socializing. (Treats and playing as opposed to coddling and stroking and really praising a happy attitude and NOT punishing a poor one or accidentally praising a bad one are important). Your puppy should have at least one new experience each day.

**FAMILY CONSISTENCY:** This is vital. Confusion creates a lack of confidence. For example, if Mom and Dad say no dogs on the furniture and little Suzy allows the puppy on the furniture, this is inconsistency. One family member using OFF when puppy jumps and another using DOWN is inconsistency. The puppy stresses and builds a lack of confidence out of confusion.

Confidence is also built through activities such as going to a positively based obedience class and trying sports such as Agility or Flyball.

More often than not, owners are the root of shyness and confidence issues in dogs. However, again if your dog appears fear aggressive (tail tucked, ears pinned, backing off while snapping and growling and even biting) you may need to go a step further and seek a behaviorist. A good trainer will refer you to one.