



#PETS

Controlling your fear of dogs

Dogs — loveable and furry four-legged bundles of joys we all adore. Despite their playful nature, some of us might not be comfortable around them. Be it due to past experiences or for unknown reasons, being afraid to approach dogs or to cross their path is nothing out of the ordinary.



unfriendly dog or being barked at by street dogs could be such sources. Perhaps, assessing what happened that day in terms of external factors could provide some insight and help rationalise the fear.

Taking 'puppy' steps

If you are looking to overcome this fear, confrontation is not the first step. Throwing oneself amongst a pack of dogs while they jump and want to play will only make one more nervous. Instead of forcefully trying

to interact with dogs, it is better to focus on just walking past them on the street.

Confrontation with an already existing fear is likely to increase nervousness and anxiety.

Keeping distance

Avoiding areas with a high number of dogs will essentially set one up for success. Not all interactions will be positive and keeping distance from dogs prevents negative experiences from piling up and contributing to the fear.

Do not force interaction

Sometimes, others around us take this fear lightly and make one wonder if they are just being silly. However, even with puppies or with the friendliest dogs, unless one is truly comfortable with petting them, there is no reason to force interaction and set oneself up for failure or bad experiences.

Learning dog body language

Familiarising oneself with how dogs travel in packs and what intimidates them will provide an initial guideline as to what not to do. Knowing their behavioural traits will point to what to look out for.

When dogs feel threatened, they tend

to turn their heads and back away while growling. So, recognising and interpreting these signs and picking up on their body language could make one more confident in interacting with dogs when they have to.

No running

A street dog or an unfamiliar dog might be scarier than a pet. Rule number one is never to run if an unfamiliar dog approaches you. Rather, it is important to calmly withdraw oneself from the situation. Standing up tall with your head up, not making direct eye contact and even making a fist to prevent the dog from sniffing your hand shows the dog that you are not interested in interacting with them and accordingly, demotivates the dog to follow you.

Learning relaxation techniques

Relaxation techniques like taking deep breaths or counting backwards can help overcome the initial anxiety upon unexpected encounters. This helps our minds to calm down and think and make decisions rationally.

Positive thinking

We often forget the power of positivity. In situations which overwhelm us with nervous energy and anxiety, our minds naturally go to the worst possible outcome. However, reconditioning our minds to remind ourselves that dogs do not attack without reason, and in most cases of energetic outbursts, they do not mean any harm, would help in crossing their paths calmly. Unless provoked, dogs are unlikely to get in the way.

Hence, keeping a positive mindset when approaching dogs or having to face them is a good way to keep oneself collected and in control of the situation.

At the end of the day, even if dogs are man's best friend, they do not have to be everyone's. Despite their fluffy exterior, it is quite common to be afraid of dogs. It is important to remind oneself that in situations, panicking and trying to get out of the situation is not always a wise decision but rather proactive thinking and calm decisions are.

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Photo: LS Archive/Shahreer Kabir Heemel



Here are some things to consider doing if you happen to be afraid of dogs —

Understanding the fear

Analysing what one is afraid of is necessary to understand any fear. Is it actually the fear of dogs or is it a fear of all animals or a particular situation?

Is it for a particular breed of dog or when they are doing a specific activity? It might be beneficial to address the source of this fear; when and how did this fear originate?

Narrowing down to what one is actually afraid of will make the process of overcoming this fear or removing oneself from situations more effective and easier.

Childhood experiences with an