

From Homeless to Happy

Your Guide to Building
Confidence After Adoption



pranaDOGS

The Method

1. Build Trust

Safety, predictability and connection need to come before anything else.



2. Expand Environment

Slowly and intentionally expand your dogs world.

3. Train & Build Confidence

Focus on skills that build confidence *and* provide coping mechanisms for real-life.

*If your dog is struggling,
you're not behind,
you're in an earlier step.*

Support, then Stretch

We meet dogs where they are, help them feel safe, and only then, encourage small, manageable challenges that build confidence.

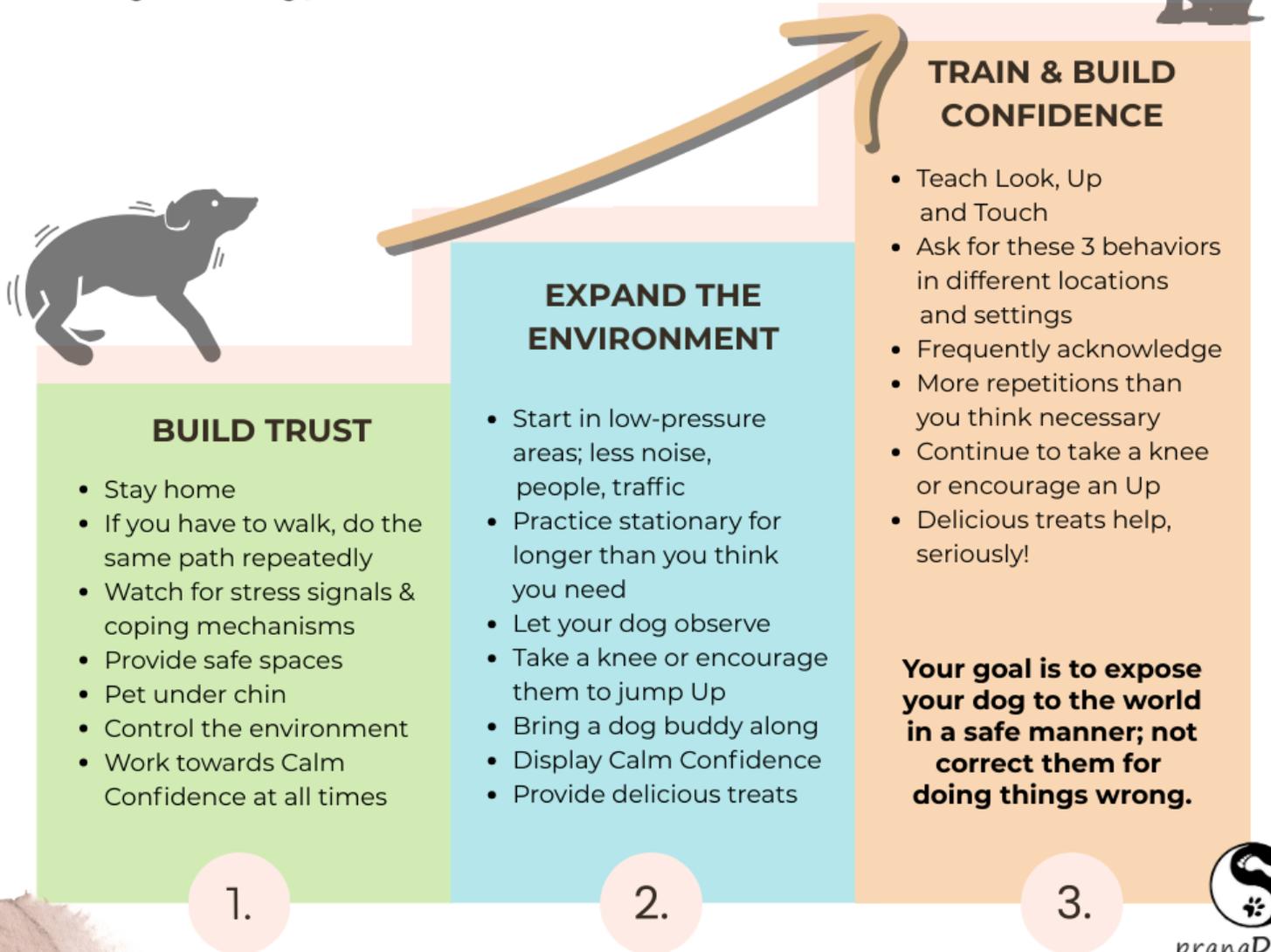


Every step in this booklet follows the

Support, then Stretch principle.

SUPPORT, then STRETCH

Build trust, expand their world slowly & safely, then train.



1

Build Trust

Before anything else, your dog needs to feel safe with you

Be dog-aware

Learn to recognize your dogs stress signals, coping mechanisms, thresholds and triggers

Control the environment

A safe space with low-chaos is key to reduce overwhelm and build trust

Calm Confidence

You are your dogs barometer; your emotions and behaviors shape your dogs sense of safety



1



Build Trust

Body language is a dog's first language.

By positioning yourself between your dog and anything that scares them, you show them you're paying attention and have their back.

Your body can say "you're safe," faster than words ever could.

Be Dog-Aware

Dogs communicate stress and uncertainty long before they panic. Learning to notice these early signals allows you to support your dog before they become overwhelmed.

Common coping signals include:

- Licking lips
- Turning the head or body away
- Freezing in place
- Yawning or drooling
- Play bowing or sudden sniffing

These behaviors are your dog's way of saying, *"I'm trying to handle this."*

Don't take it personally!

Often these dogs will bond closer and quicker with a woman than a man.

It's not personal, honest!

The more you can lay on the ground (or a couch) and allow your dog to smell you, the better!

1

Build Trust

They need to know you have their back!

Be Dog-Aware

When you notice your dog giving off coping signals, pause and look at what's happening around you.

Ask yourself:

- Where are we?
- What just changed?
- Who or what is nearby?

Your goal isn't to stop these signals — it's to change the situation that's causing them. And then either adjust the environment to help your dog feel safer or get to a new environment.

Don't try to pet!

Unless they are actually seeking affection.

If a nervous kiddo is trying to investigate you, let them! The less you reach toward them, the better!



Support,
then Stretch

1

Build Trust

A safe space with low-chaos is key to reduce overwhelm

Control the environment

Anxious, nervous, and shy dogs do best in quiet, predictable environments, especially early on.

Some dogs may seem “more like cats than dogs” at first — hiding when people arrive, avoiding outings, or sticking close to one safe spot.

This is normal. It is okay.

Every dog needs a place where nothing is expected of them.

Set up a quiet retreat — a crate, closet, or cozy hiding spot — where your dog can go when they need space. Once your dog chooses that spot, everyone should ignore them when they are in it.

**That space means
“I’m safe here.”**



1

Build Trust

By paying attention to things in the environment that affect your pup, you're letting them know you see their issues and have their back.

Control the environment

This is not the time for meet-and-greets, busy outings, or social pressure. Instead of introducing your new dog to people right away, keep routines simple and the environment calm.

If you host friends or family, ask them to ignore your dog completely. No talking to them, *no eye contact*, and definitely no reaching toward them. Let your dog decide if and when they want to join in.

Under the Chin!

When your kiddo is ready to be pet, be sure to do so under the chin or on the side of the face.

No over the head petting!

Giving your dog control over their space now, builds the trust they need, to feel brave later.

At this stage, Less is More.

*Less people. Less noise. Fewer trips.
Fewer changes. Less unpredictability.*





Build Trust

Calm Confidence

How your emotions, body language, and routines shape your dog's sense of safety

Calm confidence matters for every dog, but it's especially important for anxious, shy, and nervous ones.

These dogs naturally look to others for information:
Is this safe? Should I be worried?

They will often take cues from another dog by gauging that dog's reactions. If there isn't another dog around, the dog then looks to you for that same guidance.

Leave the Leash On

Every time you lean toward your nervous dog, they need to regroup.

By leaving on a 'leash drag' you can restrain the dog by stepping on the leash and don't need to grab toward them or their neck area

Your tone, body language, and response tells your dog how serious a situation is, or if it's nothing.

The more calmly and consistently you respond, the faster your dog can relax.

1

Build Trust

Calm Confidence

You don't have to be perfect.
You just need to be steady.



You're out on a walk and your dog suddenly freezes or startles at something ahead — a trash can, a person standing still, a strange noise.

If you tense up, stop abruptly, or rush to soothe, your dog may read that as confirmation that something is wrong.

Instead, take a breath. Keep your body loose. Step between your dog and the trigger and continue moving at a calm, steady pace. If you need to turn around or change directions, do so without any fanfare.

By staying neutral and unbothered, you're telling your dog, "I see it too — and we're okay."

Over time, your dog learns to take their cues from you and settles more quickly.

2

Expand the Environment

Slowly and Safely

Carefully and Intentionally widening your dogs world

Don't Pet the Growl

If your dog is growling, barking or otherwise vocalizing their upset - and you touch them, even if it's to sooth them - you are reinforcing the behavior.

Instead, don't pet and don't let them lean on you.

Expand Environment

Choose safe locations

Start close to home: your front lawn, a quiet park, or a low-traffic grassy area.

Look for low-pressure environments that support success — minimal people, dogs, and vehicle noise.

Start stationary

Movement changes the equation. Work in one spot so you can focus on your dog rather than navigating the environment. Allow your dog to observe without expectations. Simply taking in the world is a big part of confidence-building.

Consider a dog buddy

Many shy, nervous, or anxious dogs feel safer with another confident dog nearby



2

Expand the Environment

Slowly and Safely

Carefully and Intentionally widening your dogs world

Expand Environment

Your body language and emotional state continue to guide your dog. If things feel like too much, create space.

Distance lowers pressure. If you can't increase distance, encourage your dog to hop up onto something with some height: a bench, rock, or up a couple of stairs.

This is when sitting in a park and letting the dog take in all that's going on is so valuable. By letting them experience the world, without having to participate (react), they have the opportunity to better understand things and drop many of their reactions.

Get Startled? Laugh!

Laughing is a great way to let your kiddo know things are okay!



3

Train & Build Confidence

Train & Build Confidence

Training becomes meaningful once your dog feels secure.

Have high-value treats with you on every walk for at least the first 2-3 months.

Start with behaviors that build confidence: **Look, Touch, Up**

Asking your dog to **Look** is my favorite because it gives them something to do with their anxiety while at the same time reassuring them with your calmness. It's also a great go-to behavior they can use when things get uncomfortable.

Touch is just asking your dog to touch your hand, it's considered targeting in dog training. And it's a terrific way to give your dog a way to get your attention or come in for some reassurance.



3

Train & Build Confidence

Train & Build Confidence

Encouraging your dog to hop **Up** onto things empowers them with height and gives them a sense of control. The world is not made to be 2' off the ground, like our dogs are forced to be. By giving them height you're allowing them to see what's going on and have a better chance of reacting appropriately to it. If that's not possible, take a knee and get down to their level.

Use confidence-building statements. Repeating phrases like "You got this" can go a long way in reassuring both dog and owner.

This stage is about growing your dog's world; not correcting them.

If your they're struggling,
you're moving too fast
slow down

Less is More

Support, then
Stretch



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Behavior and
Rehab Center

Reminders

- Never reach toward these kiddos, let them come to you
- Don't face directly toward them, turn your body off to the side
- Pet under their chin & side of the face, not over their heads - do this for as long as you can remember!!
- Never bend over these dogs
- Be as predictable as possible - no sudden or quick movements
- Don't crowd or corner them
- Be generous & safe - let them make decisions when they're ready; don't force them

Just like us, Dogs thrive in a Safe, Loving Environment



Dogs speak through Body Language, the more we can speak in the same language the faster we can communicate

Additionally

Repeat Exercises & Outings

Shy, Nervous and Anxious dogs often need 2-3 repetitions of things; so go to the same park over and over again. This is not the time to explore or change up the walk, instead allow them to settle in and get comfortable in one place before introducing a new one.

Keep a Solid Routine

A strong routine involving food, water, sleep, exercise and play allows an anxious dog the ability to stop worrying about the basics, drop their guard, and begin to thrive

Get to their Level

It is tough to be two-foot tall
in a world made to be
four-foot and taller.

By taking a knee or knelling
down for your dog, you get to
their level and show them
you're looking out for them.



SUPPORT, then STRETCH

Build trust, expand their world slowly & safely, then train.



BUILD TRUST

- Stay home
- If you have to walk, do the same path repeatedly
- Watch for stress signals & coping mechanisms
- Provide safe spaces
- Pet under chin
- Control the environment
- Work towards Calm Confidence at all times

1.

EXPAND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Start in low-pressure areas; less noise, people, traffic
- Practice stationary for longer than you think you need
- Let your dog observe
- Take a knee or encourage them to jump Up
- Bring a dog buddy along
- Display Calm Confidence
- Provide delicious treats

2.

TRAIN & BUILD CONFIDENCE

- Teach Look, Up and Touch
- Ask for these 3 behaviors in different locations and settings
- Frequently acknowledge
- More repetitions than you think necessary
- Continue to take a knee or encourage an Up
- Delicious treats help, seriously!

Your goal is to expose your dog to the world in a safe manner; not correct them for doing things wrong.

3.



Anxious Dog Summary

Don't

- Reach toward them
- Crowd or Corner them
- Face them directly
- Pet them over their heads
- Put chaos and unpredictability in their world
- Put pain in their world

Do

- Turn your back to them
- Let them come to you and smell you without reaching toward them
- Give them space and room to watch and feel safe
- Wait for them to ask for petting
- Let them figure things at their own pace
- Pet them under their chin and on the side of their face
- Make the environment as predictable as possible
- Be generous and safe so they can build trust
- Stretch - stretching and yawning shows your relaxed
- LAUGH - laughing is one of the fastest ways to let your kiddo know things are okay, especially after a surprise



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Watch Sid's Success
Story and get more
tips and trips at
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