



# A new approach to treat fear-related problems towards unfamiliar people in dogs

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## Introduction

Fear towards unfamiliar people is one of the most frequent complaints in canine behavioural medicine. The main part of the traditional treatment is to establish a behaviour modification program to habituate the dog to people using behavioural modification techniques mainly based on habituation and operant condition and including, for example, rewarding the dog when it does not show signs of fear in presence of unfamiliar people. This treatment, although successful if properly applied, is very slow and oftentimes results in owners stopping it before its completion.

We hypothesize that treatments based on operant conditioning are slow because they address the behavioural manifestations of fear rather than the emotional state of the dog, e-g, fear itself. Furthermore it is very common that dogs feel frustrated due to the lack of predictability and control during the training sessions.

The aim of this paper is to present an alternative technique which is mainly based on classical conditioning and that aims at changing the dog's perception of the threatening stimulus and its subsequent emotional state.

**10** Changing the stimulus perception

**20** Shaping the dog's behaviour

By pairing the presence of unfamiliar people to a reward regardless of the dog behaviour

Increase the dog's perception of controllability and predictability

A safe area around the owner is set up and the unfamiliar person used in the treatment sessions is not allowed to enter it

We teach the dog how the interaction starts and ends

End signal is added

Call by owner becomes the end signal

Unfamiliar people will not reward the dog anymore.  
The dog will be rewarded when it obeys the owner's call

Through the luring technique we guide the dog to the safe area

Although further studies are needed, in our experience dogs that follow this program improve faster than those treated with standard protocol.

## References

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