

Help for Your Fearful Dog: A Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Your Dog Conquer His Fears

By Nicole Wilde

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Reviewed by Pat Miller



WITH ALL THE UNFORTUNATE MISINFORMATION about dominance being passed around lately as pseudo-behavior modification, it's a true pleasure to read a new book that gets it so right. A pleasure, yes; surprising, no. Veteran author and Certified Pet Dog Trainer Nicole Wilde has a track record of writing insightful books, as well as an extensive background working with wolves and wolf-hybrids—and no one knows better than those who have worked closely with wolves how flawed the “human dog-impersonator as pack leader” approach is to dog training and dog-human relationships.

Help for Your Fearful Dog is a thorough, well-organized, information-packed volume that discusses the underlying causes of fearful behavior, coaches the dog owner through a solid foundation of socialization and training, and offers detailed behavior management and modification programs for a variety of well-defined fear issues, including fear of the car, fear of the crate, fear of stairs, sound sensitivity, touch sensitivity, fear of objects and more. Fears not specifically addressed in their own chapters are covered by several detailed sections on the use of counter-conditioning and desensitization to modify fearful behavior.

To illustrate her points, Wilde sprinkles entertaining personal anecdotes about her own dogs and those of her clients throughout the book. Her style is engaging, highly readable and scientifically accurate. Detailed instructions lay out “do try this at home” suggestions for implementation of modification programs that dog caretakers can actually grasp and successfully use. At least as important, Wilde helps the reader understand what's

going on in the canine brain, and why the counter-conditioning approach is infinitely superior to methods that rely on force and intimidation to suppress emotions and behaviors.

For those who like information sound bites, Wilde has included shaded boxes with important bits of wisdom, such as, “Although it may appear that a behavior-modification program involves either classical or operant conditioning, there is usually an overlap of the two.” If you don't understand what that sentence means, you definitely need to read the book! Another helpful feature is the handy “Tail End Wrap-Up” that appears at the close of each chapter and provides a synopsis of information just presented. This is a great way for the reader to review key concepts in each section.

The book closes with an extensive section on adjuncts to behavior modification, including massage techniques; homeopathy; herbs; calming tools such as DAP, Body Wraps and Calming Caps; a discussion of the appropriate use of psychotropic drugs; and finally, a very complete “Resource” section.

I love reading a book with “Yes!” moments on every page. This is such a book. Whether you already have a fearful dog, want to avoid creating fears in a dog you have or are planning to acquire, or simply want to learn more about the fascinating subject of dealing with a dog's emotions, this book deserves a prominent place on your bookshelf.