

## **THE SAFE HAVEN**

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All dogs should have a safe haven available to them within their home as this allows them to retreat to a place where they know they will be safe whenever they feel the need. For dogs that are fearful or anxious about things in the environment, such a place is even more important.

### **What is a Safe Haven?**

A safe haven is a place where a dog

- Has pleasant associations and therefore is likely to feel more comfortable and positive about the world when he is there.
- Knows that he will not be disturbed by a person or another animal so he can relax totally.

### **Creating a Safe Haven in the Home:**

Your dog may have a number of beds and other resting places around your home, but it is advisable to choose one place to be his “safe haven”. Most dogs prefer an out of the way spot, such as in a corner or under a table. Some dogs really appreciate having a crate as a safe haven as this is fully enclosed (a metal crate can have a blanket draped over it to make it feel more secure) and as long as they are introduced to it correctly, most dogs will happily use a crate as a bed.

Do not choose a place that he chooses as a hiding place when he is scared as this place has negative associations already. Do not deny him access to this “bolt hole” but provide another place that is perceived as a “good” place.

Once you have selected the spot you plan to be his safe haven, place a comfortable bed there – they type your dog really likes – and then proceed to make it the best possible place for him. Feed him there for a while if it's possible to do so, take him there and give him treats or chews or new toys and intermittently during the day hide special things that you know he will like there so that when he goes there he has the expectation of something positive.

If you have more than one dog create a safe haven for each and encourage them to use their own places whilst not using that belonging to another dog. If you already have tensions between dogs in your home and feel you will struggle with this, please seek help from a suitably qualified professional.

## **PLEASE REMEMBER:**

- **NEVER** send or take your dog to his safe haven as a punishment. This must be a place where only good things happen
- **NEVER** try to make him go there when he is scared. Once it is established you may use it together with behaviour modification to help your dog learn coping strategies in the face of things he finds scary, such as firework noise, however this should be done with the assistance of a suitably qualified professional.
- **NEVER** allow people or other pets to approach him when he is there
- **NEVER** physically remove him from it – if you have to move him call him out or even lure him out with a treat or a toy (*in a life-or-death emergency you may need to break these last two rules, however rather spend time teaching him to come out when called for a reward than forcing yourself on him*).

## **Creating a “Safe Haven” for when you are out:**

When you are out and about with your dog he should view you as his safe haven. For this reason do not tell him off or physically correct him for doing things out of fear (running away, pulling away, barking, hiding for example). He always needs to know that when he is scared that he can trust you. If he is frightened and he comes to you, chat to him in a relaxed manner whilst you quickly remove him from whatever it is that has scared him. Be careful not to give him too much fuss, rather keep things as calm and low key as possible. If he is really struggling to move away you can try luring him with a treat or toy, but only do this in the short term as we don't want him to learn that fearful behaviour earns him fuss and treats.

If you are struggling with a dog who is frequently scared of things when out, please seek help from a suitably qualified professional as you may need more intensive behaviour modification advice for him.