

## OVERCOMING FEARS

Fears can be reduced and/or eliminated by counter conditioning. It is important that you approach this process with an attitude of calmness and patience. Even slow progress *is* progress!



It

**It is also imperative that you get the sequence of monster/conditioner in the right order.**

We'll use an over-simplified, hypothetical story to illustrate how to do this. Take someone who is terrified of spiders. This person rarely eats chocolate, but LOVES chocolate. Spiders are the scary monster (to your dog this could be the car, another dog, a person wearing a hat, etc.). The chocolate is the counter-conditioner. Use something wonderful that your dog never gets unless the scary monster has appeared. **Do NOT feed chocolate, raisins or grapes to your dog.** You may find cheese, the Turkey Treats, boiled chicken or something else very special. If your dog refuses the treats, you need to find a treat of more value, and/or move the dog farther away from the "monster".

### **CORRECT Sequence of events**

You point out a spider to the person. Be sure it is a long distance away so the person isn't overwhelmed. You then hand the person a piece of chocolate, tell the spider go away and it leaves. Repeat.

What does the frightened person learn? Spiders produce chocolate, a very good thing! Without conscious thought, the person, with repetition, begins to salivate for chocolate when they see a spider.

### **WRONG sequence of events**

Hand the person a piece of chocolate then say, "Oh, look there! There's a spider." This would teach the person the chocolate made spiders appear! This would be counter-productive to them overcoming their fear, especially if the spider is within a range that causes a reaction of fear.

## HALLOWEEN COSTUMES

Halloween Costumes can seem frightening or unusual to your dog, as can troops of little ghosts, goblins, super heroes and princesses parading up and down your front steps all evening. Even dogs who love children don't always recognize their best friends when hidden behind a friendly looking mask. (Do you know of any kids who wouldn't enjoy getting to Trick-or-Treat in costume before Halloween? So finding volunteers to practice this exercise before the



©2009 This information may be reproduced with credit given to the author.

Pawsitive Steps Dog Training - Gayle Ballinger, CPDT

[www.PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com](http://www.PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com)

(206) 799-0521

Email: [info@PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com](mailto:info@PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com)

Post Mail: 3021 SW Bradford #502 Seattle, WA 98126

holiday really shouldn't be too hard! If you don't plan on wearing a costume or don't have kids, ask your neighbor's kids to come trick or treat early

.)

Prepare your dog for Halloween now and prevent the possibility of a problem! **Never allow your child or someone to lunge at or frighten your dog, especially wearing a mask or costume.**

1. Have your child (or you) dress up in their costume (without the masks or head gear) with the dog watching while you toss the dog a few treats. When the dog is comfortable with the strange outfit, then proceed to put on the mask with the dog watching - continue to give the dog delicious treats or kibble, to have him associate good things with this strange occurrence - leave the mask on only for a few moments, then remove it, still giving treats, showing the dog it's really just your child (or you.) Do this several times until your dog is comfortable (no longer showing any signs of anxiety or curiosity of the outfit or mask.)

2. After the dog is comfortable with the costumes and masks, practice the "Trick or Treat" parade of kids and adults coming to your door in costume and ringing the bell. Kids love to dress up and Trick or Treat before the holiday! If your kids like to read, have them sit outside and ever few pages ring the bell to trick or treat, this ensures you will have a few minutes break between Trick-or-Treat'rs to give the dog time to calm down when practicing. You will do best to have some "rest time." **This works best with 2 adults...**

3. Have the dog on a set-length leash and have dog treats as well as treats (perhaps dimes?) for the kids ready. When the doorbell rings, do not admonish or punish excited behavior, but have one adult open the door to the Trick-or-Treat'rs, greeting them as if nothing odd is out there, give candy to the kids and close the door.

4. Meanwhile, the other adult should hold onto the leash, (tie the dog if you do not have a partner) with the dog far enough away from the door that the dog can see the children, but not reach them. The farther from the door, the less the dog will struggle.

5. As soon as the dog hears the approaching footsteps, treat the dog, treat again as the door opens and again when the dog sees the Trick-or-Treat'rs. Feed treats to the dog, either by dropping them to the ground or hand to mouth. When the door is closed, the dog will calm down. After a few rings he will begin to anticipate the arrival of guests in exchange for his reward. Yes, you are giving him a lot of treats. You also need to overcome a lot of stimuli and excitement.

6. You will find that the dog quickly understands that the sounds of footsteps approaching the door or that the ringing of doorbell means that something great is about happen for him. He will begin to look to you to receive his reward instead of barking or "misbehaving".

Don't worry; this will not ruin his alarm barking should the real Boogey Man come to your door in the middle of the night.

