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PAW'S CORNER

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By Sam Mazotta

Training a dog to be nonreactive

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My 1-year-old, mixed breed rescue dog "Shelly" barks at every noise and tries to lunge away from me when he sees another dog. He's skittish around certain people, and can be unpredictable when more than a few people are in the house — sometimes he's relaxed, sometimes he barks furiously. I know he needs more than basic obedience training, but where do I start? — Jethro H., Dallas

DEAR JETHRO: Talk to Shelly's veterinarian first. They can recommend specific professional training, socialization techniques, and can also prescribe medication to calm your dog. A calm dog is easier to work with, so any training will be more effective.

With rescue dogs, it can be difficult to imagine what their life was like before they ended up at a shelter. The shelter experience itself can be stressful. Building a daily routine for Shelly — always feeding, walking and training at the same time — helps reassure him that you are not abandoning him. He's part of your family and always will be.

Keep working on basic commands while you research trainers in your area. Keep a notebook (or the note app on your phone) with you and write down Shelly's behaviors during specific events, like encountering another dog, other people or wildlife. Note what situations trigger reactivity, and avoid those setups until they can be addressed in training.

One-on-one training costs more, but may be the best option at first so that Shelly gets constant attention and correction. After each training session, reinforce the new commands by working with your dog every day. Commit to continual reinforcement for the rest of Shelly's life.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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