

Behaviors Observed in Some Puppy Mill Survivors

Most of these fear-based behaviors can be overcome with understanding, love, gentle treatment, soft voices, and kindness. Understanding where these dogs come from is key. Most of their fears are usually overcome during foster care, and they are not allowed to leave until they are mostly rehabilitated. However, some of the behaviors may reappear when the dogs encounter a new environment. A few may have one or more of these fear-based behaviors for a lifetime.

- Leg lifting and marking – this usually discontinues after his testosterone level decreases following neuter. This is found with any dog that was not neutered previously.
- Possessiveness of “their” human. This can be true of any Velcro Griff. These babies never met a person that loved them before they were rescued. Once they experience the joys of love, they may be afraid they will lose it.
- Clinginess once they overcome their fear of being handled. These Griffs eventually view their humans as their saviors and will turn to them for protection in any stressful situation.
- Fright of anything new or new experiences. This can be found in any dog that has experienced extreme neglect or cruelty.
- Fear of things overhead or coming at them from overhead. Fear of hands. Try not to reach down for your Griff unexpectedly. Let him know you are going to pick him up. Encourage people not to pet the top of his head, but to put their hand in front of him, palm up, so he can see/smell them first.
- Loud noises or voices – this includes thunderstorms. Some of these Griffs were crated or in outside pens. Fear of thunderstorms can be overcome or at least lessened. Don't coddle the dog. Act like it is an every-day occurrence so she gets used to the idea. If you tell her, “Poor Baby, it will be okay” you are telling her she has a reason to be afraid.
- General nervousness. Dogs pick up on what is going on around them. Remaining calm will help the dog to become more secure and less nervous over time.
- Fear of fast movements, i.e. running children moving too quickly toward them. This can be found in many dogs that have not experienced children before. Dogs dislike anyone jumping up or using fast hand movements.
- Being chased or pursued. This can be true of any dog that has a reason to not trust humans.
- Fear of large spaces – like a house or yard. They have been confined in a cage all their lives. This fear will be overcome once they learn to trust their humans and understand the joy of being free.
- Distrust of being picked up or put down, holding themselves stiffly. Nothing good ever happened to these survivors when they were picked up before they were rescued. Griffs usually overcome this fear before they are adopted. Gently pick up and place the dog back on the floor using the same technique and calm words each time so your pet knows what to expect. These dog may have been roughly dropped in the past, almost thrown, in people's haste to get their

work done at the puppy mill. After you set him down, scratch his ear or pet his back and tell him he's a good boy.

- Poo eating or coprophagia occurs in many dogs. It happens in puppy mill dogs because their diet there was insufficient in quantity and/or nutrients. Also, the females tried to keep their area clean for their puppies. This habit is usually impossible to change unless they are fed a high quality food. The habit will sometimes lessen or disappear when they understand that there will always be enough to eat and the food offered will satisfy their body's nutritional needs. However, the best we can sometimes do is to just pick it up before they eat it.*
- Some even fear food bowls, because their food was often just thrown in to them. Some have never seen a food bowl.*
- Toy and Food Aggression (Possessiveness) is not uncommon. They have had nothing their whole lives to call their own, including enough good food to eat, yet we cannot tolerate this behavior. We gently work to teach them that there will always be enough to eat and lots of toys to play with.*
- Fear of strangers - These survivors will often make friends very slowly, but it can be done. Ignore their behavior and don't try to force them to make friends with your friends. They will eventually accept some and reject others in their own time.*

Those of us who have fostered or adopted dogs that began their lives in puppy mills have found that their capacity for love is usually unlimited. These dogs actually seem grateful for everything you give them and they tend to bond completely with their person or family. Adopting one of these dogs is a life-changing experience because you know for sure that you are literally saving them from a life of extreme sadness and neglect.