

Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

I Think My Dog Was Abused**GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753**

I THINK MY DOG WAS ABUSED!

**By Kate Schoepke
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Many people adopt a new dog and come to the assumption that their dog was previously abused. The dog may cower in fear of people or objects, tuck his tail between his legs and slink around, he may urinate upon greeting new people, roll onto his back or even whimper or shy around fast movements. Of course it makes sense that most people would jump to the conclusion that their dog was previously abused. As a behaviorist I hear this assumption from new clients every day. However, most of the time this assumption is actually incorrect!

Only handful of these overly shy dogs were truly abused. For the most part, it is either their genetics at work or the fact that they were improperly socialized during puppy hood. Some dogs are genetically predisposed to slink, cower and submissively urinate. If you met their parents, you may notice that one or both of the parents tends to be on the shy and fearful side as well. You may have even seen this with people you know! These characteristics do carry through to the offspring. Aggression is another characteristic that can carry through to a litter of puppies as well. However, even though they are predisposed to these behaviors it is very possible to help train them to become more confident dogs. While we can't necessarily "cure" these dogs, we can make dramatic improvements.

Another potential reason a dog may display these "abused" behaviors is simply lack of socialization and confidence. These dogs may have been sheltered as puppies and never taken out to experience new people and things. Once they start being introduced to new experiences the dog may view them as frightening as opposed to exciting. Combine this with a predisposition to shyness and...voila! A seemingly abused dog is born! All trainers and behaviorists strongly encourage proper socialization as puppies to prevent these kinds of problems. Most behavioral problems can be prevented with proper training and socialization from the beginning of a dog's life.

Some dogs may display the "abused" behaviors because they may have been pushed past their comfort level in the past in certain situations. For instance, a dog that is pushed to fast to accept petting from a stranger and became fearful of that stranger may now associate all new people with fear. This will give a new person the impression when they reach for your dog and she tucks her ears, cowers down and rolls on her back that your dog has been abused. In reality, this dog sees the stranger and becomes fearful so she will display her submissive body language to prevent antagonizing this "scary" new person.

Many dogs with shyness and fear issues can begin to display fear aggression. They may begin to bite or snarl at things that frighten them. It is very important to get these issues resolved before they turn into fear aggression. Working with a knowledgeable trainer with these fearful dogs is imperative. A trained eye is needed to help you determine the true triggers your dog is experiencing. He or she can help you come up with a detailed training program to start building confidence in your dog. Once your dog begins building confidence and learning how to handle the environments around him he will start behaving less "abused". He will start to act excited vs. scared around new people and situations. He can be trained and desensitized to fast movements and loud noises. He can learn that by sitting calmly when a stranger reaches for his head gets him treats and praise. We can accomplish a lot with these seemingly "abused" dogs. Using positive motivational training is extremely important. All negative or "harsh" training methods must be entirely avoided with these sensitive dogs. We will strive to build trust, confidence and charisma.

I also want to add, for the people who's dogs were truly abused...my training protocol does not differ. Although I always feel bad for a dog who experienced abuse in the past, I make it clear to my clients and to the dog that I will not allow that to be an excuse. Excuses do not help your dog become more secure and balanced. It should be known that any dog displaying these "abused" symptoms is NOT a healthy, secure and happy dog. He is

unbalanced and can not be happy with the amount of anxiety he carries around. Excuses only allow unacceptable behavior to continue out of sympathy. So, regardless of whether your dog only acts abused or was truly abused...he or she can be helped! So if you are reading this article and thinking...hey, that sounds like my dog! Call a trainer. Give your dog the security, balance and happiness he deserves. Your dog will thank you for it!

About Kate:

Kate Schoepke is the certified canine behaviorist at My Pet's Vet in Mequon, WI. She grew up surrounded by animals including dogs, cats, horses, rats, potbellied pigs and anything else she could convince her parents to let her keep. Her interest in training started at a young age when she began successfully training and competing horses. She took her horse training skills to the dogs and slowly began studying their behavior and training her own family pets. In 2002 Kate was out of college and working at a veterinary clinic. She decided to further her talent in animal behavior and attended the Animal Behavior College. She received her degree and graduated with high honors. Kate has been teaching obedience classes and private lessons ever since. She recently joined forces with Dr. Ron Beatty at My Pet's Vet in Mequon and continues to see private consultations in Ozaukee and Milwaukee counties.

