



# Greater Androscoggin Humane Society

[www.SavingPetsinMaine.org](http://www.SavingPetsinMaine.org)

## House Guests and Your Shy Animal

While these tips are helpful at any point in the year, the holiday season often finds us having more traffic in and out of our homes.

If people will be continuously in and out, the safest/most convenient option may be to keep your pet in a separate room or gated area while people are entering and exiting your home. This approach works best by keeping your animal in a different room with the door shut. Some overly shy animals will use a flight response due to the overwhelming difference of having more than the normal people in their home.

If your company plans on staying indoors for most of their visit, let them settle in before introducing your pets to the mix. Once everyone is seated or engaged in other activities, allow your animal out to join you. While it is common for us as humans to fawn over animals, it is key for shy dogs that they are completely ignored so that they can build confidence and investigate the scene/people at their leisure. As they become overwhelmed, some shy animals will try and retreat back into a private area, so to encourage socialization, the doors to other areas should be gated off or shut.

When you are working on socializing your shy pet, it can be especially helpful to wait until feeding time. Most animals are inclined to work through their fear at the promise of high value food/treats. If the animal is too nervous to engage directly, visitors should drop food/treats around them so that the animal can approach. For the braver animal, they may choose to engage immediately and take treats from a human's hands. No matter the point your animal is at, it is key that they are able to make the association that interacting with a human means great things!

Initially, it is very important that attention (even staring/looking) isn't forced on the animal. If the animal is willing to allow petting, that's great, but petting should never be forced upon them. While every pet has their individual preferences, dogs typically prefer to be petted on their sides, under the head, and on the chest area. Petting directly on the head is just plain rude in the dog



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world. Cats tend to prefer under the head/chest area, at the base of their tail/back, and at times the base of their ears and on their cheeks. As many of us have learned the hard way, cats almost never want their stomach or paws touched.

It is important to use the tools at your disposal. Sometimes enticing a cat to play, offering catnip toys, shaking their treat bag may help coax them a bit more while dogs, if hungry respond to fresher food/wet food and lesser interaction. If your shy dog loves playing ball or a squeaky toy, make some easily available for your guests to offer.

Giving your animal small breaks to prevent overstimulation and the chance for retreat is always a positive thing to do. For any animal, it is all about freedom to choose and having a bit of control over their situation that builds confidence and it may take a bit of time but it will come over time!