

SPOOKS

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My experiences with "spooks" (fearful, withdrawn greyhounds) led me to believe that as with all other facets of greyhound care and training, it is an irrefutable fact of life that if you hurry them up, they will make you wait. Patience is a virtue, and the key to the gradual easement of whatever autism or perceptive distortion it is that compels their flight instinct to overrule less panicked assessment of (and reaction to) novel situations and events, and strangers.

Only the most deeply withdrawn and fearful spooks are necessarily so, within the pack dynamic. While they may be unable to act independently, other than to choose to follow other greyhounds, they often and usually can function, sometimes quite without inhibitions, as pack and colony members---where routine is paramount, and daily events are entirely predictable and familiar---and within the culture, supports, and security of the greyhound pack/colony.

Even the most profound spooks can and do, eventually, become comfortable with, and/or bonded to and accepting of patient and empathetic handlers.

The complete upheaval of their lives with which we confront them, upon beginning and then completing the adoption process, is a much greater challenge to them. Couple that with the voluminous amounts of disinformation concerning idiopathic fear and withdrawal within the breed (or among canines at large), and we have a recipe for myth creation. Mythology that presumes the "spook" phenomenon, known to be highly heritable, is necessarily a result of mishandling or even physical abuse, which can exponentially raise the barriers the dog must overcome, to greater degrees of difficulty.

So, most often, and erroneously assuming they are dealing with a greyhound in need of some sort of rehabilitation, the adoptive owner smothers the dog with attention and sensory overload that intimidates and confounds, and with items and objects that are of no interest, value or comfort. The greyhound, reflexively, then withdraws to an even deeper state of fear, confusion and isolation. The new adopter becomes increasingly frustrated and stressed, which the fearful greyhound picks up on, doubling down on the fear and the compulsion to withdraw and escape that he/she feels.

To sum it up, like greyhounds within their formative and professional, colonial culture, the adopted "spook"---and even the less withdrawn, merely skittish, reactive types---eventually thrive with routine and punctuality, in an environment as free of human-induced stresses as we can manage to make it. Where known, rather than novel events take place, punctually formatted within a daily schedule. If we are introducing them to a new pack or housemate, the acclimation process is often a bit less daunting to them.