

Modify Your Dog's Fear of Stairs

Gradual steps will help a dog afraid of stairs overcome his fear.

Brian Kilcommons

Q. My 5½-month-old black Labrador is great in every way, except that he will not go up or down the stairs in my home. It is only this set of stairs that he is afraid of; granted, they are bare-wood and very slippery, and he did fall down them once. I am having them carpeted this week, so please advise me on the best way to get him to use the stairs after the carpeting is down. He is very fearful of these stairs, and we have been carrying him up and down them for quite a while.

A. I can't fault your puppy on his decision-making. For many puppies, stairs are frightening, and he has a better reason than most for his reticence: a previous fall. I am glad you took the action to have the stairs carpeted.

Start working with your puppy on a short set of steps to accustom him to using stairs. Using some special treats, place your puppy one step from the top or the bottom and reward him there. Then lure him up or down that one step. Laugh, be enthusiastic and make it a game.

If he refuses to move, bounce a ball, play with a favorite toy, and call his name. When he finally does it, tell him what a wonderful dog he is and repeat the scenario. When he can handle one step up or down without a problem, move to two, then three.

Once he understands the stairs are safe, he will not hesitate to go up and down them. When he is full-grown and coming down the stairs like a freight train, this short stage will be a fond memory.