

Tips for Canine Stress Reduction

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This is a collection of techniques and products that have worked for me in reducing a dog's stress levels and keeping them at low levels. It is important when dealing with stress behaviors that a thorough veterinary exam be completed as soon as possible. Many stress behaviors can be indicative of health concerns. These suggestions are in no way meant to replace veterinary care. Please take this list with you to your dog's veterinary appointment and ask which techniques and products would be suitable to try with your dog.

- Keeping a loose leash is a huge stress reducer! Dogs pulled around on tight leashes feel powerless and fearful. Dogs dragging people around on tight leashes feel anxious and on guard all the time. Teach loose leash walking.
- Some dogs feel more comfortable when experiencing comforting body pressure. Check out techniques and products such as Tellington TTouch® body wraps, anxiety wraps, or Thundershirts.
- Make sure your dog is getting enough exercise. Walking exercise is great! Allow your dog to sniff, using a long leash in an open area if you can. Dogs need to sniff and explore to feel secure in their environment. Walking gets your dog away from home and lets him see new things and meet new people so he is better able to deal with the stresses of being in public. If he rarely leaves home, he can't be expected to know how to handle things outside of his home.
- Change the dog's food to a more appropriate diet (get your vet's advice on this one). Diet can affect stress levels and behavior in a huge way!
- Let your dog have time to be a dog. Be less controlling when the situation does not call for it. Let your dog make choices and do things that dogs like to do.
- Use food toys and puzzles to give your dog problems to solve. Using clicker training to shape new behaviors is great for teaching problem solving also.
- Have appropriate and varied things for your dog to chew on. Chewing helps to alleviate stress.
- Use calming music for your dog to listen to while you are away, or even while you are at home. Healing Touch for Animals® has great CDs created for this purpose, as does Through a Dog's Ear. Classical music can also work.
- Give your dog some quiet time. If it is noisy where you live, try turning on a fan to provide some background white noise so other sounds fade away for awhile.

- Give your dog a safe place where he can choose to go get away from the world for awhile. This may be a crate left open for him to come and go as he pleases, or a bed in a quiet corner where he won't be disturbed.
- Use touch to help relax your dog. Healing Touch for Animals® has a wonderful program where you can learn techniques for relaxing and calming your dog and for helping him to deal with stress. Tellington TTouch® techniques are also easy to learn and implement.
- Consider getting your dog a buddy if he has to spend many hours home alone. In some households, this may be a viable option.
- Dogs love scent games. Teach your dog to search for toys and treats to keep his mind busy. Scenting games help reduce stress.
- Make a doggie obstacle course and teach your dog how to use it. By changing the obstacles around, you will provide him with new challenges and help boost his confidence. A confident dog can deal with stress better.
- Flower essences can be helpful for reducing stress levels. Essential oils are very useful also. Be sure if you are using products like these to research and purchase high-quality products. Lower quality products will not be as helpful.
- DAP sprays, collars, and plug-ins may be helpful in a variety of circumstances. DAP stands for Dog-Appeasing Pheromones. There are several companies making these products.
- Reduce his triggers. Try to reduce the number of things in your dog's life that are stressful for him. Don't try to force him to "deal with them" or "get over them." Forcing him to be stressed will not help his stress to go away and in most cases, it will make his reactions worse.

***Debbie Bauer** is a certified Healing Touch for Animals® practitioner, a certified Tellington TTouch® practitioner, a published author, and a professional dog trainer. She has over 28 years of training and consulting experience working with dogs and their people. She specializes in working with dogs that display fearful, reactive and aggressive behaviors, in a positive manner. Debbie has trained dogs in a variety of fields including therapy and assistance dogs, print ad and media work, obedience, agility, and scent work. One of her passions is working with and educating about deaf, blind, and blind/deaf dogs.*