

Stress in Dogs

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Stress is a fact of life we must all learn to deal with in appropriate ways. It is not the circumstances in life that are stressful by themselves, but it is our (and our dog's) perception of those circumstances that causes stress. Every person and every dog does not react in the same manner to the same situation. So what might seem stressful to one may not to another.

There are many things that may cause our dogs to be stressed. Here are a few to consider.

- Being in a new environment or situation
- Being confused about what is expected or how to react
- Being afraid
- In crowded places with very little personal space
- In very hot or cold environments
- New people or pets entering their home
- Changes in regular routine
- Not getting enough exercise
- Being left alone

Dogs show stress in different ways. Some dogs become very active, while others seem to get very quiet. Some signs of stress in dogs are...

- Backing away
- Growling when approached
- Crouching down, cowering
- Refusing to eat or drink
- Yawning
- Panting heavily
- Pacing
- Diarrhea
- Licking the lips
- Trembling
- Whining or barking excessively
- Freezing in place
- Hiding
- Hyperactivity
- Urine marking

Dogs that are stressed are not able to learn easily or think clearly. If too many stressful events are present at the same time and the dog does not feel like he can cope, he may act to defend himself,

maybe even biting. Here are some things that can be done to help decrease your dog's stress level in certain situations.

- Remove your dog from the area of stress if possible.
- Visually block your dog from the stressful trigger. You can use a barrier or if there is nothing else, put your body between your dog and what he is concerned about.
- Give him a break in a quiet area or crate where your dog feels comfortable. Even a few minute break in the car with you may allow your dog to calm down.
- Give a chew toy to encourage appropriate ways to relieve stress. Stuffed Kongs and safe bones are good for this. You may need to give these to your dog in his crate or in a quiet place away from the stress. Some dogs don't eat when they are too stressed.
- Use gentle touch and bodywork to help relax your dog.
- Do not force your dog to interact or be close to what is causing him stress. Let him approach as he becomes more comfortable.
- Keep a loose leash and allow your dog to move away from the stress. A tight leash will make your dog feel trapped near the stressful trigger and he won't be able to relax if he feels he cannot get away.
- Work slowly to get your dog used to new situations that may cause stress.

Stress can begin to build in your dog in his day to day activities. Stress tends to build on itself and accumulate over time. If your dog's stress level is already high, it won't take much to tip the scale and create a bad situation. Your dog may be able to handle a young child coming up to pet him on a normal day. But what if you are remodeling your house and your dog has to deal with strangers coming and going all day long for weeks on end, plus the noise and commotion of power tools, people yelling to each other, a stressed out owner, etc? If you add a child trying to pet your dog into that mix, your dog may feel so overwhelmed by everything else going on that he snaps at the child, or worse.

It is important to try to keep your dog's stress levels low in his daily life so he is better able to handle the unusual things that come his way. Be aware of when things are getting over the top. When will your dog's scale finally tip? Don't let it get to that point. Give your dog some time out when needed. Protect him from getting overwhelmed. Use some stress reducing techniques in your dog's daily life. And remember that your dog will react to your stress levels as well. Taking good care of yourself and keeping your own stress levels under control is good wellness care, but will also help you be that much closer to keeping your dog's levels under control.

***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.*