

Stress in Dogs

Understanding, Recognising, and Supporting Your Canine Companion's Wellbeing!

Why Recognising Stress Matters

Our dogs can't communicate stress with words instead; they rely on subtle body language and behaviour to tell us when they're overwhelmed. Understanding these signals is crucial. Recognising stress means we can respond with empathy and support, rather than frustration or misunderstanding.

After all, no dog wakes up thinking, "How can I make life difficult for my human today?" Much like us facing a day where the coffee machine breaks, the hot water stops, the Internet is down, and the train gets cancelled, your dog's stress builds in layers and it's our job to notice before it reaches a tipping point.

What Happens Inside a Stressed Dog?

When confronted with stress, a dog's body initiates the well-known 'fight-or-flight' response by releasing cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone. This hormone helps the dog manage immediate threats, but its elevated levels can linger for up to 72 hours before returning to balance.

If another stressor appears before cortisol normalises, the dog's system compounds the effect, releasing more cortisol. The result? Your dog becomes increasingly sensitive, reactive, and less able to cope with even minor challenges that they would normally manage.

The Cumulative Effect: Trigger Stacking

Picture this: One challenging event barely fazes your dog. But when multiple stressors come in rapid succession or overlap, this is known as Trigger Stacking. It's akin to your mental overload after a cascade of daily frustrations - one small inconvenience alone is survivable, but together they push your stress threshold to breaking point.

Dogs experiencing trigger stacking are vulnerable to unexpected reactions - barking, growling, or snapping - that might surprise us. Even if they seem outwardly "holding it together," their body language often whispers of discomfort, making it vital to pay attention to all preceding triggers, not just the final straw.

Common Stress Triggers in Dogs:

- Sudden or loud noises (fireworks, thunderstorms)
- Unfamiliar environments or people
- Prolonged periods of isolation or being left alone
- Disruptions in daily routine or household changes
- Crowded spaces or encounters with unknown dogs
- Restrictive gear or confinement (crates, tight collars)
- Physical discomfort or undiagnosed illness
- Lack of mental or physical stimulation
- Overwhelming scents, sights, or chaotic environments

Signs Your Dog May Be Feeling Stressed

Stress signals can be subtle, and each dog is unique in how it manifests. The list below includes some of the most common signs, but it's by no means exhaustive. Paying close attention to your dog's individual behaviour pattern is key:

- Excessive yawning or lip licking
- Pacing or restlessness
- Avoiding eye contact or turning away
- Ears pinned back or lowered posture
- Unexplained whining or barking
- Panting despite a comfortable temperature
- Trembling or shaking
- Increased shedding

Supporting Your Dog's Mental Wellbeing

Helping your dog manage stress begins with nurturing overall mental health. Consider these essential pillars to build resilience and happiness:

- **Health:** Consistent veterinary care to maintain physical wellbeing.
- **Fresh, Nutritious Diet:** Tailored, wholesome food that fuels body and mind.
- **Daily Exercise:** Sufficient physical activity that suits your dog's age and breed.
- **Enrichment:** Interactive toys and puzzles to engage their brain and nose.
- **Mental Stimulation:** Training, scent games, and novel experiences that challenge the mind.
- **Healthy Sleep Routine & Comfortable Bedding:** A secure space to rest deeply.
- **Social and Bonding Time:** Meaningful human interaction and, if appropriate, canine companions.

- Breed-Specific Play: Activities honouring your dog's natural instincts, from retrieving to running to herding.
- Routine: Consistency helps reduce anxiety by creating predictability in daily life.

The Takeaway!

Stress is a natural part of life for dogs, but when it accumulates unnoticed, it can lead to unexpected and difficult behaviours. By developing a keen eye for stress signals and proactively supporting your dog's mental health, you create a sanctuary of calm and trust. Remember: every wagging tail starts with a heart that feels safe.

If you're finding your dog's anxiety or stress challenging to manage, you're not alone and support is available. Book an initial consult below and we can explore personalised strategies tailored to your dog's unique needs.

Together, we can help your companion live a calmer, happier life! 🐾

About Vanessa Bsirsky



Vanessa Bsirsky, the founder of Jack's Mum Dog Training, is an award-winning and highly regarded dog trainer based in Hackney, East London. Known for her compassionate, supportive, and structured approach, Vanessa consistently helps clients overcome even the most challenging behavioural issues with patience and expertise. Her business is lovingly named after her late Whippet, Jack, her heart dog whose memory inspires Vanessa every day to make a positive difference in the lives of dogs and their owners.

Our tailored training programmes offer personalised strategies perfectly aligned to your dog's temperament and lifestyle. Get in touch today to discover how expert guidance can bring peace of mind to your daily routine.

To book a training programme or an Initial Consult with me, simply click below:

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