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COURTEOUS CANINE, Inc.
Dog School and Doggie Gym!

Dog Signs of Stress

The list below are *SOME* of the behaviors that dogs can signal when they are feeling stressed. Stress is the cause of many aggressive behaviors (such as barking, lunging, etc.). You can prevent these behaviors by monitoring your dog's level of stress. You can monitor your dog's level of stress, by reading your dog's stress signals.

The following behaviors usually signal stress in most dogs:

- Slow Tail Wag. A slow tail wag is NOT friendly. It is a sign of stress.
- Tail tucked between hind legs. This behavior probably signals fear. Fear is an extreme form of stress.
- Being unable to eat. If your dog took food a moment ago, and abruptly will not take food, evaluate the dog's environment and see what maybe causing stress. Immediately move the dog away from the source of stress, to prevent triggering of possible aggressive behavior.
- Being unable to play. If your dog is normally playful and suddenly can't play, it is likely that your dog is stressed. Again, immediately remove your dog from the situation she is in.
- Low ear carriage. Scan the area for a probable source of stress, if you find the source, move away from it and watch how your dog's ears respond. If they lift, then you have done a great job protecting your dog from stress and helped her feel better. This will increase your dog's ability to trust you and will deepen your bond with your dog.
- Blinking of eyes. Deliberate eye blinking can be a sign that your dog is experiencing stress.
- Squinting of eyes. Again, this can be a sign of mild stress.
- Holding Breath. Breath holding can be a precursor to aggressive behavior. If you notice your dog holding her breath, rapidly remove her from the source of stress in her environment.
- Puffing. Puffing is when the dog rapidly exhales a small amount of air, that causes her cheeks to puff out. Puffing is a precursor to aggression.
- Stiffness. Also a precursor to aggression.
- Staring. Another precursor to aggression.
- Panting. If you notice your dog panting and she is in a potentially stressful situation she may need to be moved away from the stressor.



The dog to the left is stress panting.

Notice that this dog's lips are not curled upward to reveal teeth. The lack of curling shows that this pant is more stress oriented than part of a "doggie smile".

Also visible are the dog's facial muscles, they are clearly tensed.

Also, notice the slight squinting of the eyes, another sign of stress.

- Pacing. Just like a anxious human may pace, so do anxious dogs.
- Shedding. Also called stress shedding. It is common to see stress shedding when a dog is at the vets.
- Diarrhea/bowel movements can be signs of stress.
- Urination and or marking can be a sign of stress. Stressed male dogs may mark as a way of alleviating stress.
- Licking of the lips. When a dog stress licks her tongue will usually dart out of her mouth in rapid succession. This is a strong sign of stress, as usual scan the dog's environment to establish the source.
- Coughing.
- Sneezing. Can be a sign of stress and or confusion.
- Turning away/avoiding eye contact. This is a clear sign of stress. Evaluate environment and manage dog accordingly.
- Trembling as if cold. A sign of extreme stress/fear. Remove dog from environment immediately.
- Shaking (as if the dog were shaking off water). Scan environment for potential triggers.
- Yawning. The photo below shows a dog stress yawning. Notice the tension in the dog's facial muscles, the squinting shut of the eyes and the yawn itself seem unnecessarily exaggerated.
- Drooling can be an extreme sign of stress. Dogs that live with families and are kenneled for boarding can drool for a few days as a result of stress. Also dogs that seize will sometimes drool.



- Sweaty paws. A sign of severe stress. Remove dog from situation, monitor for additional stress signals.
- Increased activity.
- Decreased activity. Some stressed dogs will take a "stress nap", they will just shut down and go to sleep, as a way of dealing with stress.
- Scratching.
- "Spacing out". In my opinion it is likely that this type of behavior is similar to a dissociative state in humans. Dissociation is nature's way of "flipping the brain into neutral" in order to avoid the processing of extremely stressful situations. A dog that spaces out is suffering from extreme stress and immediately needs to be removed from the source of stress.
- Barking at other dogs or people can be a sign of stress
- Lunging at other dogs or people can be a sign of severe stress.
- Other:

Potential Sources of Stress

Dogs are individuals, so what is stressful for what dog can vary greatly. Here are some basic sources of stress:

- Other dogs.
- Strangers.
- Babies.
- Toddlers.

- Children.
- Adolescents.
- Men in uniform.
- Crowds of people.
- Groups of dogs.
- Humans on bikes, rollerblades, etc.
- Cars
- Other:

If any signs of stress appear while you are training your dog, it is likely that your dog is stressed. Back up a few steps in the training process and help your dog have success, then build up to what you were previously asking the dog to do. Avoid failure, by finding your dog's area of success. Gradually expand that area of success, by pairing it with food and play. The previously stressful situation will begin to signal fun for your dog and so gradually, your dog will alter her attitude.