

STRESS SIGNS, TRIGGERS, WHAT DO I DO?

Just like humans, dogs can experience anxiety for various reasons. It is essential for handlers to be able to recognize stress signs.

Common stress signs are:

- Lip licking or drooling (when no food is present)
- Yawning (when they shouldn't be tired)
- Whale eye (being able to see more of the white of their eyes)
- Turning head or body away from source of stress
- Freezing (stiffening, not moving)
- Panting heavily (when they are not hot or haven't exercised)
- Shaking or Tremors
- Ears back
- Not taking treats
- Tail between legs or downward facing

Common stress triggers:

- Loud, sudden noise or a constant loud atmosphere
- New environment (smells, physical items, etc)
- Changes in routine (started training, started visits)
- Social situations (new dogs, new people, crowds)
- Rough handling
- Forced hugs (invasion of personal space)
- Inconsistency (need for routine)

Stress begins at home. Getting close to time to leave, start moving faster, talking louder, grabbing things quickly, stress in traffic, etc.

How am I going to de-stress my dog?

- Plan ahead. Prepare ahead so you aren't running around and increasing tension.
- Create a visit routine. When your dog sees you doing particular things, they will know what that means.
- De-stress yourself. Our dogs look to us for direction. They are looking to see how they are supposed to react.
- Don't force your dog to interact. It will happen naturally. If not, make the exchange brief and move on. It can feel embarrassing at first. Just a moment ago your dog was friendly and outgoing, now they are not. It is not a reflection of you. Your dog is not misbehaving. Sometimes we don't like a particular person that we meet. Why does your dog need to like everybody?
- Protect your dog from rough handling or petting. Children and many adults do not realize how rough they are when they pet. If you have a small dog and they are used to petting a big dog, or you have a big dog and they believe they can rough around with a big dog.
- Let your dog explore a little bit. Let them sniff around the visit site a little bit before beginning the visit, if appropriate.

- Get up and move around. If your dog loses focus or begins to show stress signs, get up and walk around for a few minutes. A good distraction for 5 minutes can de-stress both of you.
- Leave the situation. This goes back to don't force to interact or protecting your dog from rough handling. Also, it is part of get up and move around. Excuse yourself and explore with your dog. Re-enter after a few minutes.
- Leave the visit. If you have tried several things and you are not having success with getting your dog to relax or interact, just leave. It is not a good day. Forcing your dog to stay at that point will create a negative effect and will carry over into the next visit. If this continues, you will never have good visits because your dog will remember the negatives of visiting.
- Massages: Dogs generally like having the area behind their ears gently rubbed. Also the area at the base of the skull. You could use your finger tips on their chest and make slow circular motions. You can also try long sweeping gentle strokes down their back beginning at the neck and ending at the tail. In general, dogs do not like having their legs or paws rubbed or even touched. This can make them more anxious. If you have done so since they were little, then they will probably enjoy it. If you are just starting, go slow, short increments of time and watch for signs positive or negative.