

CANINE STRESS SIGNS

Some stress signs may be difficult to see, while others are very noticeable. Some signs relate to an increase in activity, as in acute stress – body and mind go into “red alert” status. Others relate to a decrease in activity or shutting down – in response to chronic stress. These differences are due to chemical changes taking place in the dog’s brain.

Please note that some of the signs listed below may also be caused by health-related problems. Consultation with a veterinarian may be advised.

Stress Signs:

Backing away

Growling when approached to be handled

Crouching or slinking posture

Cowering

Loss of appetite

Yawning (Unless your dog is about to take a nap, yawning is fairly indicative of stress.)

Panting (Panting is normal for dogs who are hot, but the dog looks relaxed. If panting is related to stress, often the tongue will be cupped at the tip as opposed to laying limp and relaxed.)

Drooling

Pacing

Excessive shedding

Diarrhea/ bowel movements

Vomiting

Inappropriate or increased urination (when the body is stressed, fluids are forced from the body)

Licking the lips

Coughing

Sneezing

Dilated pupils and/or red around the eyes

Trembling or shivering (take in context – dog may be cold)

Shaking (as if the animal were shaking off water)

Whining, excessive vocalizing (barking)

Freezing in place

Nipping

Sweaty paws (leaving sweaty paw prints on the floor)

Increased activity (may look frantic or ‘hyperactive’)

Excessive scratching or licking repeatedly

“Spacing out” by turning away or avoiding eye contact

Hiding behind the handler

Hiding under furniture

Decreased activity

Refusing to interact with family; previously playful dog not wanting to play

Confusion (may also be a medical emergency such as seizure or diabetic problem)

Skin disorders (may need medical or dietary attention in addition to stress management)

Possible causes of stress:

Unusual noises
Unknown places
Confusing or inconsistent training or handling
People exhibiting strange or unusual behavior (can include baby who is beginning to crawl)
Unpredictable or rough handling
Unusual odors
Being crowded by people or other animals
A person being nervous or acting in a strange way from the animals perspective
Inadequate socialization to new people and experiences
Extreme indoor and outdoor temperatures
Housing or resting area in an inappropriate place, not able to get adequate rest as a result
Visiting company – dog not getting adequate rest in safe area
Inadequate exercise or mental stimulation
Inadequate diet
Humans “anthropomorphizing” animal behavior thus causing behavior problems
Inappropriate or excessive feeding of animals
Any unusual event
Genetic predisposition

Stress Reducers:

Remove dog to a different area
Block visually so dog cannot see the trigger
Let dog have 'down time' in a safe quiet place
Redirect dog to suitable chew toy
Calming massage (be careful not to reward fearful behavior)
Check for physical problem (take to veterinarian).
Socialize dog to new experiences. You must make it pleasant for the dog, never force the dog.
Establish leadership so dog looks to owner for guidance
Counter-conditioning and desensitization (seek assistance from humane trainer or behaviorist)