

# FEAR, ANXIETY & FEAR-AGGRESSION IN DOGS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **PART 1: UNDERSTANDING FEAR & ANXIETY**

What is fear, anxiety & stress?

Why some dogs more anxious than others

Signs of fear in dogs

Why some dogs use aggression

The 'aggression ladder'

The importance of choice

Why punishment worsens anxiety

The effect of over-arousal

The effect of trigger stacking

Bite inhibition (bite severity)

### **PART 2: MANAGING FEAR & ANXIETY**

Recognising fear & respond appropriately

Managing the environment

Establishing a safe haven

Enriching your dogs life

Using anti-anxiety medication

### **PART 3: TEACHING NEW BEHAVIOURS (TRAINING)**

Foundation behaviours

Rewards, Cues & Markers

## **PART 4: CHANGING BEHAVIOUR & EMOTIONAL RESPONSE (BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION)**

Behaviour modification overview

Counterconditioning

Desensitisation

## **PART 5: HANDLING HUMANELY**

The consequences of forceful restraint

Humane animal handling: The way forward

## **PART 6: SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

Avoiding aversive / dominance-based training methods

Reward based training: The ethical, humane, modern approach

How to identify an ethical behaviour professionals

Red flags to avoid in a trainer

Trusted NZ behaviour professionals

## **PART 7: MUZZLE TRAINING MUZZLE TRAINING**

Benefits of a muzzle

Breaking the stigma

How to muzzle train

Choosing the right muzzle

# PART 1: UNDERSTANDING FEAR & ANXIETY

## WHAT IS FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS?

**Fear** is an emotion that causes an animal to avoid things that are perceived as dangerous; what or who the animal perceives as dangerous can be independent of actual risk and may not match a human's perception.

**Anxiety** is the anticipation of future danger that may be unknown, imagined, or real. Anxiety is an involuntary response and is a very unpleasant experience.

**Stress** is the physiologic response triggered by anxiety and fear. It includes dilated pupils as well as increased heart rate / respiratory rate / blood pressure.

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## WHY SOME DOGS ARE MORE ANXIOUS THAN OTHERS

### 1. GENETICS

Some dogs are predisposed to anxiety due to underlying **abnormalities in brain chemistry**, which may be genetically inherited.

### 2. INADEQUATE SOCIALISATION

A common misconception is that fearful dogs have been abused in the past. However, more often than not, it is improper socialisation during puppyhood that has caused the problem. **Dogs are born without fear** then between 3-14 weeks of age (the 'socialisation period'), puppies explore their environment and learn what is 'safe' and 'unsafe'. Puppies need to have positive experiences with a variety of sights, sounds, places, people and other animals during this period as this enables them to learn the coping skills to feel safe in a variety of situations. **Lack of, or negative experiences during** this period can have **lasting negative impacts** on a dog's emotional responses to unfamiliar or fear-provoking situations in the future.

### 3. LEARNED BEHAVIOUR & PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

Dogs are constantly learning but unfortunately, when it comes to learning, fear trumps everything; i.e. **it is a lot easier to learn to be afraid, than it is to unlearn that fear.**

Dogs learn by association; this means they learn to associate specific situations with either good or bad emotions, based on their previous experiences. Dogs also learn what helps them feel safe in each situation (e.g. escape, avoidance, freezing or aggression); With repeated 'practice', these behaviours become learned and this is why **without intervention, most anxious animals become more reactive over time.**

# Body Language of Fear in Dogs



**Slight Cowering**



**Major Cowering**



## More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



**Licking Lips**  
when no food nearby



**Panting**  
when not hot or thirsty



**Brows Furrowed, Ears to Side**



**Moving in Slow Motion**  
walking slow on floor



**Acting Sleepy or Yawning**  
when they shouldn't be tired



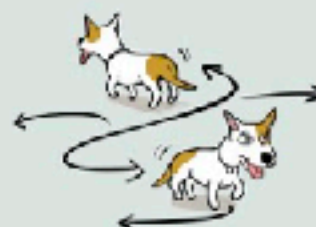
**Hypervigilant**  
looking in many directions



**Suddenly Won't Eat**  
but was hungry earlier



**Moving Away**



**Pacing**

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# Facial Expressions of STRESS



LOOKING AWAY



WHALE EYE



CLOWN MOUTH



BROW FURROWED



EARS ALERT



EARS BACK/FLATTENED



EARS SIDEWAYS



GRINNING



CHEEK PUFFING,  
TEETH CHATTERING



SQUINTING,  
BLINKING



# THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression: lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive aggression: hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.



## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight: ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret: tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.



## YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)

- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.



## YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)

- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.



## GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Lip licking, avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, lifts paw, partially dilated pupils, slight panting but commissures of lips are relaxed.



## GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.



## GREEN: PERKED/INTERESTED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but loose lips, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.



## GREEN: RELAXED (FAS 0)

- Sleeping.
- Neutral: ears in neutral position, not perked forward, brow soft, eyes soft, mouth closed but lips relaxed, body loose, tail carriage neutral, pupils normal dilation.
- Friendly greeting: slow back and forth tail and butt wag, ears just slightly back, relaxed brow and eyes, may have mouth slightly open with relaxed lips and loose tongue.



## A happy dog

A dog who is happy will be relaxed.

1

Dog has a relaxed body posture, smooth hair, mouth open and relaxed, ears in natural position, wagging tail, eyes normal shape.



2

Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.



3

Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.



## A worried dog

These dogs are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you to go near them.

1

Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.



2

Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking and ears are back.



3

Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising a front paw.



## An angry or very unhappy dog

These dogs are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.

1

Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you – pupils dark and enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.



2

Dog is lying down cowering, ears flat, teeth showing, tail down between legs.



3

Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.





## SIGNS OF FEAR IN DOGS

When dogs are feeling anxious or afraid, they may display 4 types of behaviours to communicate their emotional state; these are: **Fight, Flight, Freeze & Fidget**. These behaviours are commonly called ‘**distance-increasing**’ or ‘**diffusive**’ because their purpose is to deflect a threat; lessen the intensity of or diffuse a situation; and prevent escalation towards aggression.

<p><b>‘FLIGHT’</b> (‘Avoidant’)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding eye contact</li> <li>• Turning head or body away</li> <li>• Moving away</li> <li>• Trying to escape</li> <li>• Cowering / crouching down</li> <li>• Tucking the tail under</li> <li>• Exposing the whites of the eye (‘whale eye’ / ‘half-moon eye’)</li> <li>• Licking the nose / lips</li> <li>• Yawning</li> </ul>	<p><b>‘FREEZE’</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing still / immobility</li> <li>• Creeping around / moving slowly</li> <li>• Refusing to eat</li> <li>• Lifting a front paw</li> <li>• Dilated pupils</li> <li>• Wrinkled / furrowed brow</li> <li>• Ears down &amp; back</li> <li>• Mouth closed, lips drawn back</li> <li>• Trembling, shaking</li> <li>• Rolling onto the back</li> </ul>
<p><b>‘FIDGET’</b> (‘Hyperactive’)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyper-vigilant (on high alert, looking all around)</li> <li>• Increased activity &amp; reactivity</li> <li>• Decreased closeness to owner</li> <li>• Panting</li> <li>• Trembling, shaking</li> <li>• Pacing, restlessness, unable to settle</li> <li>• High pitched whining</li> <li>• High pitched barking</li> <li>• Salivating (drooling)</li> </ul>	<p><b>‘FIGHT’</b> (Aggression)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standing still with a stiff stance</li> <li>• Tail straight up or curved over the back</li> <li>• Direct stare</li> <li>• Hair raised on the back (raised ‘hackles’)</li> <li>• Snarling (displaying teeth)</li> <li>• Growling</li> <li>• Snapping</li> <li>• Biting</li> <li>• Barking aggressively</li> </ul>

## USEFUL VIDEOS ON DOG BODY LANGUAGE

- Kristin Crestejo
  - Part 1: [https://youtu.be/8bg\\_gGuwzg](https://youtu.be/8bg_gGuwzg)
  - Part 2: <https://youtu.be/t4N2XvnY7Mo>
- Zoom Room: [https://youtu.be/00\\_9JPltXHI](https://youtu.be/00_9JPltXHI)
- Photo montage: <http://en.turid-rugaas.no/calming-signals-photos.html>
- Fear free happy homes: Anxiety 101: [https://youtu.be/8Nie\\_vyIKuA](https://youtu.be/8Nie_vyIKuA)



## WHY SOME DOGS USE AGGRESSION

A dog may use different coping strategies to deal with a perceived threat; this depends on the situation, the dog's prior learning and how the other individuals in an interaction behave. A dog may use several strategies all at once or switch from one to another. Anxious animals may even provoke a situation in an attempt to get more information because they are so uncertain about how to respond.

Aggression may be the first chosen strategy if a threat occurs quickly, at close quarters or the dog is unable to escape. Aggression may also be chosen because the dog has **learned** that **aggression** was **successful** in the past.

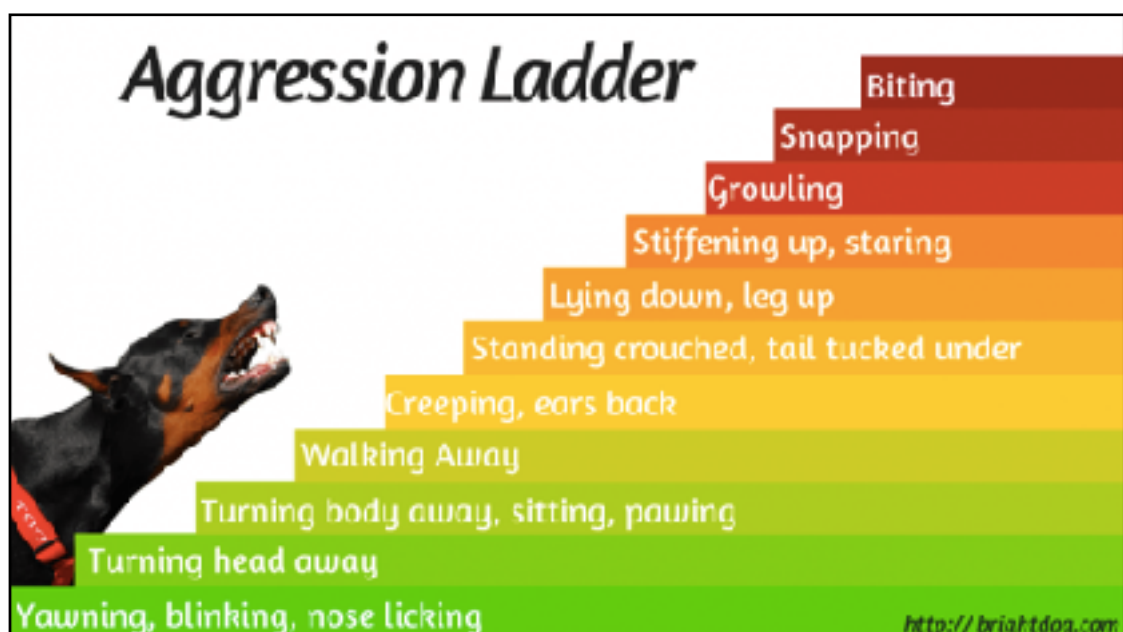
More commonly, however, aggression occurs because 'diffusive' behaviours (such as freezing and avoidance) have been repeatedly **misunderstood, ignored** or **responded to inappropriately**, and the dog has learned that these behaviours are ineffective, leading to a dog who appears 'unpredictable' even though the aggression is entirely predictable (see 'aggression ladder'). As a dog practices using aggression, she may even show fewer signs of fear and **appear more confident** despite the fact that the **aggression** is **rooted in fear**.

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## THE AGGRESSION LADDER

The aggression ladder is a sequence of gestures & body language that dogs may display when feeling fearful or threatened. Each individual dog will have a different sequence of behaviours & may have more or less steps in their 'ladder'.

The 'diffusive' behaviours on the lower rungs of the ladder are designed to deflect the threat and avoid escalation towards aggression. The gestures on the higher rungs of the ladder, such as growling, snapping & biting mean "Stop. Leave me alone right now!" The sequence **culminates in aggression, only if all else fails**.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHOICE

When fear is underlying a behaviour, choice is important; if a **dog's choice** is **removed**, the behaviour will likely **escalate** or move towards **aggression**.

In addition, dogs who are repeatedly subjected to stressful situations in which they cannot escape may eventually stop trying to avoid the situation to the point where even if opportunities to escape are presented, the dog takes no action. These dogs may 'freeze' and appear 'well-behaved', cooperative or tolerant of whatever is being imposed on them despite a negative emotional state due to a psychological phenomenon called '**learned helplessness**'; This occurs when a human or animal is conditioned to believe that they are utterly helpless and have no control over their circumstances. It is unethical to use this as a strategy to gain a dog's compliance.

Actions that take away your dog's choice include:

- Restraining (including placing a muzzle without prior desensitisation)
- Grabbing / holding their collar
- Picking them up
- Holding them down
- Placing them on their side ('alpha roll')

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## WHY PUNISHMENT WORSENS ANXIETY

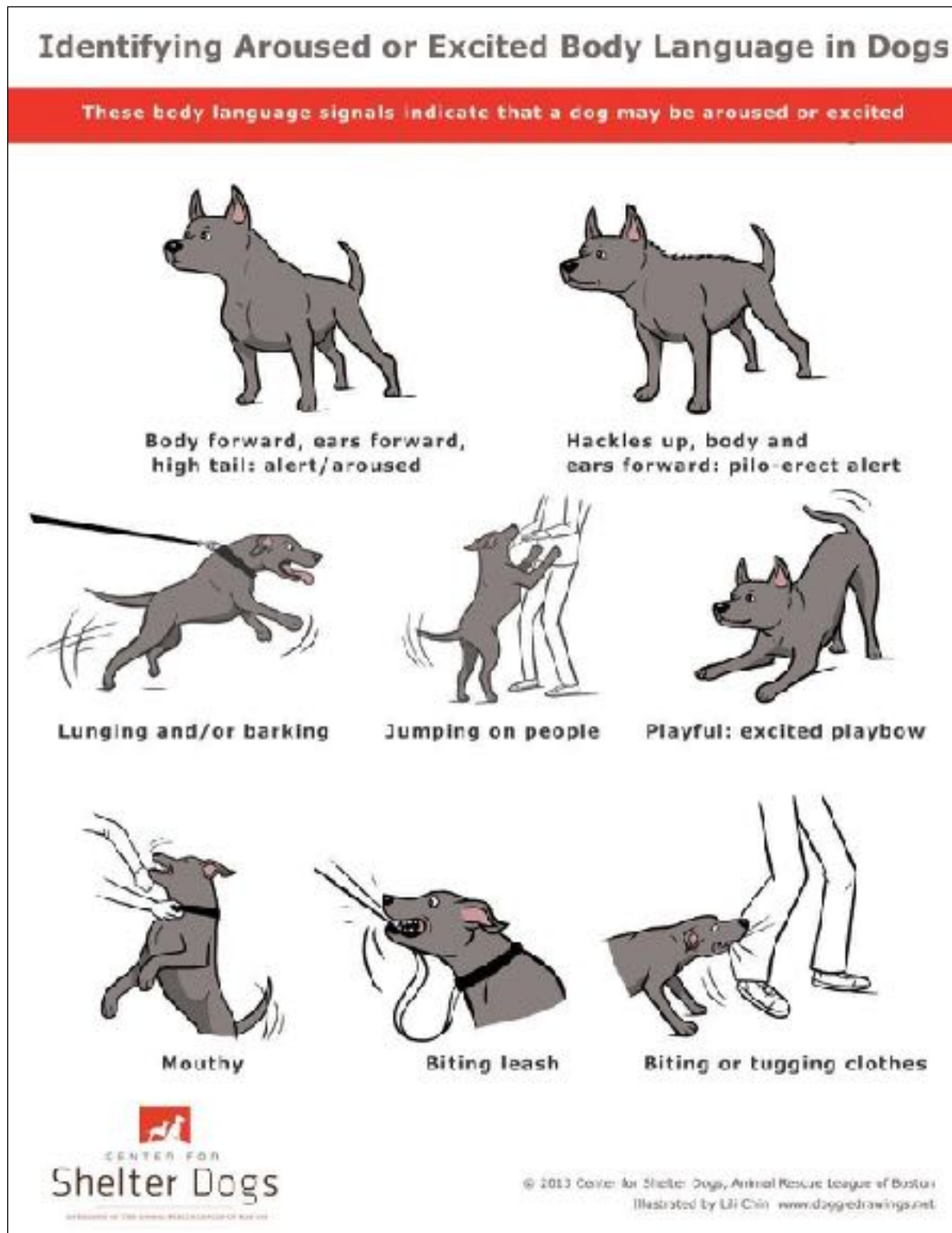
Decades ago, commonly-held beliefs about dog behaviour were based on the 'wolf pack' theory and suggested that unwanted behaviour from dogs was due to the dog wanting to be the dominant 'alpha dog'. 'Dominance' models used **aversive training** methods such as punishment, discipline, physical restraint and intimidation including yelling at, staring down, 'alpha rolls' and other confrontational methods; these caused **fear, pain** and **distress** to dogs. Since then, **scientists** have updated their knowledge of wolf social systems and dog social behaviour and the '**dominance**' theory has been thoroughly debunked. However, some dog trainers still use aversive training methods and this poses serious welfare concerns.

Aversive methods **worsen anxiety** & associated behaviours because they:

- a) don't address the **underlying cause** of the dog's behaviour (usually fear & anxiety)
- b) make the dog view people and the world as even more **scary** and **unpredictable**
- c) cause many dogs to **suppress** early **signs** of fear thereby increasing the risk of **aggression without prior warning**
- d) reduce the quality of the relationship between the owner and the dog and breaks trust

## THE EFFECT OF OVER-AROUSAL

All dogs have a natural baseline arousal level. When stimulating, exciting or stressful events happen, your dogs arousal level is raised. If arousal goes above threshold ('over-arousal'), a dog can become wound up, hyperactive or **over-excited** and show **inappropriate behaviours** such as mouthing, humping, barking, lunging and overly-rough play. During over-arousal, a dog **cannot think clearly** or **regulate** his own **behaviour** and may even show aggression.

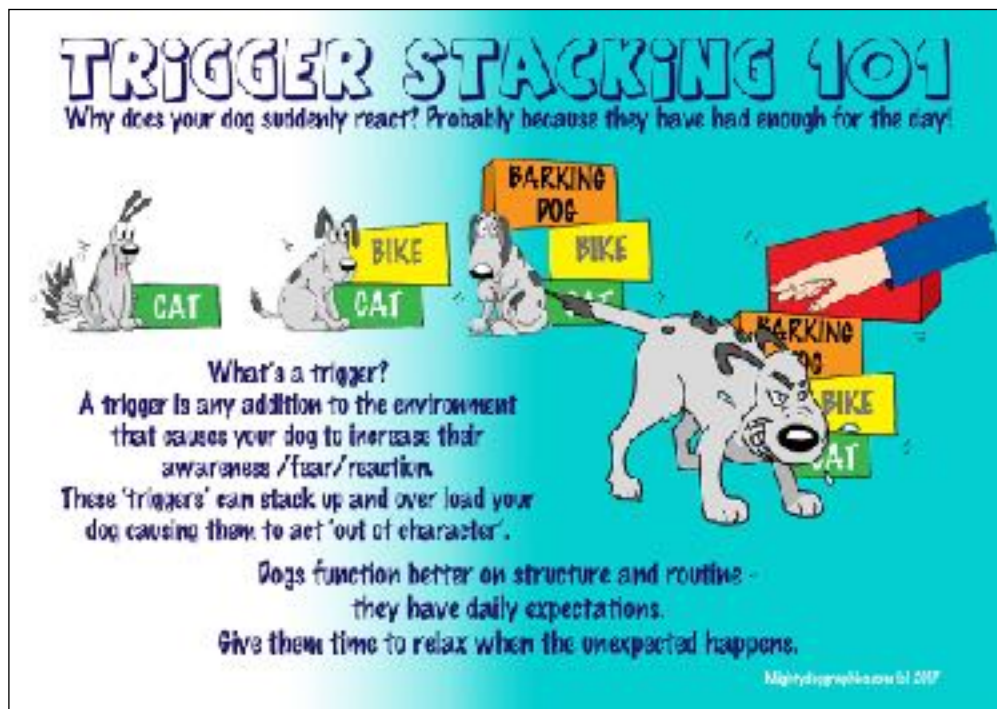


[Back to table of contents](#)



## THE EFFECT OF TRIGGER STACKING

A trigger is anything that causes a dog to feel stress, arousal or fear. Each dog has its own individual triggers. Trigger stacking is when a dog is exposed to a number of triggers **all at once or one after the other** until the dog's **coping threshold** is **exceeded**; this may cause the dog to react 'unpredictably' with a **stronger than usual reaction** (such as aggression), to a situation in which the dog is "usually fine."



## BITE INHIBITION (BITE SEVERITY)

Dogs are fast and can bite and release 3 times in the space of 1 second; so **it is the dog who decides** whether or not he makes contact or causes harm i.e whether or not he '**inhibits**' the bite.

Fearful dogs may also back up immediately after they have bitten, or bite from behind when an interaction is ending in an attempt to stop the human from changing their behaviour & doing something the dog thinks is worrying.

Different degrees of **bite severity** exist but regardless of severity, all bites should be taken as a **serious** sign that the dog need **urgent help**:

1. **Snapping**: 'Biting' without making contact. This is a dog's 'warning'. Do not 'punish' this behaviour as it provides useful information i.e. that the dog was sufficiently distressed to snap.
2. **Superficial bites**: Bites where no blood is drawn. These are also likely inhibited by the dog but may result in worse bites in the future if the dog doesn't receive help.
3. **Multiple or deep bites**: Bites with no inhibition from the dog, these pose a serious safety risk to others.

## PART 2: MANAGING FEAR & ANXIETY

### RECOGNISING FEAR & RESPONDING APPROPRIATELY

Monitor your dog's **body language** for signs of fear & anxiety and respond **appropriately** by helping the dog feel safe.

Body language is your dog's way of communicating that he is uncomfortable with the situation or does not want to interact with a particular person or animal.

If your dog displays signs of aggression, such as growling, move away or remove the dog from the situation to **prevent escalation to a bite**. Take note of what was occurring before the growl so you can manage or avoid this situation in future.

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### MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

Fearful or anxious dogs should **never be forced to stay** in a situation in which they are becoming progressively more **fearful or panicked**. Dogs do not just "get over it." **Forcing** them to stay is likely to **intensify the problem**.

**Avoid or actively manage situations** in which your dog has shown signs of fear or avoidance or is likely to be anxious (e.g. crowded environments, visitors, children, dog parks, doggie daycare, kennels). If your dog is weary of unfamiliar people, don't force her to interact with people she's uncomfortable with. If your dog is afraid of other dogs, avoid dog parks to reduce stressful and unpredictable interactions with other dogs. Consider getting a pet sitter when you go on holiday rather than putting your dog in a kennel.

For events & situations that are unavoidable (such as grooming & vet clinic visits), talk to your groomer or vet about ways you can work together to manage the situation. Be an advocate for your dog. See handout 'Reducing the stress of vet visits & grooming' for further information

**Avoid over-arousal & trigger stacking:** Be aware of your dogs triggers and monitoring for signs of stress and over-excitement to help you keep your dog below threshold. Teach your dog a 'down-stay' to encourage calm behaviour.

## ESTABLISHING A SAFE HAVEN

A safe haven is a special space where your dog can go to relax and escape stressful situations such as storms, fireworks or visitors. A safe haven can be a crate, room, modified piece of furniture, closet, teepee, tent or ‘fort’ (e.g. blanket draped over a coffee table); it should be away from the front door or high traffic areas and be **off limits to scary things**. **Only good things** should happen in the safe haven.

The safe haven should contain a comfortable resting area and all the fun things your dog likes such as food dispensing and puzzle toys. You can dim the lights, close the blinds and play classical music, audiobooks or white noise to block out sounds. A dog appeasing pheromone such as an Adaptil Diffuser™ (Ceva) may also help to create a relaxing environment.

Practice sending your dog to her safe haven at least once a day for special treats, toys, or attention. For dogs that are fearful of unfamiliar people in the home, ask **visitors** to call or text ahead of time and place your dog in the safe haven before they arrive.



By Chewy Studios



Photo by @dramatic\_feline



PHOTO: JAY WILDE



## ENRICHING YOUR DOG'S LIFE

Enrichment provides mental stimulation, prevents boredom, burns energy and reduces stress and anxiety in dogs. Anxious dogs crave predictability so try to stick to the same times for feeding, walking, training & departing from home.

### FOOD

Throw away the food bowl; instead, use food dispensing toys (e.g. Kong®), puzzle feeders, slow feeders, 'licki mats', snuffle mats and frozen treats to encourage your dog to work for his food and enhance problem-solving skills. You can also use mealtimes for training using each kibble as a reward.

### TOYS & PLAY

Playing with your dog is a great way to reward, build confidence and improve your relationship. Tug-of-war, fetch and flirt poles are great ways to play interactively with your dog. Take turns winning and rotate your dogs toys weekly. Teach new tricks and keep it fun!

### EXERCISE

Aerobic exercise such as running off-lead is important and can help reduce anxiety. If your dog's recall is not good, use a 10m long line to give your dog some freedom while still maintaining control.

### FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Confidentcanines.co.nz](http://Confidentcanines.co.nz)
- [Sithappens.co.nz](http://Sithappens.co.nz)
- [Enrichedcanines.co.nz](http://Enrichedcanines.co.nz)



## ANTI-ANXIETY MEDICATION

### HOW BEHAVIOURAL MEDICATIONS WORK

The brain is hardwired to create negative emotions when in an anxious or fearful state; an animal in this state simply **cannot relax, focus or learn** new coping skills.

Anti-anxiety medication improves your dog's **emotional state** and **increases learning** pathways in the brain leading to the formation of positive associations at an increased rate.

Medications are not a cure-all and should **accompany behaviour modification and management**.

### WHO CAN PRESCRIBE BEHAVIOURAL MEDICATIONS

Most veterinarians can prescribe anti-anxiety medications. However, knowledge and experience using these medications varies between vets.

A **veterinary behaviourist** has **expert knowledge** and **experience** using behavioural medications and has a thorough understanding of their interactions, side effects, effectiveness and suitability for specific problems. They can tailor a medication plan to suit your dog's needs and combine the plan with a behaviour-modification program. However, with only a small number of qualified veterinary behaviourists in New Zealand, demand exceeds availability and long wait times can be expected.

### FINDING THE RIGHT DOSE

Individual response to medication varies between dogs. **Trialling** different **dosages** or **combinations** of medications may be necessary before the most effective protocol is found.

Response to the medication also depends on the intensity of the trigger; it is recommended to give a test dose at home (without exposure to any triggers) to assess the response; the goal is relaxation without undesirable side effects, such as excessive sedation, hyperactivity or excessive hunger. Bear in mind that some sedation is desirable to counteract the adrenaline from the fear response that is activated once the dog is exposed to the trigger.

### LONG TERM MEDICATIONS

Long term medications include anti-depressants such as Fluoxetine (Prozac®), Clomipramine (Clomicalm®), Sertraline and amitriptyline. They take 3-5 weeks to take effect.

### SHORT ACTING MEDICATIONS

Short acting medications last a few hours and can be used for short term situational anxiety in addition to long term medications. Short acting medications include benzodiazepines (Diazepam, Clonazepam, Lorazepam), trazodone, clonidine, gabapentin and pregabalin.

## PART 3: TEACHING NEW BEHAVIOURS

**Reward-based training** (a.k.a positive reinforcement) involves rewarding a dog for a desired behaviour, whether the dog has performed it naturally or in response to a cue given by the trainer. When done correctly, reward-based training encourages dogs to think for themselves and leads to high obedience with few training or behavioural problems.

### FOUNDATION BEHAVIOURS

Foundation behaviours help with behaviour modification (see next section) because they encourage relaxation, focus on the handler and **give the dog an alternative desirable behaviour to perform** instead of a previous undesirable behaviour. Foundation behaviours include: **sit, down, sit-stay, down-stay, eye contact ('look') and hand targeting ('touch')**. Foundation behaviours should be **taught independently of any negative triggers**.

### REWARDS

Rewards include **treats, praise or play**. Treats are the simplest & least complicated so are used most frequently. Initially, use high-value rewards (e.g favourite treats); with time and repetition, rewards may be lower value or given less frequently. A **treat pouch** is a convenient way to keep treats out of the way yet easy to reach so your dog can focus on the task rather than the treats in your hand. A pouch also allows you to have treats on hand for positive reinforcement of desired behaviours at any time.

Initially, you can use the **food** reward as a **lure** to **guide your dog** into a desired behaviour. Gradually, replace the lure with a cue (below).

### CUES (COMMANDS)

Cues are the **signals** that convey to the dog which behaviour is being requested. Cues are sometimes referred to as '**commands**'. They can be **verbal** (i.e. words) or **hand signals**. Cues should be short, uncomplicated and not be repeated more than 2-3 times. Avoid using too many words. The goal is to be as clear and concise as possible. e.g. simple say "sit" instead of "Sit, Fido, sit down, common, sit down".



## MARKERS (“YES” SIGNALS)

A ‘marker’ is a **sound** that **tells the dog a treat is coming**. Markers improve learning (compared to treats alone) because they bridge the gap between the behaviour being performed and treat delivery; Delayed treat delivery (sometimes several seconds) causes confusion for dogs about which behaviour earned the reward; the marker is used to signal the **exact moment** the dog is performing the desired behaviour.

Common markers are the word “**yes**” (said in a distinct, sharp tone) or a ‘click’ sound (using a clicker or tongue). Start by pairing the marker with a treat repeatedly (without requesting a behaviour) until that the dog learns that the sound predicts the treat. Once the dog know the marker sound, use it to ‘mark’ desired behaviour.

**Timing** is key; as soon as the dog performs the desired behaviour, **immediately** say “yes” then follow **immediately** with a treat.



## PRACTICE

Repetition is key! Spread training throughout the day and **use mealtimes** to practice, using each kibble as a reward. **Consistency** is important so make sure everyone in the household is training the same way. **Avoid distractions;** Teach new behaviours in a calm environment with minimal distractions. Once your dog has mastered the skill, you can practice in gradually more distracting environments to simulate real-life.

# PART 4: CHANGING BEHAVIOUR & EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

## BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION OVERVIEW

Many anxious dogs will benefit from behaviour modification to reduce reactivity to triggers & change the emotional response from anxious to relaxed.

The most commonly used methods for behaviour modification are counterconditioning and desensitisation. The two methods are often combined.

The keys to successful behaviour modification are:

1. The **environment** and **exposure** is **controlled**.
2. The dog is **never pushed** beyond its **fear threshold**.
3. The dog's **body language** is **monitored** for signs of anxiety to determine when to move forward and when to stop to allow the dog return to a more relaxed state
4. **Aversive** training methods such as punishment are **avoided** as these increase anxiety and are counterproductive.
5. **Physical manipulations** without prior warning or consent are **avoided** as this can break trust. i.e. get consent & give the dog warning before touching / moving him.

## COUNTERCONDITIONING

In counterconditioning, **rewards** are **paired** with exposure to a **trigger** (e.g person, noise, object, situation, environment) to create a **positive association** with that trigger. **Giving treats during a vet visit** is a common example of counterconditioning.

## DON'T 'POISON THE STEAK'

During counterconditioning (especially when counterconditioning against a neutral trigger), rewards can be given freely in order to let the dog know what the 'currency' is and to get them into a positive emotional state. However, when **counterconditioning to a negative trigger**, the order of events is important; the **reward should be given after the stimulus, not before** (e.g. vaccination then treat, 'in the bath' then treats start, let the dog hear car in the driveway then food starts flowing, let the dog see another dog at a distance then give treats). Doing it the **wrong way around** (giving the reward before the trigger) inadvertently creates a negative association with the reward ('poisons the steak') and creates a 'suspicious' dog.

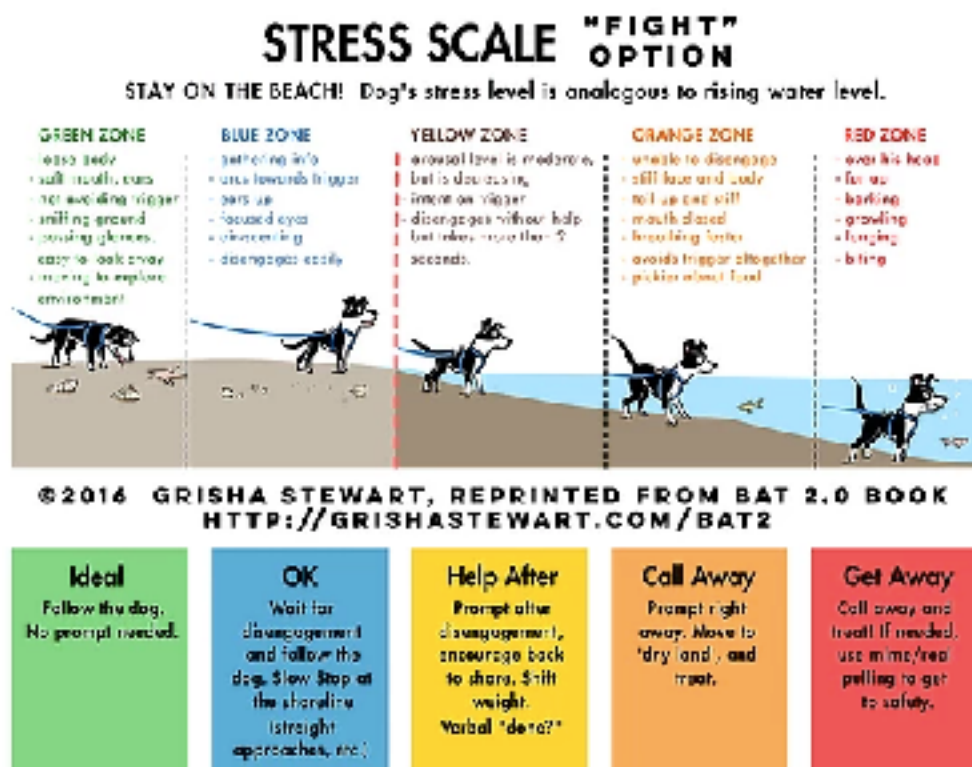
## DESENSITISATION

Desensitisation involves **gradual repeated exposure to a trigger** until the dog is ‘desensitised’ to that trigger. Exposure starts at the lowest intensity (one at which the dog does not react) and gradually increases as the dog becomes less reactive. Desensitisation is usually **combined with counterconditioning** and is an effective strategy for **noise phobias** (e.g fireworks, thunderstorms).

### AVOID FLOODING: “STAY ON THE BEACH”

Exposing a dog to triggers at intensity levels above their threshold for reactivity, in the hopes that they will “get used to it” is called ‘flooding’ and will only serve to overwhelm the dog and worsen the problem.

The **stress scale** below can be used to determine whether exposure is at the correct level (one which will achieve successful desensitisation) or whether you need to backtrack to a lower intensity. It requires monitoring your dog for signs of stress. The goal is to stay in the green or blue zones (“on the beach”) and to only increase the exposure level if the dog remains “on the beach” the entire time.





## PART 5: HANDLING HUMANE

All dogs need to endure various ‘husbandry’ (animal care) procedures such as nail trimming, grooming, injections, blood draws, examination, restraint & taking medications at some point in their lifetime.

For far too long, the attitude towards dog handling has been, “do it because I said so” . However, there is **growing awareness** of the importance of engaging **cooperation** and giving dogs some **control** over the procedures we ask them to endure. Increasingly, veterinarians & animal care professionals are taking low-stress, fear-free approaches to animal care.

However, it’s equally important for pet owners to do their part to make health care less stressful for their pet; this includes choosing the right professional (and avoiding those using force), training your dog ‘cooperative care’ and preparing your dog for procedures by using behaviour modification.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF FORCEFUL RESTRAINT

Restraining dogs in a forceful manner can **make things worse** to the point where they can no longer receive thorough care. A dog who is struggling when being handled for a procedure or examination is likely **confused** or **afraid**; restraint will only make this worse.

With each **negative experience**, difficult behaviour is likely to worsen and the dog may escalate towards aggression. For dogs who are already weary of unfamiliar people, a **single negative experience** can cause them to develop a **generalised fear** and suspicion of anyone new.

### HUMANE ANIMAL HANDLING: THE WAY FORWARD

#### COOPERATIVE CARE

Cooperative care involves training an animal to be an active, willing participant in handling and husbandry procedures.

#### LOW STRESS HANDLING

Low stress handling certification is available for veterinarians and animal handlers. The program was created by world-renown behaviourist and veterinarian, Dr. Sophia Yin, who also published the comprehensive guide for veterinarians “Low stress handling, restraint & behaviour modification of dogs & cats”

#### FEAR-FREE

In 2016, veterinarian, Dr. Marty Becker, launched ‘Fear Free’, a certification program training veterinary professionals how to minimise fear in their patients. The program is now also available to dog trainers and groomers.

## PART 6: SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

### AVOIDING AVERSIVE / DOMINANCE-BASED TRAINING METHODS

Unfortunately, the **dog ‘training’ industry is not regulated** so anyone can call themselves a ‘trainer’ or ‘behaviourist’ without any credentials. Credentials also don’t guarantee the trainer is using ethical, humane, scientifically based methods. Unfortunately, many dog trainers are still using **aversive training methods** and this poses **serious concerns for dog welfare**. It’s important to **seek behaviour and training advice only from those using modern, positive based methods**. This is especially important for dogs who are already anxious.

#### THE DOMINANCE MYTH

Decades ago, commonly-held beliefs about dog behaviour were based on the ‘wolf pack’ theory and suggested that unwanted behaviour from dogs was due to the dog wanting to be dominant or the “alpha” dog. ‘Dominance theory’ has since been thoroughly **debunked** by science.

‘Dominance models’ use **aversive training techniques** such as “alpha rolls”, staring the dog down or other confrontational methods and punishment which can **caused fear, pain and distress to dogs**. These methods do not address the underlying cause of the unwanted behaviour and often **increase the dog’s fear and anxiety** which can actually **make the unwanted behaviour worse**. Aversive methods also reduce the quality of the relationship between the owner and the dog and can place the owner at serious risk of physical injury.

### REWARD BASED TRAINING: THE ETHICAL, HUMANE, MODERN APPROACH

Research has shown that **reward-based training** is more effective and more humane. Reward-based training focuses on teaching animals by increasing their motivation and improving their emotional state, without using force.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY AN ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR PROFESSIONAL

- Look on their **website** or social media for a description of their **training methods**. Words like ‘reward-based’ or ‘positive reinforcement’ is a good sign. **Photographs or videos** can be helpful as well. Look for animals being rewarded for doing the desired behaviour.
- Ask about their **education** and **experience**. At a minimum, the trainer should have taken classes in animal behaviour and psychology. Research any **credentials** your trainer has earned and understand what the requirements are to obtain the certification.
- Ask if there are any behaviour **problems they are not prepared to handle**. A reputable trainer is self-aware and recognises when a client needs to be referred elsewhere or work with a veterinary behaviourist.
- Ask to **observe a class or a training session**.
- Ask yourself if **you and your pet feel comfortable with the techniques** being suggested.

## RED FLAGS TO AVOID IN A TRAINER

- **Guarantees** that training will be successful. Guarantees are **unrealistic and impossible**. Behaviour can never be guaranteed. Qualified trainers and behaviour professionals are willing to admit and discuss this.
- Be cautious of trainers who’s **websites are vague about methods** used. Trainers that use aversive methods are not always upfront about it, hence why vague communication about methods is a red flag. Again, photographs and videos can be helpful. **Avoid trainers that use aversive methods or physical force**.
- Ask the trainer if they use or recommend **prong collars, shock collars, or choke chains**. These aversive tools should not be used. You may see these tools in the trainer’s photographs or videos.
- **Avoid** trainers who reference **dominance theory** or being the “**alpha**” or “**top dog**”

## TRUSTED NEW ZEALAND BEHAVIOUR PROFESSIONALS

- Veterinary behaviourists
  - **Dr. Jess Beer**, Kiwi Vet Behaviour - <https://www.kiwivetbehaviour.net/>
  - **Dr. Elsa Flint**, Animals with Attitude - <https://www.animalswithattitude.co.nz/>
- Clinical animal behaviourists
  - **Hannah Sadgrove**, ThinkDog - <https://www.thinkdog.nz/>
- Dog trainers
  - **Force Free Dog Training NZ** - comprehensive list of trainers regularly updated (click on ‘Files’ in the menu) - [Force Free Facebook page](#)
  - **Association of Professional Dog Trainers NZ (ADTP)** training directory: <https://www.apdtnz.org.nz>

[Back to table of contents](#)

## PART 7: MUZZLE TRAINING

All dogs have the potential to bite but dogs that have shown aggression in the past should especially be conditioned to wear a muzzle.

### THE BENEFITS OF A MUZZLE

- Provide reassurance & peace of mind for you and those around you
- Keep other dogs & people safe
- Allow you to focus on rewarding good behaviour
- Allow reactive dogs to go on walks & other outings that they would otherwise miss out on
- Prevent your dog from developing a bite history, which may carry serious ramifications
- Create safe veterinary visits so you & your veterinarian can relax (which in turn will help your dog relax). May also help vets perform a more thorough examination
- Send a visual signal to give your dog space. Visit <https://ignoremydog.com> for 'Ignore my dog' apparel.
- Prevent your dog from scavenging or attacking wildlife on walks

A muzzle will not fix your dog's reactivity and is not a green light to put your dog into a situation that will cause him to react. Even though he may not be able to bite, the situation will only serve to strengthen his reactivity.





## BREAKING THE STIGMA

**Dogs who wear muzzles should not be judged as ‘bad dogs’;** their owners should be praised for being responsible and keeping everyone safe.

A popular way to reduce the visual stigma of a muzzle is to **decorate** it using colourful adhesive foam, fleece wrap, fabric tape or rhinestones. See: <https://muzzleupproject.com/2019/08/modifying-your-dogs-muzzle-an-equipment-guide/>

There is a lot of work being done on breaking the stigma of dog muzzles through social media. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/TheMuzzleUpProject/> to see photos of many dogs proudly wearing their muzzles



## HOW TO MUZZLE TRAIN

You can train your dog to absolutely love wearing a muzzle if you go slow and follow the right steps. Check out these online resources on how to train your dog to wear a muzzle:

- Search hashtag #muzzlettraining on Facebook
- <https://muzzleupproject.com/muzzle-training/>
- <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.58/obs.598.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Muzzle-101.pdf>
- <https://youtu.be/1FABgZTFvHo>
- <https://youtu.be/Q5qsty9s9n0>
- [https://fb.watch/eBS7ewwS\\_S/](https://fb.watch/eBS7ewwS_S/)

[Back to table of contents](#)

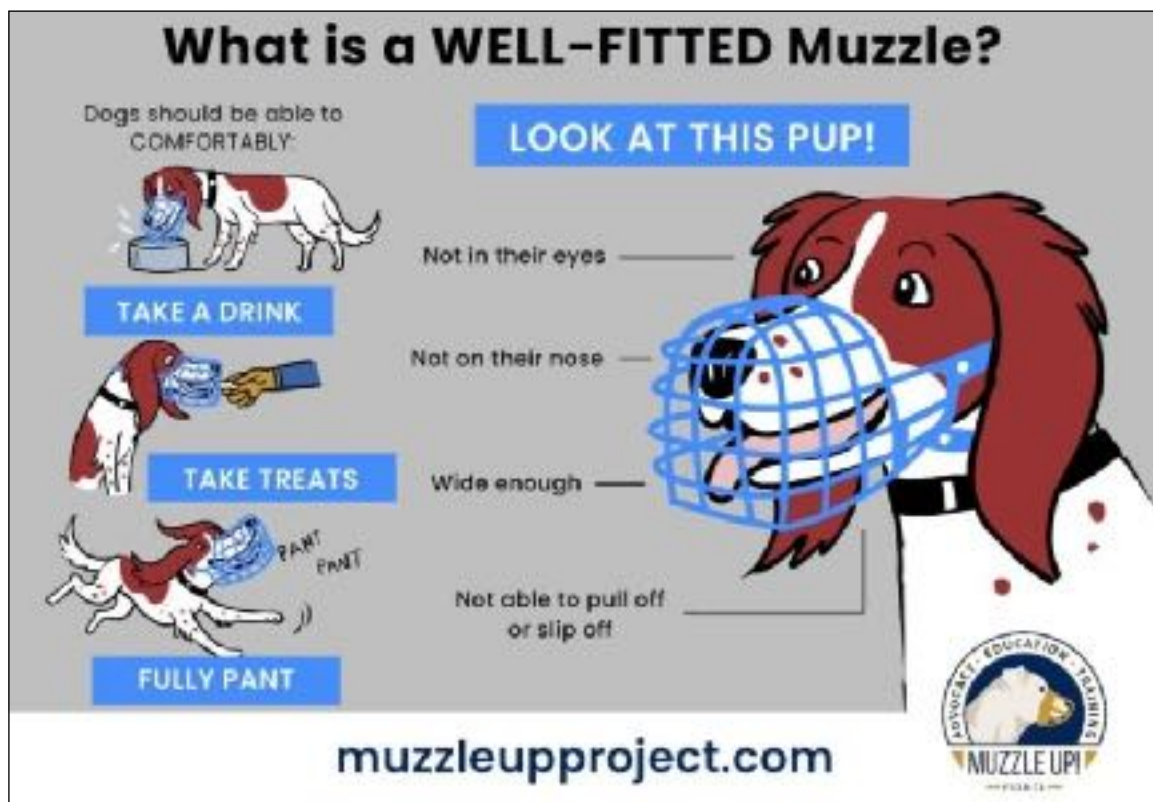
## CHOOSING THE RIGHT MUZZLE

### GETTING THE RIGHT FIT

Measure your dog's nose length, width, height, circumference as well as the circumference of your dog's neck & compare these to the manufacturer's sizing guides as appropriate.

A well-fitted muzzle should:

- Be **comfortable** & **not rub** on the dog's eyes or face
- Be **secure** so the dog can't paw it off
- Allow the dog to pant and bark
  - **Avoid fabric or cloth** muzzles as they do not allow dogs to pant. These should not be used for more than a few minutes.
- Allow the dog to eat & drink
  - The ability to **feed treats** through a muzzle is important as it allows us to use 'counterconditioning'.
  - For ideas on what you can feed through a muzzle, visit: <https://youtu.be/4MhPKIWDJs8>



## **BASKERVILLE ULTRA®**

This muzzle is considered by many to be the gold standard for a safe and comfortable basket muzzle. <https://companyofanimals.com/uk/brand-product/baskerville-ultra-muzzle/>

Product features include:

- Durable, flexible rubber
- Neoprene padding on the straps to prevent chafing
- Safety strap that fits over the head to ensure a secure fit (optional)
- Wide holes guarantee your dog can eat, drink and pant
- Can be shaped by placing in boiling water: <https://youtu.be/vfaYuMefivI>



## **BUMAS®**

Bumas is a German based company that produces colourful, comfortable muzzles available in standard, customisable or breed-specific: <https://bumas-muzzle.com/en/shop/>



## MUZZLES FOR 'TOUGH-TO-FIT' DOGS:

- **Very long** slim-nosed breeds (Greyhounds)
  - <https://greyhoundgear.com.au/products/aussie-style-yard-muzzle?variant=40508696297612>
  - <https://companyofanimals.com/uk/brand-product/brand-product-baskerville-anti-scavenge-muzzle/>
- **Broad** nosed breeds (English bulldogs, boxers, English bull terriers)
  - Try the Baskerville 'ultra', moulded to the correct shape
  - Baskerville 'wide fit': <https://companyofanimals.com/uk/brand-product/baskerville-wide-fit-muzzle>
- **Flat-faced** small breeds (Pugs, French bulldogs, chihuahuas)
  - These are especially challenging. Google search 'short snout fabric muzzle'
- **Very small / toy** breeds
  - Challenging to find small enough muzzles
- <https://journeydogtraining.com/the-five-best-dog-muzzles-for-tough-to-fit-dogs/>

## MUZZLE COMPARISON & REVIEWS

- [https://youtu.be/bABPNJ\\_deRg](https://youtu.be/bABPNJ_deRg)
- <https://petexpertise.com/blogs/news/muzzle-guide-compare>