



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.) which can be prevented by monitoring your dog's level of stress. By reading your dog's stress signals you can monitor their level of stress, and by recording them and their potential triggers, you can help your dog remain happy and healthy.

We have divided these signals into three groups by how strong of signals they are. Mild signals are worth paying attention to, but most dogs can still be otherwise enjoying themselves or training with some mild stress signals. Moderate stress signals indicate that your dog may be stressed by whatever is happening. Consider giving your dog a chance to relax soon, and if you're training, try a few easier exercises before repeating the stressful one. Any severe stress signs require you immediately remove your dog to safety. Something's very wrong, and you need to act quickly.

Many of these signs can also be caused for other reasons. For example, sneezing and yawning are both common and normal in many situations, so they're not always indicative of stress, especially if you don't see any other stress signs. Some, like diarrhea or excessive urinating can also indicate a medical concern. Signs that are commonly also medical concerns are labeled with the first aid symbol to the right. Consult your veterinarian if you see your dog exhibiting one of these signs when they don't appear to be stressed, or if you have any other medical concerns.



mild stress signs

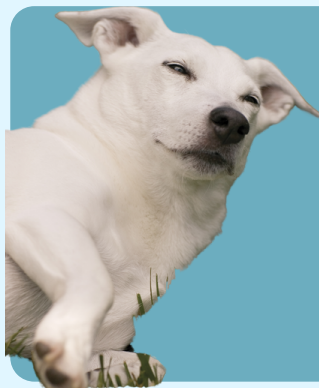
Remember: mild stress signs like these are worth noting, but don't mean you need to stop what you're doing yet. Be on the lookout for more serious signs!

Urination or Marking

is more common
with male dogs



Squinting Eyes



Scratching



Deliberate Blinking Eyes



Shaking

as if to get off water

trembling like they're
cold is more severe



Sneezing



Yawning

as if tired




Turning Away/ Avoiding Eye Contact



moderate stress signs

Remember: moderate stress signs like these are worth noting as well as considering stopping the training or activity you're doing, but there's probably not an immediate health or safety risk. Be on the lookout for more serious signs!



Panting
panting while exercising is normal and not necessarily stress



Coughing


Muscle Tension
muscles may appear to be clenched or as if bearing weight



Barking
at other dogs, people, or potential stressors



What should we do if our dog looks like this?

Stress Yawning with the seemingly exaggerated yawn.

Squinting so severe that the eyes are completely closed.

Tension in the dog's facial muscles.

While yawning and squinting are only signs of mild stress, facial muscle tension indicates that we should probably give our dog a chance to relax soon.

**Low Carriage of
the Ears**



**Licking their Lips
or
Darting their
Tongue**



**Diarrhea or Bowel
Movements**



(Stress) Shedding

this is common
at the
veterinarian



If any moderate signs of stress appear while you are training your dog, your dog needs a break before continuing. Back up a few steps in the training process to where your dog is succeeding, then build back up in smaller steps to what you were previously asking the dog to do. By gradually expanding that area of success by pairing incremental challenge with food and play, you'll convert the previously stressful situation into a signal of fun.

Slow Tail Wag

a slow tail wag is
NOT friendly



Pacing

just like an anxious human may pace,
so do anxious dogs.



severe stress signs

Remember: Any severe stress signs like these require you to immediately remove your dog to safety. Something's very wrong, and you need to act quickly.

Puffing

this is when the dog rapidly exhales a small amount of air, causing her cheeks to puff out.



Lunging

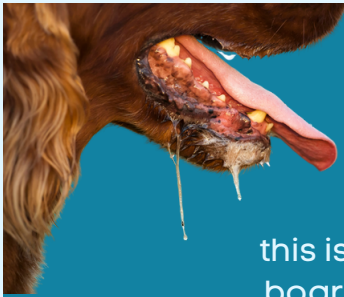
at other dogs, people, or something else



Drizzling



this is common when boarded or during a seizure



Staring

often at the stressor



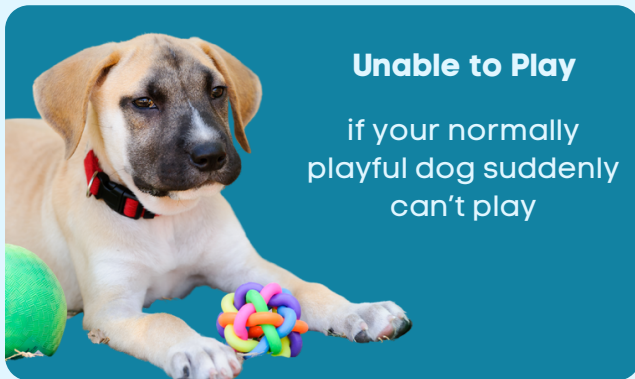
Holding Breath



"Spacing Out"

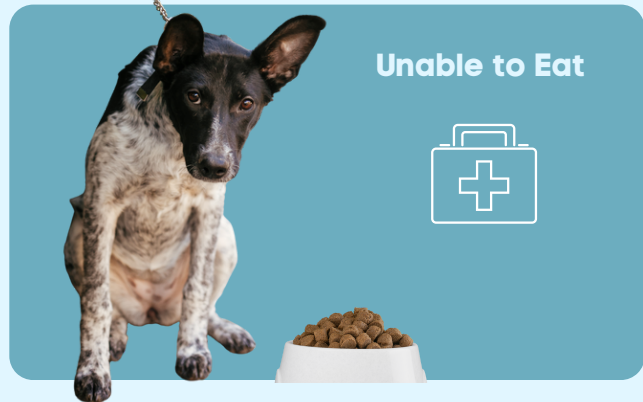
likely similar to dissociation in humans, "flipping the brain into neutral" avoids processing stress



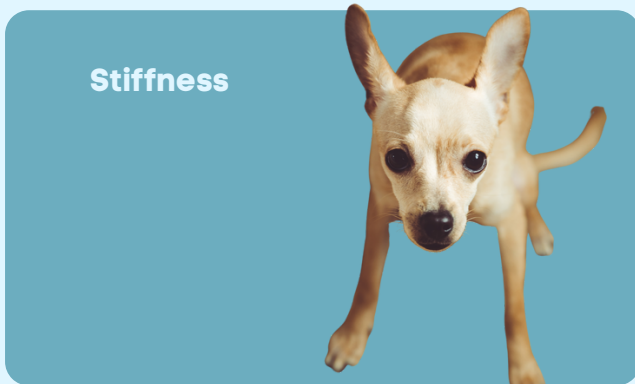


Unable to Play

if your normally playful dog suddenly can't play



Unable to Eat



Stiffness



Trembling as if Cold

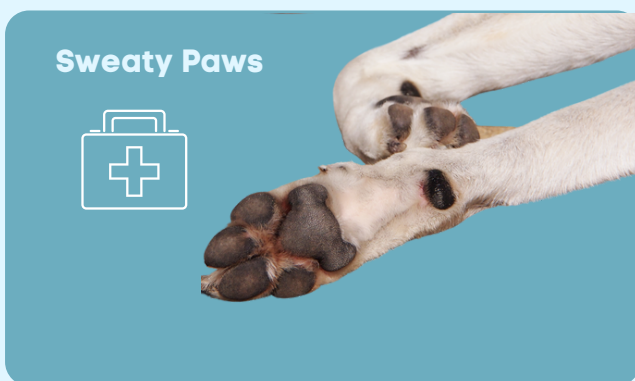


Increased Activity



Decreased Activity

sometimes looks like a "stress nap," where a dog shuts down and goes to sleep



Sweaty Paws



Tail Tucked Between Hind Legs

How stressed does this dog look to you?



Low carriage of ears - though this may be less noticeable in a dog with erect ears, erect ears are usually held more straight up than this.

Dog is **turning away** and **avoiding eye contact** with the person petting him.

Dog is in a hunched over, **stiff** position.

Tail tucked so far that the dog is sitting on it.

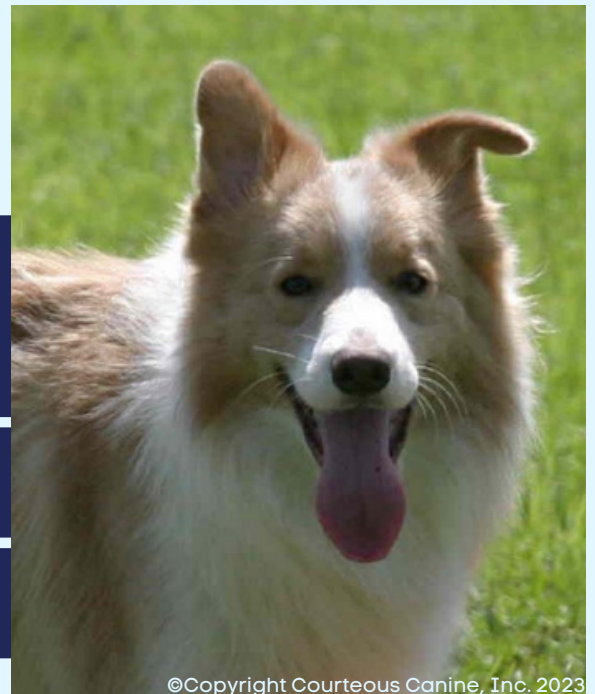
The stiff position and tucked tail indicate severe stress. This dog needs to be immediately removed to safety! If it's someone else's dog that looks like this, remove yourself and your dog before you get hurt.

Having fun, or ready for a break?

Her lips are not curled upward to reveal teeth, which suggests **panting** is more likely than a "doggie smile."

Her eyes are slightly **squinting**.

Her facial muscles are **tense**.

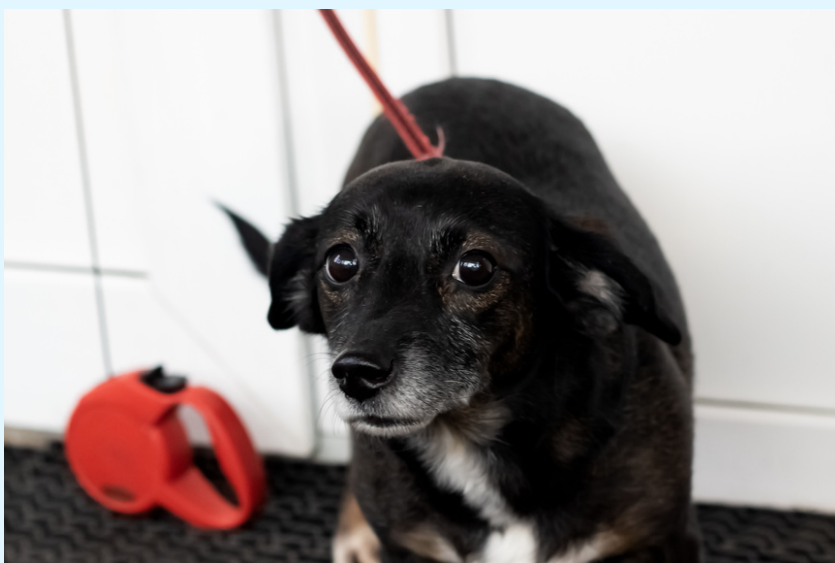
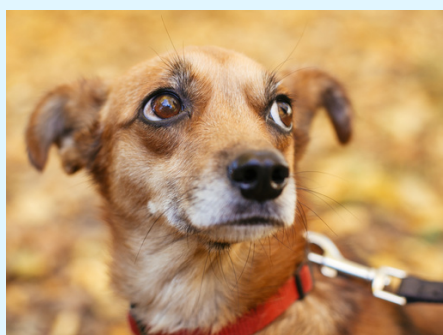
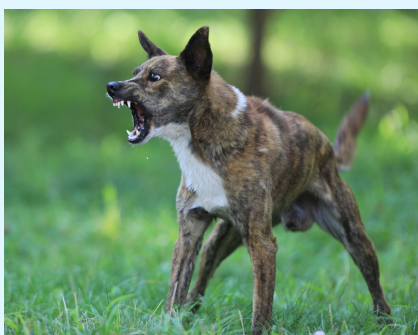
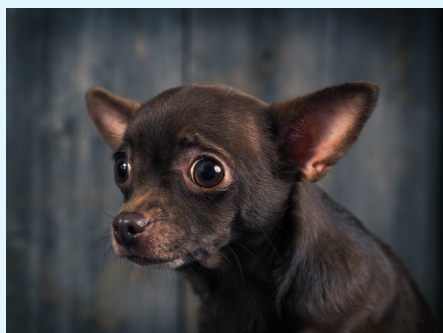


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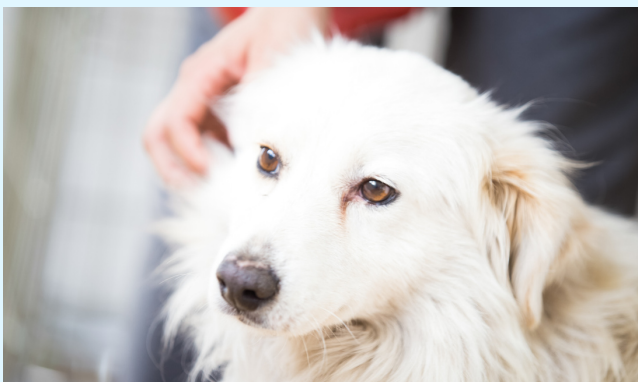
If she was just exercising, the panting is likely normal and not stress. Squinting can indicate mild stress, so if tense facial muscles are the only sign of potential moderate stress, then you should keep an eye out for more signs or consider taking a break soon.

Example Photos

Here are many more depictions of stressed dogs. Use these images to practice analyzing dog stress signals and to reference while analyzing the stress signals exhibited by your own dog.



One dog can display many different stress signals at different times, as pictured here.



Signs of Stress Worksheet

When you observe a potential sign of stress in your dog, write it in the center column, then observe and record possible triggers to its left. Once you identify these triggers, try pairing them with treats and toys to convert those triggers into signals for joy.

Training can only occur sub-threshold, meaning below the moderate stress level. If your dog shows any signs of stress beyond the mild category, they won't be able to learn successfully until after they've had a chance to relax.

Trigger	Signs of Stress	Other Notes

Courteous Canine, Inc. provides Dog Training, Behavior Consults, Agility, Dock Jumping, Scent-work, Lure Coursing and a variety of other dog sports in the Tampa Bay area. We also provide Day Care, In-Home Boarding, Pet Sitting, and Group Training classes!



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