



Zorgbeest

12. Stress and signs of stress

- The handler:
 - does not consider the dog to be the solution to all of the patient's problems or his or her happiness. Such unrealistic expectations put unnecessary pressure on the dog and can lead to stress.
 - never forces the dog to participate in a session if the dog is clearly reluctant or does not appear to be enjoying the sessions (Delta Society, 2012).
 - always protects the dog. Removes the animal from stressful situations such as incorrect treatment of the dog by the patient (IAHAIO, 2014).
 - takes the lead off before (and during) the AAI session and allows the dog to acclimate to the new environment before the session begins. If the dog does not relax, the dog should preferably not participate (Ophorst et al., 2014).
 - avoids using the lead during the sessions (Glenk et al., 2013).
 - avoids locking up the dog in a crate, waiting room, the car or in a separate room.
 - ensures that each session ends on time, thus before the dog begins to show signs of stress (Butler, 2004). This is generally equivalent to a time span of 45 minutes, maximum one hour (Iannuzzi et Rowan, 1997).
 - limits the dog's participation in AAI to two to three sessions per day, twice a week. Also ensures longer rest periods, such as an annual holiday for example (Kohler, 2011). This is of course dependent on what the dog can cope with.
 - keeps an eye out for any signs of acute stress as well as chronic stress that can be caused by participating too frequently or for too long of periods of AAI sessions (Karatsoreos & McEwen, 2011).
 - avoids unpredictability and loss of control for the dog (e.g. new dogs frequently present, unpredictable patient reactions, etc.) that can lead to chronic stress.
 - must also be patient: dogs can learn to get used to some stressful situations if they are trained correctly by the handler (Fine, 2015).
 - limits new situations and environments (Ng, 2014), or ensures there is sufficient time in between them so the dog has time to get used to them.
 - speaks in a calm and quiet tone to calm the dog (Herron & Schreyer, 2014) in slightly stressful situations.
 - avoids punishment or aversive intonations that can lead to stress and aggression (Herron & Schreyer, 2014).
 - explains to the patients how to behave towards the dog and tries to steer this if necessary.
 - avoids hypostimulation of the dog (e.g. constantly repeating the same tasks, insufficient interaction with the dog, always the same environment, etc.) that, in the long term, can lead to a *bore out*.
 - avoids hyperstimulation of the dog (e.g. continuous noise, lots of walking back and forth, too many cues, too many different tasks, etc.) that, in the long term, can lead to a *burn out*.



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- Ideally, during an AAI session both the behaviour parameters (stress behaviours) and the physiological parameters (cortisol level) of the dog should be evaluated in order to detect stress situations and then avoid them (Pastore et al., 2011). This is often not feasible, but be aware that animals that do not show clear signs of stress can still experience stress. This emphasises the importance of the handler: the better the handler knows the dog, the better he or she can assess this.
- The dog:
 - The experiences of a puppy in the first weeks of life are crucial for learning how to cope with future stress situations (Foyer et al., 2013).
 - If the dog develops stereotypical behaviour, this is an alarm signal and his or her environment must be adapted immediately (Fine, 2015).
 - It is important for a dog that remains in a care facility (semi-residential dog) to have his or her own resting area that he or she can always access.
 - When the dog shows signs of stress (e.g. low body posture, whining, panting, tail tucked under, etc.) (Serpell et al., 2010), he or she must have the chance to rest (Hatch, 2007; Fine & Eisen, 2008). If a short rest period is not enough to reduce the stress, the session must be terminated and the dog must be taken home (Lefebvre et al., 2008).
 - Dog-friendly chew toys (e.g. from Kong) can be used to reduce acute stress. Chewing movements relax the dog.
 - Transportation is always stressful in some way. It is therefore important that travel time is not too long and is as comfortable as possible (be aware of the temperature too) (Ophorst et al., 2014). Only transport dogs that are used to travelling.
 - Bright lights and slippery floors can be stressful for dogs. It is best to train them to cope with these.
- The cleaning team:
 - Dogs that are stressed excrete a stress odour that can be alarming to the next dog. Clean the environment after a session therefore if the dog has shown signs of stress (Herron & Schreyer, 2014).
 - Limit the use of cleaning or other products that contain alcohol because their strong smell can cause an aversive reaction in dogs (Herron & Schreyer, 2014) because they have a much better sense of smell than humans.
- The project manager:
 - Tip: hang up the ladder of aggression diagram where it is clearly visible to help all those involved to recognise the signs of stress in dogs.
 - Tip: hang up posters in the private rooms, therapy room, waiting room, etc. with the correct way to approach a dog, recognising signs of stress, etc.



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Additional guidelines for patients' own dogs visiting

- Tip: consider including the following sentence in the facility regulations or contract with the patient: "if necessary, for the welfare of the animal, the animal can at any time be returned home" so that the owners/patients are aware that a visit to the facility may be too much for some dogs.

Additional guidelines for AAI in hospitals

- If palliative patients wish to pass with a dog (their own or AAI) with them, a goodbye ritual is recommended instead of passing with the dog present. It is difficult to estimate what effect the strong emotional atmosphere has on the dog and is therefore important that the dog can relax with a long walk afterwards. Hospitals often provide a buddy in their palliative care. This person should receive good information on how to handle such a goodbye ritual as well as respecting the role of the dog (recognising the signs of stress in dogs, etc.).



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Signs of stress in acute stress situations

List of behaviours

Below is a list of stress-related behaviours dogs generally show as a reaction to acute stressful situations:

- Increased activity
- Restlessness/frequently changing position
- Walking in small circles as if the dog is chasing his or her tail
- Vocalisations such as barking, howling, growling, etc.
- Low body posture
- Shaking
- Sniffing
- Yawning
- Nose licking/lip licking
- Panting
- Excessive salivation
- Eye-contact avoidance
- Dilated pupils
- Whale eye
- Lifting up a paw
- Scratching the floor with front paws as if he or she is digging a hole
- Urinating and defecating/diarrhoea

This list of behaviours is based on the following references: Beerda et al., 1997, 2000; Horwitz et Mills, 2009; Pastore, 2011; King et al., 2011.

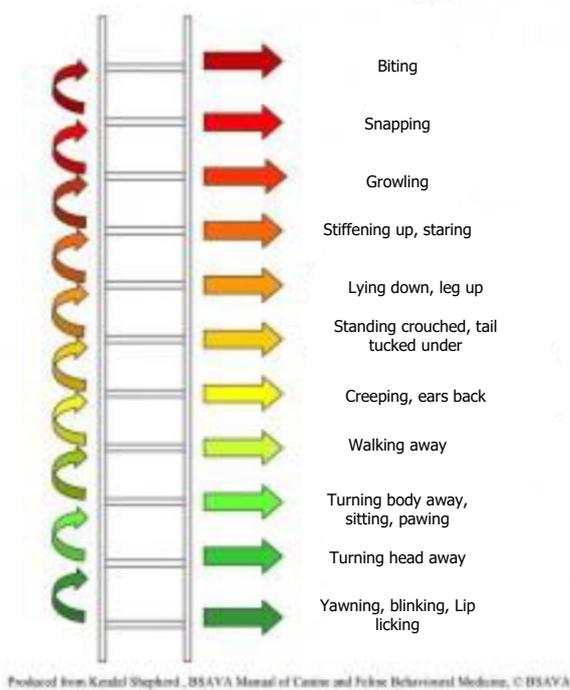


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Stress level scale

A dog will always show certain signs depending on how he or she feels. It is important to be able to recognise these signs as well as be able to interpret them. Please refer to the behaviour ladder from [“The Blue Dog”](#). This ladder contains the behaviours that suggest how the dog is feeling (*The Blue Dog, 2016*).

How does a dog react if he or she is feeling stressed or when he or she feels threatened?





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Signs of stress in chronic stress situations

List of behaviours

If a dog is exposed to stress for a long period of time, he or she can suffer from chronic stress and show the specific behaviours listed below.

It is important to always look at the dog as a whole. It is the combination of different behaviours that make it clear that the dog is suffering from stress, which is often difficult to assess. To help with this, ask yourself the following questions: "Do I see a general change in behaviour in my dog between previously and now?"

- Decrease in exploratory behaviour
- Decrease or increase in social behaviour
- Decrease or increase in sexual behaviour
- Decrease in food intake (anorexia)
- Suppressing body maintenance behaviour such as grooming, urinating and defecating
- Passive behaviour
- Decreased variation in behaviours (playing less, not as curious)
- Increased sleep pattern
- Displacement activity (= an action that has nothing to do with the situation. This behaviour occurs when there is a between two behaviour systems)
- Repeated or stereotypical behaviours (= repeating the exact same functionless behaviour; e.g. walking in circles)
- Increase in aggressive behaviour
- Increase in locomotor activity
- A general increase in activity (shaking, yawning, ambivalent behaviour and displacement activity)
- Vocalisation
- Low body posture
- Autogrooming
- Coprophagia
- Urination
- Sniffing
- Paw lifting

This list of behaviours is based on the following references: Beerda et al. 2000; Horwitz and Mills, 2009.