

30% of Dogs Show These Anxiety Triggers – Are Any True for Your Pet?

If you've ever known a dog with anxiety issues, you know it's downright vexing to watch. You desperately want to find a way to comfort and calm him. Get in tune today with these telltale signals your pet is nervous, stressed and on edge. Then use these 16 ways to calm him.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Around 30% of dogs show signs of anxiety, including obsessive licking, yawning and trembling
- There are many potential causes for your dog's anxiety, and it's important to identify his individual triggers so you can address them effectively
- Where possible, take steps to eliminate the triggers of your pet's anxiety
- It's important to rule out an underlying medical condition that may be the cause of or a contributor to the anxiety
- While some things that cause your dog to feel anxious may be outside your control, there are many things you can do to reduce stressors in his environment and help him remain calm

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published February 12, 2018.

If you've ever been around a dog with anxiety issues, you know it can be hard to watch. You just want so badly to find a way to comfort and calm him.

Estimates are that somewhere around 30% of dogs show signs of **anxiety**, which often take the form of body language that signals uneasiness, and/or behaviors such as obsessive licking. Since each dog has his own style of communicating, it's important to learn your own pet's signals that he's feeling nervous or stressed. There are many signs of anxiety in dogs, and they can change over time. Some of them include:

- Nose/lip licking
- Tail lowered or tucked
- Yawning and panting
- Ears pulled or pinned back
- Destructive behaviors
- Cowering/crouched body posture and/or hiding
- Reduced or absent appetite
- Trembling/shaking

- Diarrhea
- Increased vocalizations — Whining, howling, barking

The first stop for a dog who seems anxious or stressed is your veterinarian's office for a wellness checkup. It's important to rule out an underlying medical condition that may be the cause of or a contributor to the anxiety.

Common Triggers for Anxiety in Dogs

- **Novelty** — Exposure to new items, new people, new animals, etc.
- **Punitive training methods** — Shock collars, yelling, hitting, etc.
- **Loud noises** — Fireworks, thunderstorms, etc.
- **Invasion of personal space** — Disruption when resting, hugging, kissing, forcibly restraining, etc.
- **Changes in housing** — Moving to a new home, boarding, etc.
- **Lack of outlets for normal breed behaviors** — Herding, running, retrieving, etc.
- **Changes in household members** — New baby, new pet, loss of pet or human, houseguests, etc.
- **Separation from human family members** — Separation anxiety, etc.
- **Changes in household routine** — New job schedule, kids returning to school, holidays, etc.
- **Poor (strained) relationships** with other household members (pets or humans), etc.

As you attempt to identify the triggers for your pet's anxiety, it's also important to consider her history. If you adopted her, what do you know about her past? Was she abused or neglected? Is she anxious mainly around men or kids? Other dogs?

Putting Your Anxious Dog on the Path to Peace

Some of the things that cause anxiety in dogs can be unavoidable, such as a move to a new home or a change in work schedules. However, as you can see from the above list, there are several triggers you can exert control over to minimize stress in your dog's life. For example:

- Replace punitive training with positive reinforcement behavior training.
- Make sure everyone in the household understands and respects your dog's need for uninterrupted sleep and appropriate canine-friendly handling.
- Most dogs, especially working and sporting breeds, need much more exercise than they get, so a great place to start in reducing your pet's anxiety is to increase her daily physical activity level. Daily movement is important in altering your pet's stress response.
- Dogs are social creatures who get lonely and bored when forced to stay alone for long stretches. If there's no one home during the day to keep your dog company, recruit a friend or neighbor or hire a dog walker to take him for a stroll around the block, at a minimum. An alternative is doggy daycare.

A high-tech alternative is an at-home communication system where you can check in with your pet (and release treats from a dispenser, remotely). Some **gadgets** allow your pet to call you, too.

12 Additional Suggestions to Reduce Your Dog's Anxiety

1. When you must leave your dog at home alone, leave him with an article of clothing or blanket with your scent on it. Also leave a treat-release toy for him to focus on in your absence. Place small treats around the house for him to discover, along with his favorite toys.
2. Add a flower essence blend like Separation Anxiety from Jackson Galaxy's Solutions to her drinking water. This works wonders for some dogs. And put on some soothing doggy music before you leave.
3. Invest in an Adaptil collar or diffuser for your dog. These products release a pheromone that's designed to have a calming effect on dogs.
4. Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise, playtime, mental stimulation and TLC. The fuller her life is when you're around, the calmer she'll be when you're not.
5. Play calm, soothing music before a possible stressor occurs. This may relax your dog and have the added bonus of drowning out distressing noises.
6. If your dog seems to respond well to pressure applied to her body, there are wraps available (e.g., Thundershirt, TTouch anxiety wrap) that many pet owners and veterinarians find extremely helpful.
7. Ttouch is a specific massage technique that can help anxious pets.
8. Consult your holistic vet about homeopathic, TCM (traditional Chinese medicine) or Rescue Remedy, as well as other specific Bach flower remedies that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress. Examples of helpful products include homeopathic aconitum (or whatever remedy fits the symptoms best), Hyland's Calms Forte or calming milk proteins (variety of brands).
9. Calming nutraceuticals and herbs that can be of benefit include holy basil, l-theanine, rhodiola, ashwagandha, GABA, 5-HTP and chamomile. Consult your holistic veterinarian about which makes sense for your pet.
10. The essential oil of lavender has also been proven to reduce a dog's stress response. Place a few drops on your dog's collar or bedding before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house for an overall calming effect. There are also great oil blends specifically for calming animals.
11. If you've adopted a dog who may have had a rocky start in life, try A Sound Beginning, a program that is designed to help rescue dogs and adoptive guardians learn to communicate effectively and form an unbreakable bond.
12. If your dog's anxiety seems to be getting worse instead of better, consider an individualized approach to managing her stress by allowing her to choose what best soothes her via applied zoopharmacognosy (self-healing techniques offered through a trained professional).

Sources and References

[PetMD, April 23, 2020](#)
