

# Your Rescue Dog



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## WELCOME

Whether you are fostering a dog or helping a rescue dog settle into their new home, as a form of aftercare, it's important to be aware of what to expect in the early days. Many dogs arrive in a new home, stressed and stunned. Some settle immediately though and like everything, it all depends on the individual dog.



Every rescue dog is different. What works with some will be unsuitable for others and the first few days can be stressful for dogs and their new guardians. Many dogs, that are returned to rescue early in their adoption, have never relaxed enough to be themselves in their new home. In many ways, this is understandable if a human family has not been properly emotionally prepared for a new dog. Lack of sleep, mess and stress can have a devastating effect on the mind and body. This is in part why dog rescue is much about the human aspect too.

When we adopt a dog we need to expect certain things, this is particularly important if a dog is scared. This information is also paramount when rescuing puppy farm adult dogs, who have a very specific set of fears and needs. But all rescue dogs are individuals and all need time to settle.

The temptation to try and comfort a new rescue dog is high. As humans, we tend to try and touch to soothe. We hug each other, rub hands and offer all manner of physical contact. This is in our nature and works very well with most of our own species but in canine, it's a stressor and a threat to a scared dog.

Eye contact is another thing that we use with other people to convey support and often earn trust. Eye contact from an unknown dog or person, to a dog, is interpreted as a threat. There are barely any exceptions to this and it is exactly why glancing away acts as a calming signal.

What a rescue dog needs most of all is to be left alone. This is particularly important to a dog that is scared or traumatised. They need space to feel safe and if we look at them or touch them too much, they can't feel safe.

Scared dogs often feel vulnerable when off the floor, they seem to prefer a higher spot or a dark open crate to retreat to. It is far better to allow the dog to go at his own pace, while you set a routine which is understandable. This should include; regular toilet times, regular feeding times, and down time where he can just be quiet.

## OFFER A SAFE PLACE

Provide safe areas in quiet corners of your home, a covered open crate, a bed away from foot traffic - but not in areas where the dog can self-isolate. It's good to offer the dog a safe area where the normal hustle and bustle of home life can be observed, but from a safe distance.



Try to avoid any form of handling in the beginning. Resist the urge to pick them up, stroke or continually approach a new dog. If they approach you then that's fine. Offer gentle affection but always allow the dog to remove himself in the beginning. Any forced contact will hinder the dog's recovery and keep that stress level too high. If a dog is scared, they may benefit from an existing, confident dog in the home. Many puppy farm dogs need a confident dog, to show them that humans and dogs can share trust. Remember, dogs often learn from other dogs.

## FOOD AND DRINK

Some fearful dogs struggle to eat and drink around people. It is often suggested to hand feed a dog that doesn't want to eat. Yet if a dog is scared and we place a lot of emphasis on food, we are adding stress to the situation, as opposed to the required relaxation.



When feeding a scared rescue dog, we need to establish a routine, a time, an area and a place within that area. Some dogs, particularly those that have been hungry, will eat straightaway. Others will be scared to eat whilst in the open or a human is nearby. It's a good idea to put the food down and walk away, but not leave the area altogether. A dog is likely to be happy to eat when you are a few metres away. Don't stand over the food and call the dog to it though, this is far too much pressure.

Dehydration is a danger during this point as some dogs will refuse to drink for days. If they are eating, try mixing more water than usual with their dinner. Take the act of not drinking seriously and if it continues beyond 24 hours, seek veterinary advice.

## TOILETING

Toilet training needs to be an established routine. Some adult dogs are not toilet trained at all, yet they often learn quickly, if the guidelines are clear.

Opportunity should be given to go outside and toilet first thing in the morning, immediately after eating or drinking and regularly spaced throughout the day. If there is another dog in the house, a new rescue dog will often learn from their established behaviour. A dog that toilets in the house should never be punished, they know no different and punishment will lead to stress, mistrust, fear and all lead to further indoor accidents.

Coaching a good toileting routine is about capturing and rewarding outdoor toileting and ignoring indoor accidents.

Unneutered males may carry out marking behaviour, particularly so when they are feeling insecure. They may leave little wet patches on walls, chair legs etc. Most dogs are neutered before going into homes but this doesn't always curb anxiety based marking behaviour. With anxiety based marking, working on the dog's stress levels and confidence will help. It is worth checking with a vet that there is no underlying issue such as a bladder infection which increases the need to urinate. Urine eliminator is a must, as any remaining traces can further encourage urinating in the same spot.

## SETTLING IN

Most dogs, who find themselves in a rescue situation through behavioural issues, will not have lost those issues during their time in kennels. They may however worsen, or temporarily disappear, whilst the dog is living in an unfamiliar and/or stressful environment. Once the rescue dog has settled in his new environment, it is common for behavioural issues to re-emerge. When we talk about behavioural issues, we must be mindful that not all behaviours are necessarily issues. Often, we as humans classify normal dog behaviours as behavioural issues because we as a species find them unacceptable or intolerable, when it often just a dog doing natural dog things.

An example of these could include:

- Digging up the garden.
- Barking.
- Chasing.
- Herding.

These behaviours, if excessive, could constitute an underlying behavioural issue. Excessive barking when alone may be a sign of separation anxiety. Chasing joggers in the park - although chasing is a natural behaviour to carry out - could be construed as having a dog out of control. The key is knowing when a behaviour is normal or when a behaviour needs additional input and training. The behaviour of rescue dogs comes in many forms, however there are a few common behaviours that we may expect to see:

- Reactivity/aggression to dogs
- Separation anxiety
- House soiling
- Food or toy guarding
- Destructive behaviour
-



## THE HONEYMOON PERIOD

The honeymoon period is that first few days or weeks where the dog is unsure and generally seems well-behaved. The post adoption period generally begins with the rescue dog behaving quite well *in human terms*. This period can last anything up to six months, dependant on the individual dog and previous history.

The dog then adjusts to his new life and the following can happen:

1. Past learned behaviours, can emerge that have been dormant for a while.
2. New behaviours can appear that have been accidentally reinforced in the new home.

This can be managed well, if the new home is aware and supported by the adoption process to look out for unexpected emergence of behaviours. In addition, it's important that adopters are encouraged to set fair and stable guidance, so the dog knows exactly what is expected of him.

The most effective way to prevent "problem" behaviours from emerging, after the honeymoon or settling in period, is to ensure the dog understands the boundaries. It may be tempting to be lenient in the beginning when building a bond, yet if changed later those lenient habits will confuse and likely upset the dog.

It's important to use positive training methods as encouragement for behaviours that are acceptable, reward helpful things whilst ignoring the unhelpful ones. Success occurs when we create a predictable routine that a dog can understand.

## SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Many rescued dogs have issues to work through, before they can truly settle. This is unsurprising considering that dogs have evolved to be our companions, over thousands of years, yet we so often let them down.

During the remainder of this module we will consider the most common of those issues, why they occur and what can be done about them. It's important to remember that a lot of these problems can also occur in dogs that have never been abandoned or abused too, because there are always many potential reasons for one type of behaviour.

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation anxiety is when a dog fears being alone to the point of becoming severely stressed or distressed. It is currently thought to be for one of an unknown number of reasons.



There are two types of separation anxiety, amid other undefined reasons for the disorder, fear of unexpected noises or over attachment to the owner. There is no evidence that dogs being left with other dogs find any relief from additional canine company, this type of anxiety seems to be linked specifically with the absence of a human or humans from the home. As every dog is an individual so is their experience, when suffering from separation anxiety.

Some suffer greatly, becoming destructive to themselves and their surroundings. Others simply become sad and depressed when alone, leaving no trace of the stress. This means the owners may never be aware that anxiety occurred at all, during the dog's alone time.

The actual anxiety becomes a phobia (Reid1996) and can become so severe that the dog develops serious stress related behaviours causing poor health, self-harm and obsessive worrying about being left alone. Dogs chain the behaviour of their owners and become stressed very early in regular routines that lead to alone time.

There is a view that separation anxiety is not actually a problem at all, just one of lifestyle as described in the book, In Defence of Dogs (Bradshaw 2011). That dogs simply are not naturally programmed to be left alone thus leaving the entire species susceptible to developing a reaction of anxiety when home alone. In the same way that we socialise dogs through delicate learning periods, we can also teach puppies that being alone is an acceptable part of their lives, yet in most cases we don't. This is sad, as such a regularly stressful life caused by separation anxiety could be easily avoided if general alone time became part of puppy socialisation.

Symptoms include:

- Destructive behaviour when home alone.
- Self-harm.
- Howling and barking when alone.
- Toileting indoors when alone even for a short while.
- Pacing, panting and other signs of stress.

Confirmation of separation anxiety can include examining and confirming the following points:

- The behaviour occurs only when the dog is alone.
- The behaviour always occurs when the dog is alone.
- Anxious behaviours begin even before the dog is left.
- Any sign that the guardian may leave the home results in the onset of anxious behaviour.

Dogs are bright and they can recognise patterns in our own behaviour. If a dog becomes anxious before we leave the house and we carry out a series of acts before we leave, the dog will learn those acts and become anxious earlier. This is a process called chaining. The dog sees a regular set of behaviours as the route towards the final one and if there is never any variation he will see the final behaviour as soon as the first one appears. This is relevant no matter how many acts we carry out in between.

When a rescue dog goes into a new home he will usually show signs of separation anxiety. This is particularly so if the dog's sleeping area is away from that of the owner. Confusion, anxiety, stress and fear will all attribute to anxiety in the dog during periods of separation. This can be helped with rescue remedy and careful management of alone time for the dog.

## TRUE SEPARATION ANXIETY

If the separation anxiety carries on past the initial period of insecurity, then it can be admitted that the dog has separation anxiety and will need some help to learn that being on his own is a normal part of his life. This process must be catered to the dog as an individual, as ever, with his feeling and insecurity at the forefront of the process.

Flower remedies and other herbal calming remedies can be part of the treatment process. Flower remedies are specific to calming the emotions, whilst other remedies work on different areas of the body. The calming products we looked at earlier could be utilised through the stress of separation anxiety.

The first thing to do is change the routine. A dog can very quickly begin to chain human actions, right up to the point that he is going to be left. If the chain of actions are always the same, before the moment of departure, the worried dog will become anxious at the very moment the chain begins.

The next step is making changes to the environment the dog is left in. This will begin the process of detaching from things in the environment which have become stressors (based upon them happening when the dog is left alone). Change the room, the radio, the TV, the dog bed. All the changes will break down the mass environment which the dog finds stressful. Alongside these changes, it is important that behaviour modification begins right away or the dog will soon adapt to the changes and be equally stressed in the new environment.

Next is the happy mat or bed that comes out with a happy toy or chew to settle on. These items are going to be the dog's association to a calm feeling. Gradually the dog will learn to be apart from his human for short periods of time whilst he has the happy mat and toy (filled Kong or similar). This can be as short as 10 seconds to begin with but it will quickly build up. If the dog's human must sit next to the dog and only move across the room from the happy mat in the first instance, then that's fine.

The happy mat and toy are reminders for the dog that his human will be back. He will be conditioned to remain calm on them and then only the time need be increased. The happy mat and toy should always be put away when the human is home, or they will lose their effectiveness.

It's vital for the dog to stay calm throughout the program, if he goes over the threshold into stress then the program will not work, the dog should be set up to succeed and so should the human.

The other thing to do is make sure no fuss is made when the dog is left or when the owner returns. A big fuss will make the dog think that being left is a big deal and we are trying to work towards the exact opposite.

Separation anxiety can be present for any dog. Recent studies are showing that some breeds may be more susceptible to it. This includes working breeds such as border collies, classic hunting dogs such as setters, cocker spaniels and pointers. There is at present, little proof that rescue dogs are any more inclined towards separation anxiety

## COPROPHAGIA

Dogs eat their own faecal matter for a variety of reasons. It is very common in puppy farm survivors and dogs who have lived their lives chained up or confined. Dogs are naturally clean animals; they do not like to toilet in their homes especially their sleeping areas. If they have no choice but to eliminate where they are living. For instance, in a cage in a puppy farm many will simply clean up after themselves.

This behaviour can become a habit and then continue after the circumstances change. It's vitally important that kennels are kept clean when a dog is in rescue. After rescue and when the dog enters a home, if the opportunity is taken away, the habit should dissipate.

## RESOURCE GUARDING

Resource guarding generally betrays insecurity. As a dog becomes more secure and learns that resources are tight, the guarding behaviour should naturally dissipate. This is something to be careful with, as people can make the behaviour worse by handling it in a way that teaches the dog that he is right to guard things.

A common example of reinforcing guarding is by taking the resource away through force, because this will convince the dog he needs to fight harder for it next time. People can also fall into a trap of chasing the dog and getting annoyed. For a dog that is seeking attention or is generally bored, being chased in this way can be rewarding. Then, if we try

to take the item away, we are not only taking the item but also a chance for interaction, so the dog is more likely to guard his prize. This is a habit that can progress to aggression if allowed to.

It is common for dogs to guard their favourite fun thing and not want to hand it over. Toy guarding is possibly the easiest one to work with as it incorporates play. The simplest method to work with is to swap toys. Teach this by having two toys which hold equal value to him and offer one in place of the other. When one toy is surrendered, give the dog

encouragement and the second toy. This can be incorporated into swapping anything at all.



Food guarding can be complex because it is often due to the dog knowing lack and experiencing hunger. If he is guarding and showing signs of aggression because you or another dog is near there are a few steps you can take. The important thing about this type of behaviour is to always keep things low key, always watch the body language and never risk a bite.

Before you consider food guarding modification it's important to ask yourself whether it is necessary. We expect a lot from dogs and whilst extreme food guarding is dangerous, with anxiety based problems, do we really need to do anything other than leave the dog in peace to eat his meal?



## PICA

Pica is the act of eating non-food items on a regular basis. The behaviour is a result of either specific learning or physical concerns such as poor nutrition. Eating grass is a form of the condition though occasional grass eating in dogs is a natural behaviour, yet increased grass eating can point to digestive problems or ill health.

Pica in puppies is an act that can be grown out of. It can be part of the need to alleviate soreness in gums due to teething or simple exploration of the world. It is important not to allow, by careful observation and management, the behaviour to progress into adulthood.

Pica can become a compulsive behaviour and have disastrous consequences. The first thing to do with a dog that is displaying this type of behaviour is establish whether the reason for the act stems from physical need or psychological prompting.

The dog displaying Pica due to physical need (medical problems) can develop the repeated act because of parasites, digestive disorders, nutrient deficiency or a dietary imbalance. The other medical possibility is poisoning as either a one-off incident or over a slower, longer period. Some dogs can learn Pica via attention seeking.

Dependent on the scope and cause for the condition there are various approaches that can be taken. The dog can be given a complete nutrition overhaul to ensure that he is completely healthy and no vital vitamins, minerals and nutrients are missing from the diet. Similarly, a health check to look into basic body and organ functions can be carried out in order to ensure that the dog is completely healthy.

If the dog is carrying out the behaviour to seek attention, a safe yet effective program can be created which gradually changes the focus of attention to teach the dog that the behaviour no longer achieves his aim.

## LONG TERM NEEDS

When dogs are rehomed successfully it is usually because all their needs are met in the long term. Often dogs go into rescue or are returned, based upon lack of understanding by the human factor in the home, or behaviour that occurs because the dog's needs are not being met.



To ensure success with as many rehomed dogs as possible, a rescue will offer knowledge and support for the rehoming party and for the dog. When he is understood and his needs are met, even the most difficult dog to rehome can settle with a new family.

## BIOLOGICAL NEEDS

Many rescue centres are limited in the standard of food they can offer to dogs in their care. Some must choose quantity over quality, which is understandable. In the long-term though, it's important to have some knowledge on canine nutrition and how food can affect the dogs that eat it.

The dog food that we are regularly sold in shops is often poor quality and can cause long term health problems in dogs. The process of creating dog food is rarely transparent and much of the food is created from ingredients unfit for human consumption. Yet the bag or packaging promise vitality and perfect health.

There are two types of reaction to food that a dog can have. Food allergy and food intolerance.

Food intolerance will upset the digestive system and cause vomiting, diarrhoea and general gastric upset. This is usually acted upon quickly, because the effect of the food is obvious by the symptoms.

Food or ingredient allergy is different though for it affects the immune system.

When an allergen is continually put into the body of the dog via his diet, the immune system becomes tired and unable to function properly. The first sign of a struggling immune system is itchy skin, as the dog's body tries hard to shed away the allergen through the skin. This can cause hot spots, self-harm and sore patches.

It is at this point the dog is often taken to a veterinarian and given an injection or cream for the problem area. This is a disaster as it removes the outlet for the allergen and pushes it back into the body and often towards the other organs. Many dogs after being presented with skin problems, that seem to be successfully treated at the time, are back at the veterinarian's office with organ problems a few months later.

Correct nutrition is vitally important for both physical and mental health. A diet which contains additives, preservatives, colourants and e numbers

has now been scientifically linked to behavioural issues in dogs. Hyperactivity, increased aggression, fear or other behaviour issues are often directly linked to food. Additives and preservatives are strongly linked to illnesses, for example skin conditions. A nutritionally balanced diet will help to eliminate toxins and work towards preventing illness.

When it comes to choosing dog food there are three types to consider:

A homemade diet uses human grade ingredients prepared and cooked freshly, it generally draws on organic foods, it may be tailored to either vegetarian or vegan diets. This diet is generally fed alongside commercial biscuit based foods as a filler or may have that supplemented with rice.

The raw diet is becoming more popular and are available to purchase, either fresh or frozen. When feeding raw, it is essential the dog's nutritional needs are met.

Commercial dog food, along with natural and nature diets, is deemed nutrient adequate. Commercial foods can contain high levels of fillers such as wheat, corn, maize etc. which is linked to both physical and behavioural issues in dogs.

Nutrition can have quite startling effects on dog behaviour. Different dogs digest, metabolise and utilise different diets to different degrees of efficiency. The correct diet can make a difference for excitable, reactive or aggressive dogs. Different food types affect the blood sugar, serotonin levels and the rate at which energy is released. If stable blood sugar levels are promoted, energy surges may be minimised.

A hungry dog can display specific behaviours, such as eating their own faeces and scavenging. Hungry dogs can potentially exhibit competitive behaviour towards other animals who may be present at feeding times. Studies have shown, dogs who are underfed or fed an inadequate diet have developed *Pica* which is the term for eating non-food items.

Biological needs also include exercise and veterinary care where required.

## EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS

The dog's emotional well-being will also include careful adherence to his physical needs. The dog must feel secure that he has somewhere comfortable to be and that he is not going to go hungry. Any threat to these basic physical needs will result in emotional insecurity leading to anxiety and eventual stress. To be emotionally happy as dog needs to have fun and be shown affection. We have raised dogs to be needy creatures in general and even the less needy still have a serious bond with humans.

Dogs need their natural affinity with us reciprocated to feel secure. They need playtime, affection, friendship and love in the form of physical play, interactions and physical affection to be truly happy. When we consider the artificial selection that has taken place over the last few hundred years, it must be admitted that we made the domestic dog need us by creating a genetic bond with our own species, therefore we must keep up our side of the bargain.

In addition to relationships with people, dogs also need social and emotional needs with each other.

## MENTAL STIMULATION AND POSITIVE LEARNING

The areas are quite different but nevertheless intricately linked. Understanding a dog is one of the most important things that we must do to communicate properly. We must remember that a dog in the home of a human may have taught himself well to communicate with the people in his life, yet if the people get it wrong then the dog will suffer emotionally.

This area is why bad dog training upsets me so much. When a so called professional talks of dog behaviour in an area that has been scientifically disproven they are nurturing a lack of communication and causing problems, as opposed to solving them.

When a dog is properly understood during training sessions, and his actual learning style is catered to, the animal will not usually encounter too many negative emotions. When the dog is badly trained and misunderstood, he will be saturated with the negative emotions of frustration, fear and stress.

Consistent, positive reinforcement and careful understanding within the dog's current capacity for learning will keep a dog happy during training and behaviour modification. Training will also keep the dog mentally happy, as long as it is knowledgeable training which builds his confidence and sets him up for success.

Dogs need mental stimulation to be happy. Most dog breeds were engineered by humans for a role. They had a job and we must help them to use their skills in a convenient way.

The work of rescue does not stop when someone offers the dog a home. Whilst waving an animal goodbye with the new people that love him is one of the best feelings in the world, it's important that the people are prepared. This meant that you have offered them advice on what to expect emotionally, physically and mentally over the next few weeks. It also means that they feel confident to come back for advice if they struggle and that they know how exactly to meet the dog's needs in the long term. When careful foundations are laid and all areas covered, the dog and his

new humans will be able to build a great relationship, on wonderfully stable foundations.

## BODY LANGUAGE

Dogs are expressive with their body language. Yet, unless we educate ourselves to recognise the ways that feelings are physically shown, we can miss some important signs. Observing dogs and mentally assessing their behaviour is always the most important thing to do, for every canine professional. Observation of rescue dogs is even more important, as stress can cause random behaviours and even severe reactivity.

Due to artificial selection, body language can be tricky to read in some dog breeds. Hindered by face shape, stance, hair and many other factors, some dogs simply have less freedom of expression.

Whilst the following information is accurate, remember too that dogs are individuals. It's crucial to be able to read canine body language as accurately as possible, in a wide variety of dogs and situations.

Expect the hairy dog not to show hackles, because his hair is too heavy, the boxer to seem like he's posturing and that the flat faced dog may not be able to show facial expression so well. Whilst we have messed genetically with so many dog breeds, we have often also taken away some of their abilities to show natural behaviour.

Despite this, dogs generally communicate in a way we can interpret, particularly when we study and try. The following examples will aid understanding.

## HAPPY

Like people, dogs have capacity of many emotional states and the most pleasant of these is happiness or contentment.

A happy dog is soft, loose, relaxed and many dog breeds seem to smile when feeling good.

- Facial expressions neutral or he appears happy.
- Looks neither large nor small for his physique.
- May be panting with a regular tempo.
- May wag his tail from side to side or in a circular motion.
- Mouth is closed or slightly opened.
- Muscles in his face are relaxed.
- Relaxed body language. muscles are relaxed.
- Tail and ears are held in their natural position

## EXCITED

An excited dog is usually playful and having fun. Whilst here may be a moment or two of indecision, particularly when meeting other dogs or strangers. Generally, excitement and relaxation are twinned.

- Body is ready for action.
- Ears are up.
- Excited dogs often hold their mouths open, and they might bark.
- He looks as intense as he does when he's alert, but he might also adopt a playful demeanour.
- Looks at the individual or object that's the source of his excitement.
- Looks natural in size, but his weight might be centred over his rear legs as he prepares to move.
- Tail is held high, and it may or may not wag.



## AROUSED

With a dog, that you do not know, it can be difficult to differentiate between alert and excited.

- An aroused dog will usually hackle.
- Body may look normal-sized or larger.
- Ears might be flattened to the side or held forward.
- Tail might be held low, in a normal position or high.
- The dog may be looking directly at something specific, for instance another dog.

If there's nothing obvious in the environment, there may be something we can't hear or smell.

## PLAYFUL

Playful dogs, like happy ones, are relaxed. The body appears soft and all their muscles are loose with little tension.

- A happy facial expression characterized by a partially open mouth that almost looks as though the dog is smiling
- Body movements are jerky and bouncy
- May bounce around in exaggerated twists, turns and leaps
- May dodge around you, paw at you and then take off running to invite a chase
- May growl or make high-pitched barks
- May jump on you and start mouthing

Dogs enjoy a variety of play styles, including chase games, rough-and-tumble, and games of "keep-away" with an object, such as a toy or ball.

Almost all play is interspersed with the characteristic "play bow" that's common across all breeds. When a dog play bows, he bounces into position with his forelegs on the ground and his hind legs extended with

his bum in the air. This signal is extremely important because so much of dog play consists of what could be perceived as aggressive behaviours. Play bowing informs the other dog that this is play.

## ALERT

Alertness occurs when a dog is paying attention to something that they see as important.

- Ears are up and forward.
- Gaze is directed toward whatever is being detected.
- Hair on his shoulders or back may or may not be raised.
- Head and neck are erect tail either in its natural position or vertically possibly even over his back.
- Looks intense and focused.
- May growl or bark.
- Mouth is typically closed.
- Stands upright with his even weight distribution.
- Tail is rigid and immobile.

## NON-CONFRONTATIONAL

- The dog's body looks smaller.
- The dog may hunch over or crouch low.
- Tail is low or tucked, sometimes rapidly wagging it back and forth.
- Ears are flattened or held off to the sides of the head.
- Neck is low to the ground, but he turns his muzzle up.
- May nuzzle, lick or flick his tongue.
- Averts his gaze so as not to look directly at the other individual.
- Some dogs, particularly puppies, urinate.
- May lie down and rolls over on his back to display his tummy.
- May lie still, or he might paw at the other individual.

This type of non-confrontational behaviour will be maintained even if the dog believes that an aggressive response is required. So, the dog may back into a corner and try to look small, but also snap towards the threat. Ultimately this dog just wants to be left alone.

## FEAR

As fear is inherently linked with stress, the body language of fear will usually involve calming signals, which we discussed earlier in the course. There is also the complexity of fear aggression.

- Body looks hunched.
- Does his best to look small.
- Ears flattened back on his skull.
- May cower close to the ground.
- May lean so that his centre of gravity is over his rear legs to permit a hasty retreat, or lean to the side so that he can recoil.
- May look directly at the source of his fear or he may look away.
- Muscles of his body and face are tense and rigid.
- Tail held low or tucked between his rear legs.

Fear aggression is an important topic with rescue dogs. This is because many rescue dogs have been pushed to their limits. Some fearful dogs never escalate to aggression, but others will if they feel there's no escape.

A fearful dog isn't likely to bite a person or other animal unless all avenues for escape are blocked and he feels trapped. When this happens, he continues to cower but, at the same time shows his teeth and might growl or snarl. If he snaps or bites, it's usually lightening quick, and then he retreats as far away from the threat as possible.

An exception to this is the dog who has learned that warning does not work. The ladder of aggression is based on a set of warning signs that finally become a bite. If any dog has tried to communicate the warning signs in the past, but they have been ignored, he may go straight to bite. Rescue dogs often don't show classically healthy dog behaviour, this is something to keep in mind when working dogs, new into rescue.

## CONFRONTATIONAL AGGRESSION



The aggression that is displayed when the dog is prepared for confrontation means that the dog is not showing fear behaviour. Remember though, that fear is likely to be the basis of this behaviour but over time it may have been replaced with a confidence, usually because polite requests have been previously ignored.

Confrontational aggression is obvious body language. The dog that shows this body language is often giving you, or the focus of the aggression, the chance to back away.

- Ears up and forward.
- Growls, snarls or barks in a low, threatening tone.
- Hackles may be up.
- May look large and intimidating by holding his head high.
- Positions himself over his forelegs so that he's ready to lunge or charge forward.
- Shows his teeth by wrinkling his muzzle and retracting his lips vertically to display his front teeth.
- Stares directly at the person or animal.
- Tail raised and rigid.

Confrontational aggression usually means that the dog is confident enough to follow through on his threat.

## EXAMPLES

Dogs get worried and scared of things they think may be threatening to them just like we do, so even if the excited stranger is friendly they can make our dogs feel tense. Our job as their responsible and empathetic guardians is to read the earliest signs of worry that it's possible to see, then change the thing that's starting to stress them, and deal with it to make them feel better. Dogs often make their feelings clear to keen fussers, and grabby strangers but many people don't understand their requests. Here are some common dog requests that can be easily missed.

### "I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THIS"

Licking their lips or nose, most dogs lick their faces or lips if they are feeling uneasy, a big wide and slow tongue means the dog is very uneasy indeed.



Yawning when approached or when something changes in the environment can tell us that the change is making them uneasy.

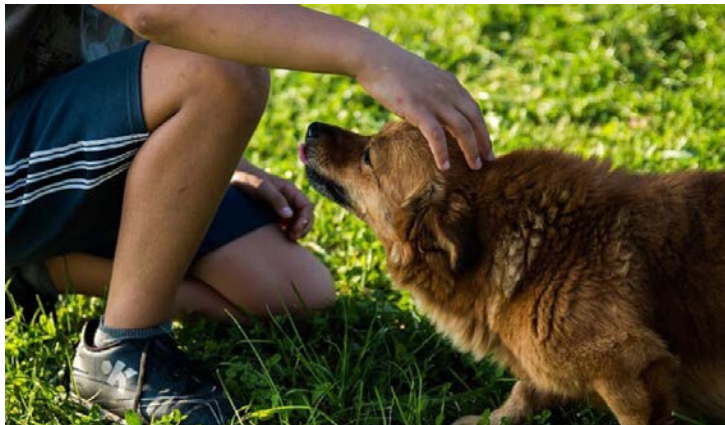


Tension around the lips and eyes may show the onset of fear and stress. The tension is something that is extremely subtle, and you might really need to look for it. Pinched lips are a sign that a dog is worried.

A tense face may lead to a half moon eye, showing more of the eye white than a relaxed dog would.



### "PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE"



A lowered head or head dip occurs when the dog's head goes below the line along the dog's back. A head dip is a subtle sign but very expressive.



A lowered tail position by a dog who feels worried will always be lower than their tail's neutral position. A tucked tail and body meant that the dog is starting to become more worried.



A slightly changed ear position, ears that go out to the side of the head, even by a little bit, may show "go away" communication.



Ears that go backwards may be telling us that the dog is scared. This is known as seal ears. A dog with long or heavy ears, for example a Cocker Spaniel may pinch them into the side of her head.



Averting their eyes away from the thing that worries them, including you is a cut off signal, used to tell us they really don't want to interact. The dog who averts their



eyes may also turn their head away. Head turning, looking away and ignoring are displayed in a way that almost appears like the dog thinks if she can't see the stressor, it is not there. This behaviour can be an important sign of low-level stress but is also common in the state of learned helplessness. Some dogs will look at the wall to avoid being looked at.



Remember to look beyond the hair and into the dog's actual behaviour. Eye narrowing, and blinking are signs that a stress reaction might be starting, she may also show a dilated pupil depending on how quickly she is getting stressed.

This final set of responses are more likely to show confusion than stress in the first instance.

"I'M BUSY. CAN'T YOU SEE I'M CHANGING THE SUBJECT?"



Sniffing when confused or unsure is a type of conflicted behaviour. The dog can see the stressor but decides to *change the subject* instead. The act of intense sniffing is another way for a dog to give the impression of ignoring the stressor in the hope that it goes away. This is not to be confused with a dog's natural need to

sniff and explore with his nose, as scent is the dog's way of exploring his world, sniffing enriches his life greatly. By exploring the entire dog's body language and the situation in context you will be able to recognise what type of sniffing the dog is displaying.



Picking a toy up can be another sign of confusion or displacement behaviour.



The confused dog may scratch himself like he's carrying a million fleas, suddenly and out of nowhere. Which is an attempt to change the subject.

## "THANK GOODNESS THAT'S OVER!"

Shaking off occurs when a dog has passed through mild stress and is returning to normal we often see this when a harness or collar is removed or when an anxious dog comes through their own front door after a walk outside. A shake off appears like the dog is shaking water from their coat and can occur when they manage to escape from someone who is determined to interact with them.



There are many other types of behaviour that will occur if a dog is not left alone after these few early requests. They might even get defensive if they can't escape a scary place or person. It's all based on a change in their physiology related to increasing stress though, and they sincerely can't help it.

## BUILDING A BOND

Rescuing a dog, particularly a fearful one or a dog with unknown history, is initially about bonding. When the relationship, trust and a friendship is established, there is a good foundation to grow.

Bonding can be difficult with fearful dogs or those that have suffered at the hands of humans. It takes work but is well worth the effort. One of the biggest bonding tools that we have is motivation. Working to overcome fear or distrust is easier when we have something to offer that the dog really wants. Tasty food or a squeaky toy are common motivators. It's easy to see what motivates a dog by their willingness to act in obtaining it.

Building a bond should be pressure free, relaxed, consistent and never overwhelming for a dog. Dogs have evolved to want to be around people, when any dog finds a person he can trust and there is no pressure, the dog will bond naturally.







