

# THE INNER DOG



POSITIVE SOLUTIONS FOR NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

## Whole Dog Journal Features

August 2011 Issue

### A Canine Stress Dictionary

#### Anorexia

Stress causes the appetite to shut down. A dog who won't eat moderate to high-value treats may just be distracted or simply not hungry, but refusal to eat is a common indicator of stress.



#### Appeasement/Deference Signals

Appeasement and deference aren't always an indicator of stress. They are important everyday communication tools for keeping peace in social hierarchies, and are often presented in calm, stress-free interactions. They are offered in a social interaction to promote the tranquility of the group and the safety of the group's members. When offered in conjunction with other

behaviors, they can be an indicator of stress as well. Appeasement and deference signals include:

**Slow movement:** appeasing/deferent dog appears to be moving in slow-motion

**Lip-licking:** appeasing/deferent dog licks at the mouth of the higher ranking member of the social group



**Sitting/lying down/exposing underside:** appeasing/deferent dog lowers body posture, exposing vulnerable parts

**Turning head away, averting eyes:** appeasing/deferent dog avoids eye contact, exposes neck

#### Avoidance

Dog turns away; shuts down; evades handler's touch and treats.

#### Brow Ridges

Furrows or muscle ridges in the dog's forehead and around the eyes.

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## **Difficulty Learning**

Dogs are unable to learn well or easily when under significant stress.

## **Digestive Disturbances**

Vomiting and diarrhea can be a sign of illness – or of stress; the digestive system reacts strongly to stress. Carsickness is often a stress reaction.

## **Displacement Behaviors**

These are behaviors performed in an effort to resolve an internal stress conflict for the dog. They may be observed in a dog who is stressed and in isolation – for example a dog left alone in an exam room in a veterinary hospital – differentiating them from behaviors related to relationship.



**Blinking:** Eyes blink at a faster-than normal rate

**Nose-Licking:** Dog's tongue flicks out once or multiple times

**Chattering teeth**

**Scratching**

**Shaking off** (as if wet, but dog is dry)

**Yawning**

**Drizzling**

May be an indication of stress – or response to the presence of food, an indication of a mouth injury, or digestive distress.

**Excessive Grooming**

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Dog may lick or chew paws, legs, flank, tail, and genital areas, even to the point of self-mutilation.

## **Hyperactivity**

Frantic behavior, pacing, sometimes misinterpreted as ignoring, “fooling around,” or “blowing off” owner.

## **Immune System Disorders**

Long-term stress weakens the immune system. Immune related problems can improve when overall levels of stress are reduced.

## **Lack of Attention/Focus**

The brain has difficulty processing information when stressed.



## **Leaning/Clinging**

The stressed dog seeks contact with human as reassurance.

## **Lowered Body Posture**

“Slinking,” acting “guilty,” or “sneaky” (all misinterpretations of dog body language) can be indicators of stress.

## **Mouthing**

Willingness to use mouth on human skin – can be puppy exploration or adult poor manners, but can also be an expression of stress, ranging from gentle nibbling (flea biting) to hard taking of treats, to painfully hard mouthing, snapping, or biting.



## **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders**

These include compulsive imaginary fly-snapping behavior, light- and shadow-chasing, tail-chasing, pica (eating nonfood objects), flank-sucking, self-mutilation, and more. While OCDs probably have a strong genetic component, the behavior itself is usually triggered by stress.

## **Panting**

Rapid shallow or heavy breathing is normal if the dog is warm or has been exercising, otherwise can be stress-related. Stress may be external (environment) or internal (pain, other medical issues).

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## Stretching

To relax stress-related tension in muscles. May also occur as a non-stress behavior after sleeping or staying in one place for extended period.

## Stiff Movement

Tension can cause a noticeable stiffness in leg, body, and tail movements.

## Sweaty Paws

Damp footprints can be seen on floors, exam tables, rubber mats.

## Trembling

May be due to stress – or cold.



## Whining

High-pitched vocalization, irritating to most humans; an indication of stress. While some may interpret it as excitement, a dog who is excited to the point of whining is also stressed.

## Yawning

Your dog may yawn because he's tired – or as an appeasement signal or displacement behavior.