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***Anxiety causes & triggers.***

*Dr. Karen Shaw Becker.*

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There are many potential causes for your dog's anxiety, and it's important to identify their individual triggers so you can address them effectively.

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 them remain calm.

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 them.

Estimates are that somewhere around 30% of dogs show signs of, anxiety and unease.

Since each dog has their own style of communicating, it's important to learn your own dog's signals that the dog is feeling nervous or stressed.

**Many signs of anxiety in dogs, & can change over time;**

yawning

trembling & shaking

hiding & trembling

obsessive licking

tail chasing

nose/lip licking

tail lowered  
tucked in tail  
panting Ears pulled or pinned back  
destructive behaviors  
cowering/crouched body posture  
reduced or absent appetite  
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.

### **Some common triggers for anxiety in dogs.**

Poor (strained) relationships with other household members (pets or humans) etc.

Lack of outlets for normal breed behaviors — herding, running, retrieving, etc.

Invasion of personal space — disruption when resting, hugging, kissing, forcibly restraining, etc.

Punitive training methods — shock collars, yelling, hitting, etc.

Separation from human family members — separation anxiety, etc.

Novelty — exposure to new items, new people, new animals, etc.

Loud noises — fireworks, thunderstorms, etc.

Changes in housing — moving to a new home, boarding, etc.

Changes in household members — new baby, new pet, loss of pet or human, house-guests, etc.

Changes in household routine — new job schedule, kids returning to school, holidays, etc.

As you attempt to identify the triggers for your dog's anxiety, it's also important to consider their history.

Is the dog anxious mainly around men woman or kids?

Other dogs?

Certain clothes or a hat?

### **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;

### **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 dog's anxiety is to increase their daily physical activity level. I can't stress enough how important daily movement is in altering your dog's stress response.

Dogs are social animals 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, I recommend recruiting a friend or neighbor or hiring a dog walker to take the dog for a stroll or workout at or in a safe place for the dog and for other animals or humans. An alternative is dog daycare.

### **Additional suggestions to reduce your dog's anxiety.**

When you must leave your dog at home alone, leave the dog with an article of clothing or blanket with your scent on it.

Place small treats around the house, yard or kennel for them to discover, along with their favorite toys.

Add a flower essence blend like Separation Anxiety to their drinking water. This works wonders for "some" dogs.

Essential oil of lavender has also been proven to reduce a dog's stress response.

Recommend placing a few drops on your dog's collar or bedding before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house or kennel for an overall calming effect. There are also great oil blends specifically for calming dogs. *{See Article on this website about Essential oils}*.

Some leave a radio on or put on some soothing voice music before they leave. Play calm, soothing music before and during possible stressor occurs (thunder as example).

This may relax your dog and have the added bonus of drowning out distressing noises.

Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise, playtime, mental stimulation and TLC.

The fuller their life is when you're around, the calmer they will be when you're not.

If your dog seems to respond well to massage and pressure applied to the body.

Consult your holistic vet about homeopathic, TCM (traditional Chinese medicine) that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress.

Suggested homeopathic aconitum (or whatever remedy fits the symptoms best).

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 dog.

If your dog's anxiety seems to be getting worse instead of better, consider an individualized approach to managing the stress by allowing the dog to choose what best soothes them via (self-healing techniques offered through a trained professional).