

'Trigger stacking'

understanding how stress can build throughout the day

Dogs experience stress just as people do. While a single event may be manageable, several stressful, exciting or challenging experiences occurring close together can gradually reduce a dog's ability to cope. This process is known as trigger stacking. Understanding how stress builds throughout the day can help explain why dogs sometimes react more strongly than we expect and highlights the importance of allowing time for rest and recovery.



WHAT MIGHT LEAD TO TRIGGER STACKING?



Visitors



Other dogs



Travel



Loud noises



Veterinary visits



Grooming



Changes at home



Exciting activities

Underlying pain/discomfort/illness may also contribute

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

Many dogs display subtle signs that they may be finding it difficult to cope....



Barking more than usual



Reactivity on walks



Difficulty settling



Restlessness



Pacing



Reduced responsiveness



Mouthiness



Increased



Jumping up

These behaviours are often signs that a dog may be feeling overwhelmed rather than deliberately misbehaving.

THE STRESS BUCKET

Stressful events can affect dogs for longer than we often realise. As stress accumulates throughout the day, a dog's ability to cope may become reduced. Imagine a bucket being gradually filled with water.

A visitor arrives.
A delivery driver knocks
The dog encounters several unfamiliar dogs on a walk.
A grooming appointment follows later that afternoon.
Each event adds a little more water to the bucket.

Eventually the bucket overflows.



The final trigger is often not the problem itself — it may simply be the last drop that causes the bucket to overflow.

TOP TIPS

- ✓ Consider your dog's whole day, not just the final trigger.
- ✓ Allow time for rest and recovery following stressful events.
- ✓ Reduce avoidable stressors where possible.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for sleep, relaxation and enjoyable activities to allow your dog time to recover.
- ✓ Remember that excitement can lead to trigger stacking too.
- ✓ Seek support if your dog frequently appears overwhelmed or struggles to cope.



NEED MORE HELP?

Behaviour concerns are often easier to address when support is sought early. Did you know most pet insurance companies cover the costs of clinical behaviourists?



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