

Clients are surprised when I suggest their dog is “under the influence.” When they reflect on their dog’s recent over-reacting to a situation in which they might normally cope like a civilized canine, it makes sense. Higher-than-usual stress hormone levels may leave your pet taking on the other neighborhood dogs like a drunk at a bar.

You’ve had bad days, too. Work delays due to an unexpected outfit change from spilled coffee, traffic pile-up and a line for the elevator all in the same morning can become all too much. With each event, your stress level compounds. You are less able to deal with the next surprising incident. Find your own behavior diminishing with each passing event? Tempers may flare and patience wears thin more quickly when multiple stressors happen in short order. This is referred to as “trigger stacking.”

Cortisol and adrenaline rise during stressful situations as part of the internal “flight or fight” mechanism we all need to stay safe and survive. It’s nature’s way of helping us protect ourselves.

The same happens with our pets. Stress would usually diminish over time, but when stacked, it’s more difficult for them to calm, and this can push the dog over their stress threshold causing them to react.

Under normal stressful circumstances, these hormones can take 5-8 hours to leave the body. When “stacked,” stressors can affect normal behavior patterns for days or even weeks in cases of chronic stress.

Even young born to highly stressed mothers react to stress with higher levels of cortisol and need more time for levels to decrease.

Turid Rugaas, Norwegian dog trainer, author and noted canine body language expert, asks shelters to wait six days or more to allow dogs to acclimate before making behavior-based euthanasia decisions.

Digestion, immunity, and energy usage are compromised in the face of trigger stacking. So, it’s easy to see why careful attention to our own stress levels and our pet’s is so vital.

Common Stressors

- Too much or too little physical exercise or socialization
- Inconsistency or major changes in daily routines
- Lack of mental stimulation
- Harsh or bullying training methods
- Pain from new or old injury or ailment
- New or frightening situations.

If you notice unusual fear or reactivity in your dog, allow them relief from stressors for up to a week to decompress and cope. 🐾



Is Your Dog High?



WRITTEN BY:
C.C. BOURGEOIS &
SUSAN MARETT

Visit CanineConfidenceUniversity.com where C.C. Bourgeois and Susan Marett specialize in helping your anxious or fearful dog.