

CALM CARE STRESS SCALE

Understanding your dog's stress signals

Dogs communicate how they feel through their body language. Recognising early signs of stress helps us provide calm, kind care and prevent fear from escalating.

0

RELAXED



- Weight evenly balanced on all four legs
- Ears in neutral, soft position
- Soft, relaxed facial expression, mouth may be slightly open
- Eyes soft and gaze relaxed; may look towards or away without visible tension

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ALERT



- Ears oriented towards sounds or movement, relative to normal ear carriage
- Posture becomes more attentive while the body remains loose
- Tail position or movement may change with attention
- Observing the environment without visible tension

2

UNEASY



- Ears back or held to the side
- Tail lowered, wag slower or stiffer than normal
- Occasional lip licking or lip smacking
- May glance away or avoid direct eye contact

3

ANXIOUS



- Body lowered, weight shifted backward or away
- Tail tucked partially under
- Panting without exertion, or excessive yawning
- Whites of eyes visible ("whale eye"), avoiding interaction

4

FEARFUL



- Tail tucked tightly against body
- Ears flattened against the head
- Trembling, attempting to retreat or freeze in place
- Dilated pupils, may vocalise (whining)

5

OVERWHELMED



- Body highly tense; weight may shift forwards, backwards or sideways
- May freeze, stare, avert, retreat or attempt to escape
- May show teeth, growl, snap, lunge or attempt to bite
- Piloerection may occur but does not, by itself, indicate intent to bite



0-1

Proceed consideredly and continue monitoring.



2

Pause and adjust the approach.



3

Stop and reassess before continuing.



4-5

Discontinue non-essential handling and develop a safer clinical plan.

