

REPULSION BEHAVIOURS IN GREYHOUNDS

Repulsion, also known as aggression, relates to a group of behaviours (growling, air snapping, snarling and biting) that act as a means for a dog remove a perceived threat. As such, repulsion behaviours typically involve the fear/anxiety emotional system. Therefore, these animals are experiencing *the apprehensive **anticipation** that a particular situation will lead to negative outcomes, such as pain or fear. The threat is perceived by the animal, but may not be viewed as such by his/her human(s).*



Most dogs that display aggression have adopted a proactive response to stress: meaning they often react first; think later, therefore these responses are VERY QUICK.

Normal vs. abnormal aggression:

Aggressive behaviour is in the 'normal' repertoire of any dog, and functions to keep them safe when threatened. For example, touching an injured part of a dog's body would likely cause the animal to react aggressively in order to avoid further injury or pain.



Aggression can be in the 'abnormal' category if the dog's behaviour isn't proportionate to the situation, he/she is in. For example, if a dog that has never experienced any pain/fear associated with people, but is displaying repulsion behaviour towards a familiar/unfamiliar person they encounter in a safe environment.

The emotional causes of aggression in dogs:

While the majority of aggressive behaviour is related to the fear/anxiety emotional system, other instances may be related to frustration where a dog reacts aggressively due to his/her expectations not being met (this is also known as redirected aggression). Consequently, any emotional system (including fear/anxiety) may lead to frustration aggression if handled improperly.



Fear-related aggression:

- The aggressive behaviour occurs in an attempt to make a threatening thing (or situation) go away.
- Low intensity aggressive behaviour (such as growling) often escalates if the trigger remains.
- A dog that would have normally chosen to avoid a particular situation, may resort to aggression if he/she is prevented from leaving (e.g. being brought closer on lead to a threatening dog).
- Fear-related aggression also includes situations where a dog is protecting his/her things of value (resource guarding) which may include food, bedding, toys and personal space.



Frustration aggression:

Frustration is the result of a behaviour not having the anticipated result (from the dog's perspective) and results in an increase in the speed and intensity of the animal's response. When a dog is displaying aggressive signs that cannot be carried into an actual encounter (e.g. barking at another dog through the fence) and is interrupted, the dog then may redirect the aggressive behaviour towards the interrupting person or animal.



This type of aggression can occur when people attempt to break up a dog fight, resulting in a dog redirecting their aggression onto the people trying to pull the dogs apart. For this reason pulling apart two fighting dogs is **NEVER RECOMMENDED**.

If you need to break up two dogs on your own:

- Pour a bucket of water on the fighting dogs
- Squirt with garden hose
- Use a loud noise. Whistle, air horn, banging pots etc.
- Use objects to separate if you have too, such as brooms, blankets etc.

Considering Pain:

Pain can cause a dog's threshold for aggressive responses to decrease. So, any dogs that are experiencing a sudden and unexpected behavioural change should be examined by a veterinarian to rule out pain and/or an underlying medical condition. A thorough clinical examination should always be performed first.



What should you do if your greyhound is showing signs of aggression?

This largely depends on the context where the aggression occurred as well as the intensity of the behaviour. Contact GAPNSW straight away to talk to the rehabilitation team to learn more about what your dog might be telling you. GAPNSW can also provide helpful handouts to help you implement any changes that may be required. This can inform you about what your next steps should be to set yourself, your family and your greyhound up for success.

For cases where the dog is exhibiting intense (i.e. biting) and/or unpredictable aggression: It is highly recommended that you consult a vet with further training in behaviour. These professionals should be either:

- A vet who has further interest and education with behavioural medicine, or
- A vet who has become a member or fellow of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in Veterinary Behaviour, by examination.

Management:

If your greyhound is displaying aggressive behaviour, some kind of management strategy should be put in place to prevent further incidents, even for the short term. Management can help a dog remain in an emotional state and excitement level where they are able to think and learn effectively (see below diagram). Such strategies may include:

- Prevent/avoid aggression triggers
- For inter-dog aggression in the same household: Supervise or separate the dogs AT ALL TIMES
- Keep the dog's world small, so they don't have to continuously recover from stressful events

Prevention:

While all dogs are individuals, greyhounds are generally passive (or reactive) stress copers. This means that their responses to stressful situations are often very mild (e.g. freezing or looking away from the threatening situation). As such, aggression is rare and usually occurs in circumstances where the dog's initial signs of discomfort were ignored or dismissed. This often leads to some people saying an aggressive response "came out of nowhere" despite the dog's previous body language and responses. There are several strategies that can avoid putting your greyhound in this predicament such as:

- Keeping the dog's world small
- Not touching the dog when he/she is laying down
- Avoiding busy areas like dog parks for the first few months of having the dog in care
- Learning more about your dog's body language and recognising the early signs of stress (and leaving situations when you see these signs)
- Being your dog's advocate by standing up for them if friends/family try to push the dog out of their comfort zone
- Separating dogs from each other if one dog has clearly had enough of the other

Other occurrences of aggression:

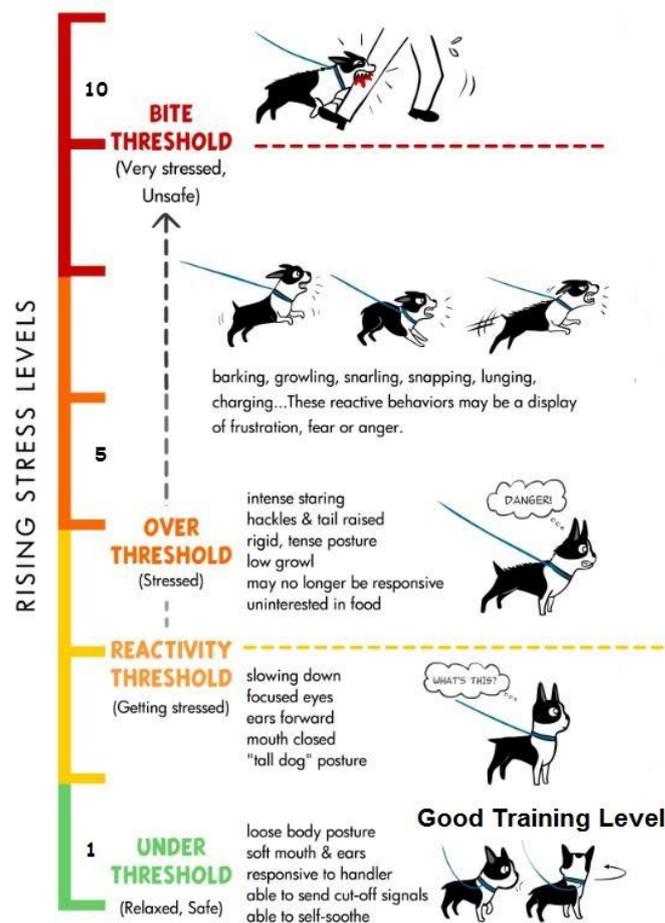
There are certain medical conditions that may cause a dog to react aggressively regardless of their environment. These animals should be examined and treated by a veterinary professional.

Sometimes a dog might intend to cause harm to another dog by engaging in behaviour associated with hunting and chasing. While sometimes labelled as aggression, it is not caused by a negative emotional state, but rather a positive (seeking) state. See other GAPNSW handouts for more information.

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REACTIVITY CHART

WHEN DOG ENCOUNTERS A TRIGGER



References: [Clinical Behavioural Medicine by Karen Overall](#)

Australian Veterinary Behaviour Services, Dr Tracey Henderson

Behaviour Problems in Small Animals

John Bowen and Sarah Heath