



## Building Emotional Resilience

The goal of almost all rehabilitation work with dogs is to build *emotional resilience*, which is the dog's ability to cope with and recover from potential stressors. You can gauge a dog's emotional resilience from:

- The intensity of a dog's response: how extreme is their appeasement (licking face, leaning in), inhibition (freeze), avoidance (retreat) or repulsion (aggression) behaviour?
- Recovery time: seconds, minutes, hours, days, longer??

To build emotional resilience, dogs need to be provided with 4 main things:

1. Safety and security
2. Social support
3. Autonomy
4. Healthy and balanced physiology

### **Safety and security**

The more predictable you are, the more a dog can handle the world around them. As such, ensure that you are as consistent as possible by making your interactions as routine as possible (same time every day) and everyone using the same cues/commands (e.g. "on your bed"). Avoid sensory overload, especially in the initial days- keep activity and noise to a minimum. If required, use visual barriers to help dogs calm (Note: this will not make the dog less able to tolerate visual distractions in his/her adopted home!). As standard practice, it is a good idea to return dogs to their kennel/bed with some kind of food reward to help them 'come down' from the stress of being out/handled/etc. This will also help with their recovery time as the kennel/bed becomes the place where fun treats appear.

Indications that you have provided the dog with safety and security:

- ✓ The dog can relax in his/her kennel/bed/home
- ✓ The dog recovers 'quickly' (varies with the individual) in kennel
- ✓ Any signs of fear/tension in response to routine handling/practices is reduced in time

### **Social support**

Dogs are social animals and have the capacity to form attachment bonds with both humans and other dogs. Positive social relationships can figure to provide a buffer against stressors and help the animal confidently engage with its environment. The individual dog's personality and learning history will dictate whether it finds human presence or canine presence (or both!) as socially supportive. It's important to allow dogs to opportunity to gain this support BUT it is important to remember that it is VERY easy to overwhelm them. As such, sessions



should be kept short and low intensity at first (e.g. quiet time with a passive, seated human handler), simply put- just be there!

Indications that the dog is benefitting from social support:

- ✓ Calm (relaxed body language, loose muscles) in presence of humans/dogs
- ✓ No (or limited) signs of separation distress or anxiety when provided with social support
- ✓ Dogs are viewed as social objects (i.e. can pass the 'walk down the street test' – e.g. appropriately behaved around other dogs)
- ✓ Humans are viewed as social objects (interactions solicited, dog can approach with soft body language or at least neutral consent tests e.g. dog is happy to approach but remains neutral such as little/no tail wag or engagement)

## **Autonomy**

Dogs have little in the way of 'choice' in the world. However, if we can create choices in the dog's life, no matter how small, we can help balance out a dog's mind and body. Using the basic principles of no force (avoiding the use of physical punishment, corrections, coercion or anything aversive) is an essential step in allowing dogs to have some level of autonomy. If we assume adopters inadvertently won't allow dogs as many choices as optimal, providing autonomy will still provide them with more emotional resilience to handle their new life as a pet.

Ways to give dogs autonomy include:

- ✓ Teaching dogs behaviours that they can initiate themselves (e.g. chin targeting for examination)
- ✓ Basic target training (helps dogs solve 'unsolvable problems' by giving them an option for easy reinforcement)
- ✓ Trick training
- ✓ Capturing desirable behaviours (e.g. lying down) by rewarding the dog when he/she performs them of his/her own accord

## **Healthy and balanced physiology**

Exercise and time outdoors have been shown to provide relief from trauma and build resilience in both dogs and humans. As these dogs are easy to overwhelm, it is important that any enrichment be tailored to their learning history (i.e. don't introduce too much too soon).

Ways to help maintain healthy and balanced physiology

- ✓ Provide dogs with an adequate amount of physical exercise (a fine line here, do not over exert)
- ✓ Allow them to have access to nature or aspects of the natural world
- ✓ Set up things like snuffle parks to bring elements of nature to the dog (ideal for those with limited experiences)



## **Building Emotional Resilience: A Practical Guide for Adopters**

Below are some strategies that can be used to help build emotional resilience in greyhounds as they settle into their new homes.

### **Providing safety and security:**

- ✓ Place the dog's bed/crate in a quiet area of your home
- ✓ Reward the dog whenever he or she is near their bed
- ✓ Be consistent in your routine to help your dog learn what to expect out of a typical day
- ✓ Be consistent in your behaviour to help your greyhound learn more about you and gain confidence
- ✓ Limit new things (dog parks, stranger visits, house parties etc.) in the first few weeks of settling in your greyhound

### **Providing social support:**

- ✓ Spend quiet time (while you read, knit, have a coffee or whatever floats your boat) just being there with your dog
- ✓ If you have another dog, let them spend time together doing low arousal (calm) activities under your supervision
- ✓ Once the dog begins to settle in, you can introduce them to dogs belonging to family or friends by going on parallel walks in quiet areas (it helps if your greyhound walks a few metres behind any new dogs)
- ✓ Be your dog's advocate. Don't let any strange (scary) person or dog approach your greyhound without your consent. Speak up for them, it isn't rude to politely request some space!

### **Autonomy:**

- ✓ As above, be your dog's advocate
- ✓ Respect your dog when he or she is resting and let them be
- ✓ Teach your dog to touch their nose to your fingers or a toy. Ask for this behaviour to help give your dog something to focus on when they are unsure
- ✓ Reward your dog for behaviours you like (e.g. when they lay down) when they perform them on their own accord
- ✓ Provide the dog with activities (e.g. snuffle mats or puzzle toys) to engage with in your absence (at first this may involve you sitting in the same room at a distance, then another room, then outside and then when you leave the house)
- ✓ Only continue to pat, stroke or otherwise touch the dog when they give you a positive consent test (i.e. nose you or otherwise solicit interaction when you briefly touch then and pause)

### **Healthy balanced physiology:**



- ✓ Walk your dog in areas where they can sniff natural scents (e.g. vegetated areas)
- ✓ Create a 'snuffle park' (various scented objects set up in your garden e.g. herbs, sprinkled parmesan cheese and worn shoes) in your yard to help bring the natural environment to dogs that aren't ready for big walks
- ✓ Scatter treats in your yard to encourage natural foraging behaviour
- ✓ Other enrichment ideas to allow your greyhound to engage in safe natural behaviour e.g. clam shells with water/sand, puzzle feeders, Kongs and snuffle mats