

WORKING WITH FEARFUL OR ANXIOUS GREYHOUNDS

As discussed, almost all greyhounds will experience some fear/anxiety when settling into their adoptive homes. To mitigate this, adopters should first seek to educate themselves on the behavioural indications of fear and anxiety. This information can then be used to slowly and gradually expose the dogs to potential triggers. For example, a greyhound that freezes during its first week in care would benefit from a period of no walks, then progress to short walks in quiet areas with opportunities for sniffing and exploration.



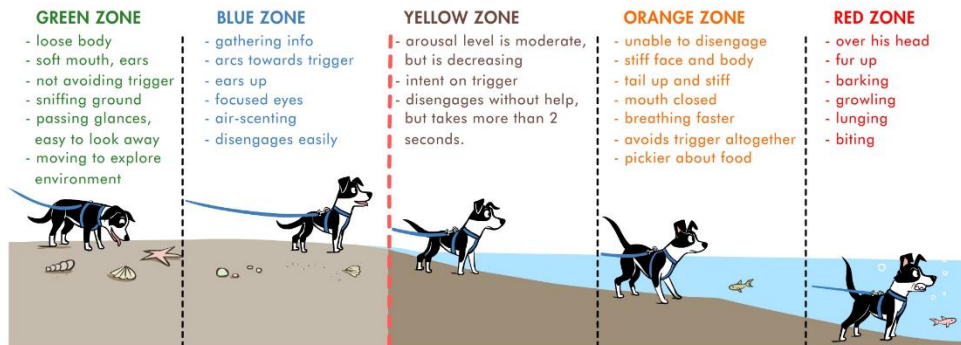
There can be a desire to want to throw some dogs in the metaphorical 'deep end' by exposing them to things that elicit fear at a level that induces fear, particularly if we, as humans, know the trigger is not threatening. This practice is known as flooding and often results in the worsening of the behaviour by inducing inhibition (learned helplessness) and/or aggression (repulsion behaviour). Both of these outcomes are detrimental to the dog-human bond and will only hinder the dog's progress in their home.



Dogs that are fearful towards a particular trigger should only be exposed to these triggers at an intensity that does not elicit a fear or stress response. The intensity should only then be increased when the dog is calm and relaxed (see below diagram). Dogs with significant fear/anxiety should only be exposed to their triggers under the supervision of a veterinary behaviourist and in conjunction with a medical treatment plan.

STRESS SCALE “FIGHT” OPTION

STAY ON THE BEACH! Dog's stress level is analogous to rising water level.



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<p>Mark and Reward Dog and Capture Good Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High rate of reinforcement -Good stage for play and other passive exposures -Allow for the dog to make unprompted good decisions (e.g. switching attention from trigger to exploration or handler) 	<p>Mark and Reward Dog at a high rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High rate of reinforcement -Good stage for LAT and CCDS -If dog fails to disengage in a timely manner, prompt -If the dog manages to make good decisions-> BIG REWARD 	<p>Prompt Dog for their attention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mark and reward dog for directing attention towards handler -Move dog away after reward delivery 	<p>Intervene and Call Dog Away</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Call dog and deliver a reward as you're moving away -Move away quickly to avoid progressing to red -Most greyhounds who reach this stage WILL escalate -"Find it" or nose targeting can help to remove dog quickly 	<p>Get Away ASAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No constructive learning can occur at this stage -Dog must be removed from its context at all costs -Needs to be avoided as much as possible -If reached, dog will need to recover completely and the situation that lead to here reviewed
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For dogs that display significant anxiety with limited recovery over time and/or a more generalised anxiety with no discernible trigger, further intervention is required. These dogs benefit most in quiet homes that can afford them the space they need to investigate the domestic world at their own pace. These homes often do not have young children to avoid the chaos and noise that often go with them! Interventions such as Adaptil collars or diffusers can help lower the dog's anxiety and settle them into their routine. Other products such as the compound Zylkene can reduce the behavioural signs of anxiety. Please seek further information on these products through your veterinarian.

Dogs that experience significant (i.e. not proportionate to their environment) fear/anxiety in their adoptive home should be referred to a veterinary behaviourist for diagnosis and treatment. Some of these dogs may require behavioural medication and lifelong management to set them up for success in their home. These medications may vary in their dose and usage, but all function to improve a dog's quality of life in their home. While sometimes stigmatised, behavioural medication is not a last resort designed to turn dogs into zombies. Rather, medication is an affordable treatment for the concerning medical condition, in this case, anxiety.

The GAPNSW team can provide you with resources on behavioural modification, environmental optimisation and/or training techniques to help a dog with fear/anxiety further settle into their home. If you believe your greyhound could benefit from further support, please contact the rehabilitation team at gapbehaviour@grnsw.com.au.