

Trigger Stacking



Trigger Stacking is important to understand and avoid, to make sure your dog does not get too overwhelmed. If a dog experiences trigger stacking, especially repeatedly, this may result in your dog displaying inappropriate or even dangerous behaviors. This is due to the fact of trigger stacking invoking flight, fight, or freeze instincts that all dogs have.

In short, **trigger stacking means experiencing an excessive amount of new experiences in fairly quick succession**. This can be as obvious as meeting a bunch of new strangers at once or in a short timeframe. Some situations may not be as obvious, such as a new dog's first vet visit. For example; a new dog gets in a car for one of the first times, goes to a new environment, waits around near other new dogs/other animals, meets a couple of strangers (vet staff), and has its body handled in a new (and sometimes weird) way. There are a lot of unfamiliar experiences that we might not realize causes our dog anxiety until we step back and review.

To prevent trigger stacking, it is important to keep two things in mind.

- Firstly, plan ahead and attempt to recognize if your day's plans with your dog may contain too many first experiences. You can always try to modify your day so that your dog is less overwhelmed and has time to process each new experience. You can also do 'try out' sessions. Referring to the above vet visit scenario- you can have your dog just visit the vet's office without necessarily seeing a veterinarian for a check-up. That way, your pet will have an extra car trip under their belt and will get a little more familiar with the vet's office.
- Secondly, pay close attention to your dog's body postures. Some key things to keep an eye out for can be overall tense body postures; tail tucked or high and stiff, dilated pupils, increased or decreased movement, attempting to back away or hide, excessive whining/panting/drooling. Seeing any of these stress behaviors in your dog's body language may indicate that you need to take a break. Walk your dog away from whatever the new experience may be and offer some cool down time. You can always try again at a later time, going slower and rewarding good behaviors with treats. To learn more about how to read dog body language, click [here](#).

If your dog is not recovering from new events, has ongoing issues with feeling overwhelmed, or is displaying any signs of aggression/nipping/being difficult to handle- please reach out to a certified, professional dog trainer. You can learn how to find an appropriate trainer by following this [link to behavior resource guide](#).