**Behavioural Short-Term Help download**

No one should ever feel embarrassed about struggling or seeking help. Dogs can’t tell us what’s wrong, so we have to try our best to work it out, and that can be incredibly difficult.

This advice – known as short-term or Behavioural First Aid advice - is simply designed to tie you over until we see you for a consultation, which will generally be 1 – 3 weeks after you first make contact, which you can do by emailing info@animalkind.biz or our contact form: https://www.animalkind.co.uk/contact-us

The below is not designed to solve the problem, or be a long-term solution, but to help you until we can make more substantial changes.

**Make safe**

Protecting other people and animals whilst help is being sought can be achieved through avoiding those interactions completely. While property may be safeguarded by careful environmental management and continual supervision. Consider what might make both your dog’s and your own households’ lives immediately less stressful or dangerous, on top of seeking our help.

This may involve not exposing your dog to situations in which they’re unable to remain relaxed. For example, not taking a frightened dog out to the park simply because you feel you are expected to.

Making the situation safe ought to involve, where possible, completely removing the dog from whatever is troubling them – or vice versa – and preventing them from being exposed to it again until our consultation. Unfortunately, however, the triggers which elicit the undesired behaviour are often unclear, or not at all apparent.

**Examples of removing or reducing identified triggers of problem behaviour**

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| **Trigger** | **Action** |
| Visitors to the home | Not permitting visitors while the dog is present. Or arranging for the dog to be cared for elsewhere by someone they know and feel safe and comfortable with while visitors are present. |
| Being outside the home (triggers might include other dogs, unfamiliar people/animals, and traffic) | Keeping the dog solely in the home and garden, with additional enrichment activity provided, until our consultation. |
| People walking past the home | Keeping curtains or blinds closed and/or preventing access to windows or places where they see outside. Restricting access to quieter areas within the home. |
| Being left alone | Not leaving a dog alone at all. Arranging professional dog walkers, sitters or trusted friends and family to care for dog when it is essential for owners to leave the home without them. |
| Resource Guarding; such as guarding food bowls, and food itself | A dog who guards objects should not be approached if they are guarding. Any objects that are likely to be guarded should be removed from the environment when the dog is not present, and the dog placed behind a stairgate when there are children or other vulnerable people present. Should be fed in a room on their own and bowl only picked up (or perhaps even put down) when they are not in the room. They should not be given chew items (such as bones) that are not designed to be consumed fully. Nobody should approach them when they have a food item or attempt to take stolen food from them.  |

The more a dog is able to carry out the unwanted, problem behaviour, the stronger and more ingrained it could become as part of their routine. Where completely avoiding triggers is impossible, measures ought to be taken to reduce the intensity, duration, and/or frequency of the triggering stimulus as much as possible.

Before our appointment, remember to do the following:

* Reward desirable, ‘good’ behaviour whenever it happens
* Implement enrichment activities and making sure their dog has opportunities to engage in exercise, playing, chewing, sniffing, learning and sleeping (appropriate for their life-stage and individual needs)
* Keep a diary of day-to-day behaviour and the times/places where undesirable behaviour occurs and who is present. This will help us learn as much as possible about the reasons for your dog’s behaviour.
* Where it is safe and appropriate, capture photos or videos of the dog performing the unwanted behaviour – but **only**if this happens spontaneously. A dog **must never** be put into a position to incite the unwanted behaviour purely for the purposes of videoing/photographing it.
* **Make sure the dog is not being punished** - Telling a dog off for behaving in an unwanted way might provide an outlet for frustration at the situation. However, it can make things much worse, doesn’t teach the dog anything beneficial, and can be damaging for your relationship with your dog.
* Using physical force or shouting at a dog can make them frightened or anxious, while taking things they value away from them might make them feel frustrated.
* Consider consistency – This is key to dogs learning how to behave in a whole variety of situations. For example, an owner might encourage their dog to jump up on them when they’re wearing outdoor ‘dog walking clothes’ but discourage this when they’re wearing ‘going out’ clothes – yet the dog is unlikely to understand the difference.
* Separation distress: Video recording of the dogs when left can help to reveal if they are experiencing distress, or whether there are alternative explanations for the behaviour.

**Instead:**

* lure a dog away from a challenging situation to a safer position, using treasured rewards such as tasty food or their favourite toy
* create a distraction by asking the dog to do something they have learned really well, such as 'come' or 'lie down'
* make a noise or throw a toy to interrupt an undesired behaviour.

**Manage**

To prevent any unwanted, problem behaviour from worsening, steps can be taken to manage a dog’s environment and interactions in such a way that prevents them from carrying out the concerning behaviour. Short-term management techniques and tools include:

* the use of gardens, child-gates, indoor kennels/crates, or barriers, such as dog-pens, to keep a dog completely apart from the trigger/focus of the concerning behaviour
* teaching a dog to relax within an indoor kennel/crate
* teaching a dog to relax by themselves in the garden
* teaching a dog to wear a muzzle comfortably — **but only** where this is going to be safe for the owner, and implemented in an appropriate and considerate way using reward-based training methods
* avoiding specific activities or interactions, such as touching a specific part of a dog’s body if that appears to trigger the concerning behaviour
* keeping a dog on a lead when exercising them out and about within the local community.
* Obtaining yellow warning accessories bearing the words “Needs space” or “Anxious dog” may encourage other dog owners to stop their dogs approaching off-lead (www.yellowdoguk.co.uk).

These types of interventions simply manage the unwanted behaviour, they do not change the way the dog feels or involve any activity which will help the dog feel or behave any differently in future.

A dog might also become frustrated by management techniques which restrict activities they are expecting to be able to engage in ad-lib. This is why seeking assistance from us is vital. We will aim to identify all the triggers for the unwanted behaviour, and ultimately the root cause of the problem – which might include many contributing factors. We will then create a bespoke plan for you to follow, aimed at helping the dog feel and behave differently.

**Include an emergency plan**

Think about exactly when and where the unwanted behaviour happens so you can predict when it is most likely. And if they’re unable to avoid these situations completely, how they can prepare to take steps to minimise your dog’s unwanted behaviour?

Preparing intervention methods in advance can help an owner avoid panicking in the moment, which would only intensify an already emotionally charged situation. Knowing what to do in advance can help both owner and dog cope better.

How to respond will be unique to the individual situation but it could include actions like:

* creating a distraction to divert the dog’s attention
* luring the dog to a safe position
* providing an alternative outlet for the dog’s behaviour.

For example, they could carry plenty of treats, ready to scatter on the ground for the dog to sniff out and eat to distract them from the sight of another dog.

Based on information available from the Dogs Trust (with whom we work)

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/how-we-help/professionals/vet-clinics/behavioural-first-aid>