

Recognizing Fear Anxiety and Stress in Dogs and Cats

Dogs

Relaxed

- Approaches willingly
- Remains close to veterinary staff
- Solicits attention
- Readily accepts treats
- Takes treats gently
- Approaches from the front or side
- Soft muscles
- Fur lays flat
- Normal pupils
- Soft eyes
- Relaxed ears
- Relaxed lips
- Tail neutral or slightly elevated
- Tail wagging softly

Mildly Stressed

- Approaches willingly
- Remains close to veterinary staff
- May lean away when touched
- Readily accepts treats
- May take food roughly or quickly during handling
- May or may not stop eating during procedures
- Approaches from the front or the side
- Mild muscle tension when handled
- Relaxed muscles when not handled
- Normal pupils
- Pinched expression
- Forehead wrinkles
- Ears slightly pulled to the side or back
- Looks away when approached
- Closed mouth
- Lips relaxed
- Tail neutral, slightly tucked, or slightly raised
- Wagging with mild tension when handled
- Relaxed wag when handled by owner

Moderately Stressed

- May approach for treats
- Withdraws when food is not offered
- Leans or moves away when handled
- Prefers to stay near owner
- May take treats
- Takes treats roughly
- Retreats after taking treats
- May refuse treats
- Will only approach from the side
- Shaking off
- Panting
- Lips pulled back
- Dilated pupils
- Wide eyes
- Scratching
- Other displacement behaviours
- Pupils dilated
- Eyes widened
- Whale eye
- Ears flat or pulled back
- Tail wagging with tension or tucked

Severely Stressed

- Will not approach
- Hiding
- Attempts escape
- Refuses most food
- Rarely accepts high value food, and if accepts, will rapidly retreat
- Exaggerated movement (either fast or slow)
- Possible piloerection
- Freeze
- Vocalize
- Snap
- Bite
- Learned helplessness
- Tight muscles
- Hard eye
- Dilated pupils
- Squinting
- Whale eye
- Looks away

- Stares off into the distance
- Tail tucked tightly or stiff high wag

Cats

Relaxed

- Exits carrier willingly
- Approaches staff members
- Rubs
- Solicits attention
- Remains close to staff members
- Will accept food
- May show interest in food but not eat
- Continues eating during handling
- May show interest in toys
- May show desire for touch and handling
- Approaches from the front or the side
- Soft muscles
- Sprawls on floor or tablet
- Rolls
- Flat haircoat
- Normal slit pupils
- Soft eyes
- Relaxed ears
- Whiskers neutral
- Tail held soft and high
- May curl the tip of the tail
- If lying down the tail will be away from the body

Mildly Stressed

- Exits carrier willingly
- Approaches tentatively
- Slinky walk
- Retreats intermittently
- May accept food
- May show interest but not eat
- Stops eating during handling
- May not willingly accept touch during restraint of procedure
- Approach from the side
- Mild muscle tension

- Sits or lays with paw folded
- Tense expression
- Shortened neck
- Squinting or slightly wide eyes
- Mild pupil dilation
- Whiskers neutral or pulled forward
- Tail held low when walking
- Gently tucked around the body when lying down

Moderately Stressed

- Rarely exits the carrier
- Retreats when approached
- Does not approach veterinary team
- Allows owner to approach and touch
- Refuses food
- Refuses touch
- Looks away
- Hypervigilant
- Tense Muscles
- Twitch or flinch when touched
- Mild piloerection
- Moderate pupil dilation
- Widened eyes
- Ears to the side or back
- Tail down, tip may twitch

Severely Stressed

- Will not exit carrier
- Curls up small, crouched in back of carrier
- Avoids approaches
- Avoids touch
- Refuses food
- Tense muscles
- May crouch
- May arch back
- Piloerection
- Strike with paws
- Vocalization
- Bite

- Learned helplessness
- Dilate pupils
- Neck tense, short
- Wide eyes
- Flattened ears
- Tail tucked tightly
- Tail swishing stiffly or twitching
- Piloerection of the whole body, especially noticeable on the tail