

This Annoying Doggy Behavior May Actually Be a Call for Help

Whatever you do, don't ever punish your dog for doing this, no matter how frustrating it seems. Instead, look for clues as to why it's happening. Your pup may be trying to tell you he's in pain, anxious or needs your help for something serious.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Some dogs are whiners, and it's important to understand that whining, like barking and growling, is a form of canine communication
- Reasons dogs whine include pain/discomfort, stress/anxiety, frustration, excitement and appeasement
- Whining should not be punished; rather, you should find the reason for it and work to resolve underlying issue(s)
- Whining is usually related to stress, so it's important to remove as many stressors from your dog's life as possible
- It's also important to take steps to minimize your dog's anxiety using various calming tools and protocols

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If you've ever asked your dog, "Would you like a little cheese with that whine?" then this article is for you. Many dogs tend to be whiners, and when they do it frequently, it can be downright annoying!

But it's always important to remember that your dog communicates with you for a reason, and it's your job as his guardian (and the center of his universe) to work to understand what he's trying to tell you, even when his means of "conversing" is getting on your last nerve. Professional dog trainer Pat Miller, writing for Whole Dog Journal, lists three steps in helping a dog stop whining:¹

1. Identify the cause of the whining so you can determine the appropriate modification response
2. Implement other procedures and products that can help your dog be calmer
3. Seek veterinary assistance if the anxiety seems excessive

Reasons Dogs Whine

Since dogs whine for a reason versus for no reason, it's important not to get short-tempered with your pet. Yelling at or punishing her can actually increase the whining and trigger other undesirable behaviors as well. Miller lists several potential causes for whining, including pain or discomfort, stress or anxiety, frustration, excitement and appeasement.

- **Signs your dog is whining due to pain or discomfort** — The when and where of your dog's whining is important in narrowing down its cause. For example, if she's normally happy in her crate at night but suddenly starts whining in the wee hours, and especially if she also starts soiling or throwing up in her crate, she very likely has a digestive or urinary tract problem that needs attention.

If your older dog whines instead of jumping up onto the couch or into the car as she always has, she may be dealing with arthritis or another condition that is limiting her mobility and causing her discomfort. A good rule of thumb is that if your dog begins whining in normal, everyday situations and/or at unexpected times of the day or night, a visit to your veterinarian is in order to investigate whether a painful or uncomfortable underlying medical condition is in play.

- **Signs that stress and anxiety are causing your dog to whine** — As Miller points out, "Anything that causes [your dog] to be fearful can contribute to ... whining, and some breeds even seem to have a genetic predisposition to whining."

If your furry companion whines as you're preparing to leave the house, he may have separation anxiety, which is an increasingly common problem in dogs today. To understand more about this condition and how to help a pet who can't tolerate being left alone, take a look at this article "Four Sneaky Signs That Your Dog Suffers from Separation Anxiety." Miller offers the following suggestions for dealing with anxiety-related whining:

"To help him be less anxious so he will whine less, make a list of things that cause your dog fear or stress, and pick two or three to start counter-conditioning, that is, changing how he feels about those things, so they no longer cause him stress or fear.

When you can tick one stressor off your list, pick another to begin working on, until you have addressed enough of them that whining is no longer a problem. Additionally, anxiety-induced and the other types of whining may improve with the application of the ever-growing list of various tools and protocols we have to help our dogs be calm." (More about those shortly.)

- **Signs your dog is whining out of frustration** — Miller also calls this "demand whining" because in most cases, dogs become frustrated when their demands aren't being met. The best way to curb frustration whining is to observe when it occurs, and then head it off at the pass by either giving her what she's waiting for before she has a chance to whine for it, or by offering a distraction such as a food-dispensing toy before she starts whining.

Now, we're assuming here that what your dog is demanding is legit, such as her morning walk, her afternoon ball-chasing session or some other fun activity she counts on each day. If she's whining for your ice cream cone or a sip of your beer, it's a whole different monster you've created.

In this case, your dog is frustration-whining because she wants something she shouldn't have. Since she's been conditioned to want it, instead of giving it to her, you'll need to work to extinguish her expectation that she'll get it.

- **Signs your dog is whining because he's excited** — As Miller observes, "... some dogs whine just because they are so happy they can barely contain themselves." One pet parent's suburban-dwelling Golden Retriever goes absolutely bonkers for outdoor adventures in nature, especially when he gets to visit relatives about three hours away whose home is off the grid and sits among the pine trees of central Arizona.

As soon as their car rolls off the highway and onto the 2-mile dirt road that leads to the relative's house, the Golden starts whining and panting in anticipation. By the time they make the turn into the driveway, the dog's whining has escalated to an almost primal (and ear-splitting) howl!

In this situation, there's really no safe or effective way to curb the whining. They're in a moving vehicle bouncing down a dirt road, and nothing the pet parent could offer her dog would be anywhere near as exciting as what he knows is coming. As dog whining goes, the excited variety is probably something you should accept and even be grateful for!

- **Appeasement whining** — This somewhat uncommon type of whining, according to Miller, generally occurs in social interactions between dogs. "In this case," she writes, "it is a healthy communication, and not one you want to interfere with."

As annoying as your dog's whining may be, it's extremely important to remember that it usually means he's stressed, and punishing him only increases his stress.

"While you may suppress the whining with punishment," says Miller, "you add another stressor, which is likely to exacerbate other stress-related behaviors. A better plan is to figure out why your dog is whining, reduce the stressors in his life, and help him change his behavior."

Suggestions for Reducing Stressors in Your Dog's Life

Make sure everyone in the family understands and respects your dog's need for uninterrupted sleep and appropriate canine-friendly handling. Most dogs, especially working and sporting breeds, need much more exercise than they get, so a great place to start in reducing your pet's anxiety is to increase her daily physical activity level. Daily movement is very important in altering your pet's stress response.

Dogs are social creatures who get lonely and bored when forced to stay alone for long stretches. If there's no one home during the day to keep your dog company, recruit a friend or neighbor or hire a dog walker to take him for a stroll around the block, at a minimum. An alternative is doggy daycare. A high-tech alternative is an at-home communication system where you can check in with your pet (and release treats from a dispenser, remotely). Some gadgets allow your pet to call you, too.

12 Tips to Calm Your Dog's Anxiety

1. When you must leave your dog at home alone, leave him with an article of clothing or blanket with your scent on it. Also leave a treat-release toy for him to focus on in your absence. Place small treats around the house for him to discover, along with his favorite toys.
2. Add a flower essence blend like Separation Anxiety from Jackson Galaxy's Solutions to her drinking water. This works wonders for some dogs. And put on some soothing doggy music before you leave.
3. Invest in an Adaptil collar or diffuser for your dog. These products release a pheromone that's designed to have a calming effect on dogs.
4. Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise (like an all-out 40 minute run prior to being left alone all day), playtime, mental stimulation and TLC. The fuller her life is when you're around, the calmer she'll be when you're not.

5. Play calm, soothing music before a possible stressor occurs. This may relax your dog and have the added bonus of drowning out distressing noises.
6. If your dog seems to respond well to pressure applied to her body, there are wraps available (e.g., Thundershirt, TTouch anxiety wrap) that many pet owners and veterinarians find extremely helpful.
7. Ttouch is a specific massage technique that can help anxious pets.
8. Consult your holistic vet about homeopathic, TCM (traditional Chinese medicine) or Rescue Remedy, as well as other specific Bach flower remedies that could be helpful in alleviating your dog's stress. Products you can use (in conjunction with behavior modification) include homeopathic aconitum (or whatever remedy fits the symptoms best), Hyland's Calms Forte or calming milk proteins (variety of brands).
9. Calming nutraceuticals and herbs that can be of benefit include holy basil, l-theanine, rhodiola, ashwagandha, GABA, 5-HTP and chamomile. Consult your holistic veterinarian about which makes sense for your pet.
10. The essential oil of lavender has also been proven to reduce a dog's stress response. Place a few drops on your dog's collar or bedding before a stressor occurs, if possible, or diffuse the oil around your house for an overall calming effect. There are also great oil blends specifically for calming animals.
11. If you've adopted a dog who may have had a rocky start in life, try A Sound Beginning, a program designed to help rescue dogs and adoptive guardians learn to communicate effectively and form an unbreakable bond.
12. If your dog's anxiety seems to be getting worse instead of better, consider an individualized approach to managing her stress by allowing her to choose what best soothes her via applied zoopharmacognosy (self-healing techniques offered through a trained professional).

Sources and References

¹ [Whole Dog Journal July 31 2019](#)
