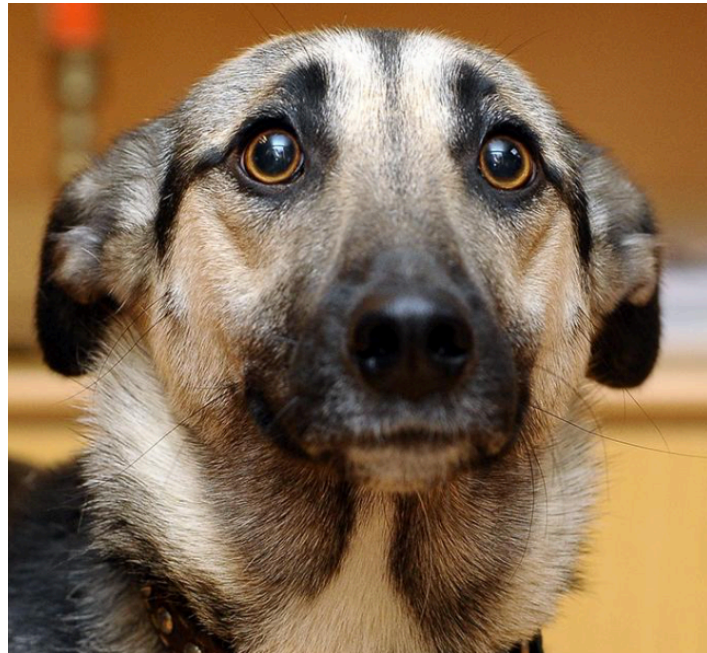




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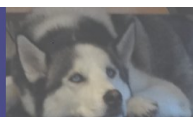
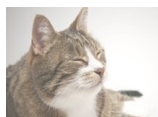
FEARS AND PHOBIAS



Like people, dogs can develop irrational fears and phobias. Living with humans can be confusing and sometimes dogs put 2 + 2 together and make 5.

This can be as simple a cause as a loud noise startling a dog as he enters a room making him afraid of going in there again or a complex build up of problems over time.

Some breeds are more sensitive or less resilient than others and thus are more prone to developing phobias. This could have been bred in unintentionally or be a result of deliberate selective breeding which becomes maladaptive when the dog is no longer in a working environment. It can also be a result of poor breeding and lack of exposure to potential triggers during the formative first few weeks of life.



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Many dogs will find something in their world that is frightening and need help to prevent it escalating into phobia. Others will need help if a phobia has developed.

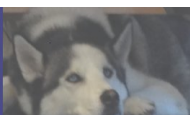
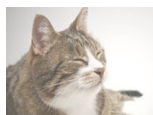
Common Fears and Phobias

- Loud noises (thunder, fireworks, guns)
- Handling (vets, groomers)
- People and other dogs
- Travel and traffic
- Stairs and unfamiliar surfaces
- Novel objects.

Fear Or Phobia?

Fear is a normal reaction; it keeps animals safe and enables the flight, fight, freeze or feign mechanisms which are activated to help an animal cope. Fear can spill over into a phobia either when it is erroneously paired with something that is unrelated or when becomes intense and persistent.

At low levels of fear a dog may yawn, lick his lips and avert his eyes or head. He may hold a front paw up with his weight leaning away from the perceived source of the threat. He may look wide eyed or show the whites of his eyes (“whale eye”) with ears facing backwards. His body posture will be low with the tail tucked under. He may pant, whine, tremble, hide or seek solace. A fearful dog may also appear to be aggressive, especially if confined.



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Countering Fears and Phobias

Fears and phobias are usually eased by gradual and careful exposure to the perceived threat and by pairing the perceived threat with something positive such as a high value treat until it ceases to be threatening.

It is extremely important to try to keep the dog below the level at which he feels the need to react (under threshold) while this re-training is taking place. This can be challenging, for instance when a dog is afraid of other dogs and lives in an area where there are many dogs or when it is difficult to anticipate or control the source of the fear such as thunder or sudden loud noises.

Where fearful behaviours have a genetic or epigenetic basis, it may not be possible to eradicate them entirely, but they can usually be alleviated. This may take a long time and may also require lifetime management or a complete change of environment.

**Contact Companion Animal Behavioural Services at
info@dogsnet.org for more help**

