



## NEWSLETTER #7

### WHAT IS TRIGGER STACKING?

Trigger stacking in dogs refers to a cumulative effect where multiple stressors or triggers build up, causing a dog to react negatively. These triggers can include things like loud noises, unfamiliar environments, physical discomfort, or other factors that create anxiety or fear in the dog. When these triggers pile up without an opportunity for the dog to decompress, it can lead to an overload of stress and potentially result in aggressive or fearful behavior.

**Here are some signs to help recognize trigger stacking in dogs:**

- 1. Increased Agitation:** The dog may become more agitated, restless, or on edge than usual.
- 2. Avoidance Behavior:** The dog may try to avoid the triggers or attempt to escape from the situation.
- 3. Excessive Panting or Drooling:** When stressed, dogs may exhibit excessive panting or drooling even if the temperature isn't hot.
- 4. Yawning or Lip Licking:** Dogs may yawn excessively or lick their lips when they are feeling stressed.
- 5. Tucked Tail or Ears Back:** A tucked tail or ears pinned back can indicate stress or anxiety in dogs.

## To prevent trigger stacking in dogs:

- 1. Identify Triggers:** Recognize what triggers stress or anxiety in your dog and work to minimize exposure to these triggers when possible.
- 2. Provide a Safe Space:** Create a safe space where your dog can retreat to when feeling overwhelmed. This can be a crate or a quiet room.
- 3. Implement Regular Breaks:** Ensure your dog has regular breaks from stressful situations and provide opportunities for relaxation and downtime.
- 4. Use Positive Reinforcement:** Use positive reinforcement techniques to help your dog associate triggers with positive experiences.
- 5. Training and Desensitization:** Work with a professional trainer to desensitize your dog to triggers gradually and help them build confidence in challenging situations.
- 6. Regular Exercise:** Regular exercise can help reduce overall stress levels in dogs and promote overall well-being.
- 7. Consult a Professional:** If you notice severe trigger stacking or behavioral issues in your dog, consider seeking the help of a professional behaviorist or trainer to address the underlying causes and develop a tailored plan for managing trigger stacking.

By being mindful of your dog's triggers, providing a safe environment, and implementing strategies to prevent trigger stacking, you can help your dog feel more at ease and reduce the likelihood of negative reactions to stressors.

Now, let's talk about distinguishing between normal alertness and increased alertness as a sign of trigger stacking in service dogs can be challenging but important. Here are some tips for service dog handlers to differentiate between the two:

- 1. Know Your Dog:** Understanding your service dog's baseline behavior is crucial. Familiarize yourself with their usual alertness levels and behavior in various situations to better recognize any deviations.
- 2. Context:** Consider the context of the situation. Is there a specific trigger present that might be causing increased alertness? If there are known triggers in the environment, the heightened alertness may be a response to those triggers.
- 3. Duration and Intensity:** Monitor how long the alert behavior persists and how intense it is. If the heightened alertness lingers or escalates beyond what is typical for your dog, it could be a sign of trigger stacking.
- 4. Body Language:** Pay attention to your dog's body language. Signs of stress such as tense muscles, wide eyes, flattened ears, or a stiff posture can indicate trigger stacking rather than normal alertness.
- 5. Response to Cues:** Test your dog's responsiveness to cues and commands. If your dog is having difficulty focusing, responding slowly, or seems distracted despite your efforts, it may indicate trigger stacking.
- 6. Changes in Behavior:** Look for other changes in behavior alongside alertness. Restlessness, pacing, avoidance behavior, vocalization, or displacement behaviors can further indicate stress and trigger stacking.
- 7. History of Triggers:** If your dog has a history of trigger stacking or if certain situations consistently lead to increased alertness and stress, it's important to be proactive in managing these triggers.

By being observant, knowing your dog well, and considering these different factors, service dog handlers can better distinguish between normal alertness and increased alertness as potential signs of trigger stacking. If you suspect trigger stacking, it's essential to address the underlying causes and provide support to help your service dog manage stress effectively.

**Wishing you a wonderful reading experience!**

Warm regards,

The Pup-Cessories Crafts Team