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# Anxiety or Training Problem?



## What is the difference?

Pets with anxiety disorders display behaviours that may be:

- Abnormal or irrational
- Disruptive to the household
- Generally detrimental to the health and welfare of the pet, you or the community.

These require a veterinary behaviour consultation and cannot be fixed with training alone. Some anxiety disorders include:

### Dogs:

- Separation anxiety
- Aggression towards people, dogs, other animals
- Phobias – to noises, situations and thunderstorms
- Fearful behaviour
- Compulsive disorders such as tail chasing and shadow chasing

### Cats:

- House soiling
- Urine spraying
- Aggression towards people, cats or other animals

Training problems are normal behaviours that are socially unacceptable (either to the owner or the community). Training problems can generally be helped by qualified trainers and/or training clubs. Some common training problems include:

- Digging
- Bad' manners – e.g. Jumping up
- Barking (in some cases)
- Pulling on the lead
- Boisterous behaviour

### Cats:

- Furniture scratching

***“Anxiety is emotionally unpleasant and is a welfare concern”***

# Anxiety Facts



At least **1 in 5** dogs and cats have an anxiety disorder

*This is irrespective of responsible breeding choices and socialisation experience. Some pets are hard wired with a predisposition to being anxious. Stressful events can also trigger long-term anxiety disorders. Anxiety is very common affecting up to 85% of dogs.*

## Anxiety is not a training problem.

- *Anxiety is a medical condition involving anatomical and chemical abnormalities of the brain, nervous and hormonal systems. Animals with anxiety disorders do not have normally functioning brains.*
- *Anxiety affects your pets' ability to form new memories. Anxiety problems can't be fixed with training, as the pet has a true inability to learn (form new memories) in that moment, so have real difficulty learning!*
- *Anxiety is an emotional response and is not under conscious control.*
- *An emotion cannot be reinforced, only a behaviour. You cannot reinforce or reward anxiety. Emotions are by nature either inherently positive or negative. Therefore it is perfectly fine to comfort and give attention to an anxious or fearful animal if this helps them to feel better – the goal is to relieve their anxiety to help them function and behave normally.*
- *Anxiety is a mental health disorder. It requires holistic treatment that includes management to prevent exposure to anxiety inducing events; medication to normalise neurochemical imbalances so your pet can learn; and modification to change behaviour and responses over time.*

## Anxiety is a medical disease and welfare issue.

- *Anxiety is out of your pet's conscious control. Anxious animals are mentally unwell. They are not naughty or disobedient.*
- *Involves physical and physiological changes to the body - initiates adrenaline and cortisol (stress hormone) to be produced. This interferes with immune function and weakens immune system.*
- *Anxious animals may have an inherent disability in processing information, which leads to anxiety, or conversely its underlying anxiety may mean that it cannot logically process the information.*
- *Anxious animals feel the need to constantly monitor and assess the environment for threats. They perceive threats where there are none. They cannot relax normally.*
- *Often involves poor impulse control – the animal can't inhibit behaviour, because the logical centre of the brain is not able to function while the emotional centre is firing.*
- *Is disruptive to the human household and harms the human animal bond.*
- *Is a risk factor for euthanasia and is therefore a life-threatening illness.*