

the stress bucket

There's no doubt about it, the pressures of 21st century living can be stressful for our dogs (as well as us). However, how dogs cope with these stressors differs from individual to individual.

If you have ever wondered why your dog may react to something one day and not the next, the answer is likely to be found in your dog's 'stress bucket'.

what is a stress bucket?

The 'stress bucket' (also known as an 'emotional bucket') is a concept which comes from human psychology. It was created as an analogy to help measure stress tolerance.

Just like in humans, the size of your dog's stress bucket is influenced by a combination of their genes, early environment, learning history, life experience, and overall physical and mental health,

The 'water' in the bucket is a combination of all the stressors/triggers in your dog's life. Each time your dog encounters one of their triggers, their 'stress bucket' begins to fill. If your dog has no way of coping with each stressor, their bucket will soon become full, to overflowing. Typically, this is when they will begin to react in the presence of another trigger.

Often, when a dog appears to cope with something one day and not the next, it is down to how full their 'stress bucket' is on that particular day. It is important to remember that your dog's stressors may begin in your home and that their bucket may already be half-full before you leave the home.

what can fill a dog's stress bucket?

- X Other dogs
- X Traffic
- X Loud noises
- X Other people
- X Children
- X Busy places
- X Punishment
- X Lack of sleep
- X Physical health issues
- X Being in pain
- X Mental health issues (eg anxiety)

what can empty a dog's stress bucket?

- ✓ Managing your dog's environment
- ✓ Stopping or limiting exposure to stressors
- ✓ Learning to read your dog's body language **and...**
 - ✓ acting before they become stressed
- ✓ Playing games your dog enjoys
- ✓ Seeking help from a qualified behaviourist



how to help your dog manage their stress bucket

- ✓ One of the first things you can do is to recognise what your dog finds stressful and make a list!
- ✓ It is important to remember that you are identifying what your dog finds stressful, not what you think may or may not be stressful.
- ✓ On the flip side of this, the second step is to make a list of all the activities that your dog enjoys
- ✓ Once you have your list of stressors, manage the environment to limit your dog's exposure to them
- ✓ Make sure that your dog has plenty of opportunity to engage in their favourite activities on a daily basis
- ✓ Recognise that their stress bucket may fill up at different rates - over a few hours, a day, a few days, or even week
- ✓ If your dog's behaviour does not improve, or worsens, seek help from a qualified clinical animal behaviourist