

OCTOBER 2024

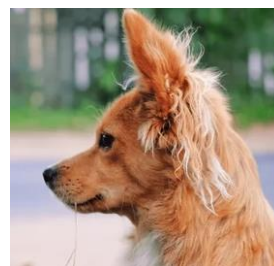
Ask the Trainer

Understanding Your Dog's "Window of Tolerance"

The term "Window of Tolerance", coined by Dr Dan Siegel, refers to the optimal emotional/physiological "zone" for happy and healthy functioning. While Dr Seigel is involved in research and education for humans, this concept is directly applicable to any mammal – including our dogs!

We, and our dogs, are most comfortable within the optimal zone of the Window of Tolerance. Too much stress or arousal can lead out the top of the window into a "fight or flight" response, or out the bottom of the window into a "freeze/collapse" reaction.

While these reactions can occur in isolation, it's also very possible for a combination of reactions to occur. Fight and flight can show up in combination when a stranger enters the personal space of a fearful dog, (e.g. walking in the front door). The dog, adrenalized from the doorbell, might initially charge and bark at the stranger, but runs away as the stranger steps toward them. Maybe the dog proceeds to approach and retreat while barking, and finally scoot in for a bite on the bum as the person turns their back.



This dog is demonstrating both a fight response (charge/approach, bite) and a flight response (run away, avoiding the front of the person) in combination. In most behaviour cases, an experienced eye can pick out what type of nervous system activation there is at play and in what combination. Even more importantly, knowing when a dog prefers to flee but feels forced to fight is a huge advantage when assessing a dog and working through a behaviour plan! A dog who would rather avoid trouble is much easier to manage, but all too often, they are pushed into a fight response because their need for space isn't understood or heeded by their person.

Most of us can understand a dog who sees another dog and barks at it. But how a dog's behaviour escalates is a bit more complicated than that.

"Trigger stacking" is dog trainer lingo for what happens if a dog is exposed to multiple triggers over a period of time. For an example in human terms, let's say you encounter the following over the course of the day: You miss your alarm, drop your toothbrush in the toilet, are late for work, mess up on a big presentation, get scolded by your boss, have to stay late, get stuck in traffic on your way home, finally get in and... there is a sink full of dishes, and your partner is relaxing on the couch seemingly without a care in the world! You may have managed to hold things together during the day, but those dirty dishes are the straw that broke the camel's back. Suddenly it all hits you and you whizz out the top of your Window of Tolerance and snap at your partner!

Earlier in the day, you may have felt the stress building, but that may not have been evident to those around you – until you snap, that is! That is the reality for our dogs, as well. Body language and communication are subtle, and it's easy for most owners to overlook these “whispers” of communication and only tune in when the dog is “shouting.”

A sneeze isn't something that would usually trigger any reaction in Monty the German Shepherd, but last week someone sneezed in their garden, and he nearly leapt into my arms like a terrified cartoon character. So why did he react that way?

Monty is reactive to dogs but is generally comfortable with other things in the environment while out on a walk – however once he is triggered, he has a difficult time coming back into his Window of Tolerance. It is something that we are extremely mindful of when navigating walks and training sessions.



On his walk last week, Monty was surprised by a dog at a too-close distance, and he had a huge loud bark-and-lunge reaction (fight). We got him out of there as quickly as possible, and he was keen to escape (flight) as soon as he realized the option was available to him. Monty visibly settled down quickly with a big shake off and a roll in the grass and proceeded down the sidewalk at a slow amble. Five minutes later, someone in their garden across the street sneezed, and Monty nearly jumped out of his skin! Monty is not worried about people or noises, so what happened?

This is a prime example of trigger stacking in a dog. If an observer was to see Monty only in that moment, they might conclude that Monty is afraid of sounds, or afraid of the person. Knowing the full context of that reaction informs how it might be interpreted. One element of a trigger is how it appears in the environment. A sudden change, even if by a usually innocuous trigger like a sneeze, can itself be a part of the triggering picture.

Monty outwardly looked “fine” before this reaction, as if he was within his Window of Tolerance, but it was the effect of trigger stacking from the initial reaction that resulted in his nervous system remaining activated enough to be triggered by the sneeze. In fact, he was not actually feeling fine at all! We can see body language and behaviour, but we can't always know a dog's internal state. Understanding trigger stacking allows owners to see this outwardly “fine” appearance and know that their dog may not truly be fine at that moment – the dog's internal state may be outside of their Window of Tolerance, even if they are not visibly in fight/flight.

These reactions and internal states aren't something that can be consciously controlled, though luckily that doesn't mean that there's nothing that can be done about stress and the associated reactions! This topic is especially important to delve into if you share your life with a dog with big feelings. These are dogs who need the most support to be able to move out of their fight/flight/freeze stress reactions and back into their Window of Tolerance. Not only that, but the right supports can, in fact, widen that Window of Tolerance, so these reactions don't remain the default response to what triggers them. Reach out to positive reinforcement behaviour consultants in your area (and beyond, as many behaviour consultants offer very effective virtual consults), and be ready to learn how to best support your dog.

Written by **Emily Fisher**

Emily is a Certified Dog Behaviour Consultant through the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants (IAABC), and a Certified Professional Dog Trainer through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT).



BLACKIE'S FUND MATCH = Double your donation!

A generous donor has offered to match every donation up to \$5k for the months of September and October! Help us help dogs by donating at www.speakingofdogs.com/donate or by e-transfer to rescueprogram@speakingofdogs.com

All donations of \$20 or more will receive a tax receipt

Click [HERE](#) to learn more about Blackie's Fund



Charity Fundraiser In Memory of Diane Purser



Every contribution helps give rescue animals the love and care they deserve.



Muttz with Mannerz is holding a fundraiser in honour of one of their team members, Diane Purser, who passed away last October. Diane was very passionate about animal welfare. Many of their educational blogs and podcasts were co-written and co-hosted by Diane, which can be found on their website at their [education link](#). The fundraiser is supporting two organizations: **Speaking of Dogs Rescue** and the **OSPCA**.

Both of these rescues work tirelessly to care for animals in need. Throughout October, they're asking for donations of **food, treats, toys, blankets, gift cards** and any other supplies that these rescues can use. Whether big or small, every contribution helps give rescue animals the love and care they deserve.

You can drop off your donations at Muttz with Mannerz during their regular hours (found at <https://www.muttzwithmannerz.com/>) and they'll ensure everything goes directly to the rescues.

Dogs Looking for Homes

Without a doubt, a dog is a real friend. Our dogs come in all shapes and sizes, but they have one thing in common — they all need loving forever homes.

Open your heart and your home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did.

For complete information about the adoption process, please visit www.speakingofdogs.com/adoption-process.

Meet our October Feature Dog

ZACH

Zach, a very sweet Miniature Poodle recently joined our rescue. He is 5 years old and weighs around 12 lbs. He lived in a puppy mill all his life and has some challenges to overcome, but is making progress. Zach was



very frightened when he arrived at his foster home. He shook for 3 days and slept alone in the living room at night. Three days later he moved to a bed on the floor in the bedroom. Now he sleeps on the bed with his foster parents and their dogs. Zach is comfortable climbing stairs and likes to spend time outside in the backyard, rolling in the grass. He feels safe in his home and yard. He is, however, frightened to leave his safe space and, when he went for his first walk on a leash, he froze and had to be carried home. He is quiet travelling in the car and is fine with a seatbelt or crate. Zach has a very good appetite and eats 2 meals a day. Benny Bully's are his favourite treats. He eats Royal Canin Adult canned food. We add a little chopped chicken and

rice. He also eats Performatrin Ultra Kibble. These can be purchased from Pet Valu. Currently there are 3 small dogs in Zach's foster home. He will sometimes join in when the other dogs bark, but for the most part is quiet. He has not been destructive when left alone. He is friendly with people and other dogs.

When Zach was released from the puppy mill, he was severely matted and had to be clipped very short. It will take a couple of months for his coat to grow back in. Zach is not yet totally housebroken. He will do his business outside in the yard. If he can't get outside in time, he will poo on a puppy pad, but will lift his leg on furniture for a pee (we use a belly band for him so no urine gets on our furniture). He will need training. Zach would probably do best in a very quiet environment with no children. Preferably he should go into a home with a retiree or someone who works from home and could be with him most of the time. A house with a yard and another dog would be a bonus. He is making great progress and, with a little time and patience, he will do very well.



If you think you are the right fit for Zach, please fill out an application for our consideration.

Click [here](#) to visit our adoption application.



Genevieve

Poodle (Toy) / Mixed
Medium Coat
Small, Young, Female



Daisy

West Highland White Terrier 'Westie' / Terrier
/ Mixed
Medium Coat
Small, Senior, Female



Sassy

Shih Tzu
Short Coat
Small, Adult, Female



Fifi

Yorkshire Terrier Yorkie / Mixed
Short Coat
Small, Adult, Female



Flash

Poodle (Miniature)
Short Coat
Small, Adult, Female



Brady

Chihuahua
Short Coat
Small, Adult, Male



Ziggy

Husky / Mixed
Medium Coat
Medium, Adult, Female



Lucy

Hound / Mixed
Short Coat
Medium, Adult, Female



Sierra

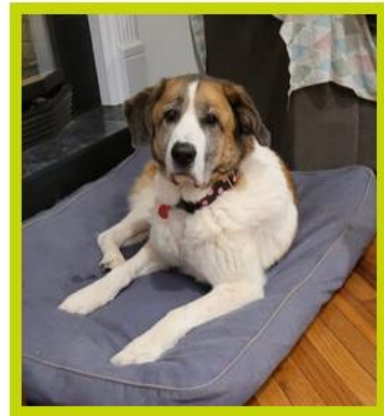
Cocker Spaniel
Long Coat
Medium, Adult, Female



Bongo
Pomeranian
Long Coat
Small, Adult, Male



Maverick
Shih Tzu
Medium Coat
Small, Senior, Male



Hannah a.k.a. Anna
Saint Bernard / Collie / Mixed
Medium Coat
Large, Senior, Female

Happy Tails (Recent Adoptions)



Buttons



Chase



Gibson



Grover



Heidi



Ingrid



Jack



LilyMae



Mindy



Roland



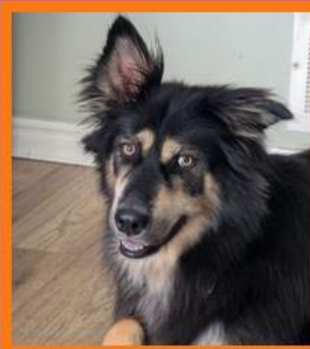
Ruthie



Rusty



Sandy



Sky



Spud



Stella



Theo



Toffee

Adoption Update

Dear Speaking of Dogs,



Eight years ago, June, you gave us the greatest gift. We met you at Petopia, and you introduced us to Preston.

He was 10 at the time and we figured, if we were lucky, we'd have him for five years. Well, he is now over 18 and we are excited to send yet another picture for this year's calendar. This is a picture of him in the outfit he wore for his street birthday party.

Preston joined us many winters in California and Florida. He is too old now so neither of us travel so I can stay with him. We don't want to take the risk if we are away. Although he is mostly blind, he still loves to run in the park every day. We are looking at having his cataracts removed but have yet to be told that he's a candidate. Fingers crossed.

Sincerely,

JAN BOASE

YOUR AD HERE

\$50

If you would like to advertise in the 2025 SOD calendar please email speakingofdogs@gmail.com



amazon wish lists

Want to help our dogs?
Consider making a donation from our Amazon wish list of priority dog supplies.

[Click here to view list](#)

In Memoriam



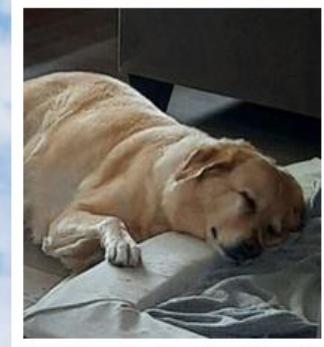
Louie

Adopted May 2008
Loved by John & Carol Collins



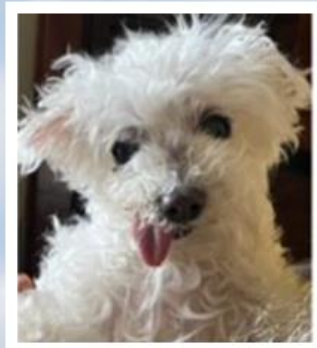
Milo

Adopted April 2020
Loved by Gary & Bill



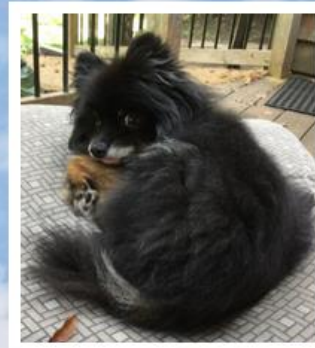
Penny

Adopted February 2015
Loved by the Saxe family



Larry a.k.a. Kyle

Adopted November 2023
Loved by Melanie & Gord Cresswell



Snickers

Adopted August 2023
Loved by Jill St. Germain

About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program is a Canadian registered charity established in the Greater Toronto area (with foster homes across Ontario). Launched in 2001, we are a foster-based, all breed rescue with a focus on senior dogs. We are run solely by volunteers with a mission to help homeless dogs in need by providing shelter or sanctuary, necessary medical care, adoption and education.

Newsletter Team

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