



Overstimulation

Overstimulation is a very common problem with dogs, especially since humans are taught to give dogs lots of exercise and stimulation with no mention of 'down time.' Dogs, like humans, need a balance of physical exercise, mental stimulation, and decompression time to be well balanced and happy.

Overstimulated behaviour in dogs can take many forms and may present differently for individual dogs. The most common overstimulated behaviours are destructive behaviour, incessant barking, constant hyperactivity and 'temper tantrums.' Dogs do not enjoy exhibiting 'bad' behaviour, if you are noticing any of these behaviours, try giving them a break and see if it helps. It is important to note that while the culprit MAY be overstimulation, it may also be a host of other behavioural or medical symptoms.

Knowing when to stop and when to provide breaks is key in preventing overstimulated behaviour before it begins. Once you notice what triggers these behaviours, it is important to take note, and provide a break before the behaviour starts. Think of a child having a temper tantrum, once they are in the middle of it, it is close to impossible to end it. A good place to start determining your dog's limits is to implement a schedule and journal. Start with 1 hour of physical exercise, give them a 2 hour 'break;' do 10-20 minutes of mental stimulation (such as scent training or trick training), and give them a 2-4-hour break, and so on. If 1 hour of physical exercise appears to be too much, shorten it. Play with the schedule until you feel you are properly stimulating your pup, without overdoing it.

Breaks can include nap time in a crate, food enrichment toys like stuffed KONGS, calming music and/or 'alone' time in a separate room.

Some activities are too challenging for certain dogs, that alone can lead to overstimulated and frustrated behaviour. Be sure to not 'over face' your dog with activities that are too challenging. It is always best to start with activities and exercises that are too easy, and slowly increase the difficulty to determine the level your dog prefers. There are many different types of exercises and activities to try with your pup, check out our enrichment resources to try to find the best one for you and your dog. Not all dogs are satisfied by leash walks, so try a variety of different activities to determine what satisfies your dog best.

Puppies generally become overstimulated VERY quickly and tend to be very bitey and jumpy when they are. The best thing you can do for puppies is to set a very strict schedule that includes lots of nap time. Puppies generally have between 20 minutes and 1 hour before they reach their overstimulation threshold (depending on age), so plan around that. 20-30 minutes of physical activity followed by 2 hours of down time, 15 minutes of mental stimulation and 2-4 hours of down time, and so on. Puppies need significantly more sleep than adult dogs, so plan on leaving them alone, or cuddling on the couch, for around 8 hours during the day, broken up by small activities.

Georgian Triangle Humane Society

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**Support:**

Our Behaviour Support Team can help to provide resources and tips if you experience concerns in the home environment. With your adoption the GTHS will provide an over the phone consultation in order to provide you with tips and resources to set your new dog up for success. In all cases of dog adoptions, the GTHS recommends hiring a professional dog training or behavioural consultant to ensure your relationship with your new dog starts off on the right paw! A list of local trainers is enclosed in your adoption package.

Our Behaviour Support Team can be reached at behaviour@gths.ca

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