



## HASS Behavior Glossary

### About this Glossary:

Similar to the origins of the HASS project itself, the HASS Behavior Glossary was created in collaboration with various trusted animal welfare professionals, including the former HASS Behavior Support Working Group, as well as behavior and veterinary experts.

This glossary provides definitions of common animal behavioral terms and does not substitute for a diagnosis or evaluation by a qualified professional. Additionally, this guide provides some species-specific examples and explanations, focusing on dogs and cats, which represent the most common species entering shelters and in households.

### Tips for Navigating this Glossary:

- All terms are listed in alphabetical order
- Text in blue font contains links to external resources
- To navigate to a specific term without scrolling, use the keyboard shortcut: CTRL+F

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**3 D's - Duration, Distraction, Distance:** The 3 D's are used in animal training to help proof, or solidify, trained behaviors. Duration is the length of time that an animal maintains a behavior. Distraction represents training the behavior when distractions are present. Distance involves increasing the distance between the dog and handler while the behavior is maintained.

**Aggression:** A normal form of animal communication that includes a variety of behaviors that range from warnings (e.g., growling, hissing) to an attack (i.e., a severely injurious bite or series of bites). Aggressive behavior is often a distance-increasing behavior, meaning its intention is to create distance between the animal and the stimulus. See this [article](#). See also *Aggression, Offensive; Aggression, Defensive*.

**Aggression, Defensive:** When an animal is fearful or anxious and would prefer to move away, but feels unable to and responds to the perceived threat with aggressive behavior. This aggressive behavior can include behaviors such as growling, hissing, swatting, snapping, or biting in response to a stimulus entering their space and is often associated with fearful body language. See also *Aggression*.

**Aggression, Dog:** Aggression that occurs in response to exposure to dogs. This behavior may look like hard staring, growling, barking, snarling, lunging, snapping, and/or biting. See also *Aggression, Defensive; Aggression, Offensive; Leash Reactivity*.

**Aggression, Offensive:** When an animal moves toward and displays aggressive behavior toward a stimulus (e.g., person or other animal), instead of choosing to move away or disengage. This aggressive behavior is less common than defensive aggression and can look like growling, hissing, swatting, snapping, and/or biting the stimulus. It is associated with postures such as a forward-leaning body, a tail held high, forward-facing ears, and a swishing tail (cats), etc.

**Aggression, Redirected:** Occurs when an animal directs aggressive behavior toward a nearby, unintended target, such as a person, another animal, or a leash. The aggressive behavior was initially triggered by a stimulus other than the recipient of the aggression.

**Aggression, Unpredictable:** A display of aggressive behavior that is not accompanied by an identifiable trigger/stimulus by a trained observer; it is genuinely unpredictable and unprovoked. Environmental conditions and warning signs or signals typically precede a display of aggression, even if they are overlooked by observers. As a result, this term is frequently overused/misused when describing aggression. Contacting a behavior consultant, animal behaviorist, veterinary behaviorist, and/or veterinarian is recommended for any behavior believed to be unpredictable, as truly unpredictable aggression is extremely rare. See this [article](#).

**Affect:** Any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to extreme pleasure, from simple to complex feelings, and from normal to pathological emotional reactions. See *Affect, Positive, Affect, Negative*.

**Affect, Negative:** The internal feeling state, also known as the affect, that occurs when an animal has failed to achieve a goal, avoid a threat, or is not satisfied with their circumstances. An animal with a negative affect might appear fearful, depressed, anxious, frustrated, or aggressive. See also *Affect; Affect, Positive*.

**Affect, Positive:** The internal feeling state, also known as the affect, that occurs when an animal has successfully achieved a goal, avoided a threat, or is satisfied with their circumstances. An animal with a positive affect might appear happy, playful, and/or enthusiastic. See *Affect; Affect, Negative*.

**Animal Behaviorist:** Associate [Certified](#) Applied Animal Behaviorists and Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists have certifications that require a master's degree or a PhD, respectively. This term should only be used by people with the aforementioned certifications. See also *Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; Behavior Consultant; Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; Trainer; Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Anxiety/Anxious:** When an animal is experiencing nervousness, worry, or stress, often about a particular event or outcome. There are several forms of anxiety, including but not limited to general anxiety, separation anxiety, situational anxiety, etc. Common signs include: pacing, panting,

drooling, trembling, restlessness, excessive vocalization (whining, barking), and destructive behavior. See this [poster](#) for signs of anxiety in dogs. See this [poster](#) for signs of anxiety in cats.

**Anxiety, Generalized:** When not excessive and not out of context, anxiety is normal and adaptive. Generalized anxiety is persistent anticipatory fear, difficulty settling, and hypervigilance. See also *Anxiety/Anxious; Hypervigilant*.

**Anxiety, Separation:** Anxiety that occurs when an animal is left alone and separated from people they are attached to. Behaviors associated with separation anxiety may include destructive behavior, vocalizing, pacing, panting, and house soiling. Dogs suffering from separation anxiety experience the equivalent of a panic attack when left alone. Differentiating separation anxiety from other causes (e.g., boredom, isolation distress, confinement distress) is key for management and treatment. See this [link](#) for more information about separation anxiety. See this [link](#) for treatment considerations for separation anxiety. See also *Confinement Distress; Isolation Distress*.

**Appeasement/Appeasement Gesture:** Behaviors and postures used to try to reduce a threat or avoid conflict with a perceived threat, or communicate that they are not a threat themselves. Common appeasement gestures for dogs include: lowering the body posture, curving the spine, ears back, long lip, squinty eyes, rolling onto the side or back, averting the gaze, turning the head away from the threat, low tail wags, urination, and lip licks. Common appeasement gestures for cats include headbutting, scent marking, and vocalizing.

**Arousal:** An animal's general state of excitability or stimulation. This term is typically used to describe an animal experiencing a heightened emotional and physiological state, in which the brain prepares the body to respond to a threat or an opportunity. High levels of emotional arousal can result in behaviors such as excitedly jumping or mouthing, barking, whining, swatting, and more. See also *Overstimulation; Jumpy/Mouthy; Impulse Control*.

**Asocial:** Indifferent to or not interested in making connections with others, lack of motivation to engage with others socially. A pet can be asocial with their own species but social with humans, or asocial with both.

**Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist:** Certified by the Animal Behavior Society, Associate [Certified](#) Applied Animal Behaviorists have a Master's Degree in a biological or behavioral science and at least two years of professional experience in the field. See also *Animal Behaviorist; Behavior Consultant; Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; Trainer; Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Aversive:** A stimulus or event that an animal will work to avoid. Aversive stimuli are determined by what is considered unpleasant to the individual animal.

**Avoidance:** The act of keeping away or retreating from something. Animals may avoid unpleasant stimuli.

**Behavior Consultant:** An individual who helps people to learn about, manage, and modify their pet's behavior. Some behavior consultants are credentialed by a reputable certifying organization, e.g., IAABC or CCPDT (CBCC-KA), which requires maintaining continuing education and adherence to professional guidelines. There is currently no regulatory body for all behavior consultants; therefore, practitioners may refer to themselves as behaviorists or behavior consultants without proving their knowledge and skills. However, these terms should be reserved to describe practitioners with the designated credentials. See also *Animal Behaviorist*; *Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Trainer*; *Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Behavior Modification:** Changing an animal's emotional response and/or teaching them to produce a preferred behavior instead of an undesired behavior. For example, a dog that displays leash reactivity due to fear could undergo behavior modification to learn to be calm and relaxed (a new association) in the presence of other dogs by being taught to look at their handler whenever they see a dog in order to receive a reward. See also *Training*.

**Behavior Professional:** An informal term that may be used to describe an individual who works with animals directly or their caretakers to learn about, manage, and/or modify the animal's behavior. Individuals may have varying qualifications, which may include any combination of on-the-job experience, education, and certification. This differs from titles such as "behavior consultant" or "behaviorist," which require standardized qualifications. See also *Animal Behaviorist*; *Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Behavior Consultant*; *Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Trainer*; *Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Bite:** Occurs when an animal makes contact with another animal or human using their teeth. A bite may cause no damage at all, or may result in bruising, tissue damage, puncture wounds, or lacerations. The [Dunbar Bite Scale](#) is commonly used to measure and describe bite severity.

**Calming Signal:** Signals that an animal presents when experiencing fear, stress, anxiety, or arousal from a stimulus (e.g., person or another animal). Animals typically display these signals to indicate that they are not a threat and/or to disengage from a threatening encounter. This can include body language such as looking away, yawning, lip licking, sniffing the ground (engaging in something else), raising one paw, freezing, and lying down. For a more complete list of calming signals, see this [article](#). See also *Displacement Behavior*; *Appeasement/Appeasement Gesture*.

**Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB):** Certified by the Animal Behavior Society, these professionals hold a doctorate in biological or behavioral science and five years of professional experience in the field. Requirements include submission of two case studies or one case study and one research publication. See also *Animal Behaviorist*; *Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Behaviorist*; *Behavior Consultant*; *Trainer*; *Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Classical Conditioning:** When an animal learns a connection between a naturally occurring stimulus (i.e., an event that naturally triggers a response, such as a flinch response to a loud noise) and a neutral stimulus (i.e., something they don't have an association with, such as a clicker or doorbell), the animal learns that the stimulus (previously neutral) predicts the paired stimulus. This can happen on purpose through training. This can also occur naturally through life events. This may also be referred to as "Pavlovian conditioning" or "associative learning." See this [graphic](#). See this [article](#). See also *Conditioned Emotional Response (CER)*; *Clicker Training*; *Pavlovian Conditioning*.

**Clicker Training:** A way of teaching an animal that uses a "click" sound to mark and indicate a reward for the behavior that will follow. See this [article](#). See also *Reward Marker*.

**Compulsive Behavior:** Behaviors that are abnormal and repetitive, may be variable in form, and are often fixated on a goal. They may be exaggerated, sustained, intense, and challenging to interrupt, or they may have an element of dyscontrol in either the initiation or continuation of the behavior, or in the inhibition or switching between behaviors. They are generally derived from normal behaviors such as grooming, predation, ingestion, or locomotion. See also *Repetitive Behavior*; *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*; *Stereotypy*; *Coping*.

**Conditioned Emotional Response (CER):** An emotional response that occurs as a result of classical conditioning. This emotion can be positive, like confidence or excitement. This emotion can also be negative, like fear or anxiety. This can happen naturally through life experiences or be created intentionally through training. See also *Classical Conditioning*.

**Confinement Distress:** Fear, anxiety, or stress that occurs when an animal is in a space they cannot escape. This emotional state might trigger behaviors such as chewing, licking, barking, self-mutilation, digging, or trying to break out of the space. Examples of confinement include crates, kennel runs, or any room in a home with closed doors. See also *Isolation Distress*; *Anxiety, Separation*.

**Coping:** Behavior that helps an animal adjust to or tolerate something they view as negative. This can be when an animal is experiencing fear, anxiety, or stress. Sometimes this can be due to a new environment, people, or animals. See [flight or freeze](#). See [cat coping](#). See also *Calming Signal*; *Displacement Behavior*; *Repetitive Behavior*; *Stereotypy*; *Aggression, Redirected*.

**Counterconditioning:** A behavior modification technique in which a stimulus that creates a negative emotional response is paired with something known to create a positive emotional response in an attempt to change how an animal perceives something. This is often used to teach an animal that an activity is enjoyable rather than scary, such as providing treats during bath time. See this [graphic](#). See also *Conditioned Emotional Response (CER)*; *Classical Conditioning*.

**Crepuscular:** In cats, active behavior that occurs explicitly during twilight/evening. See this [resource](#).

**Cue:** A signal for an animal to perform a behavior. Signals can be verbal (saying “sit”), visual (hand signal such as a “thumbs up”), or physical (touching a dog’s leg to cue “shake”).

**Desensitization:** This term is often used to describe a training strategy that reduces an animal’s fear, anxiety, and/or stress. The trainer gradually exposes the animal to something scary or stressful, beginning at a very low level. This level should be so low that the animal does not display signs of stress. The trainer then gradually increases the intensity of the exposure. This is usually done over many training sessions. The goal throughout training is for the animal to show no signs of fear, stress, or anxiety. Desensitization is often paired with counterconditioning. See this [article](#). See also *Counterconditioning*; *Habituation*.

**Dilated Pupils:** The “pupil” is the black center of the eye. When the pupil gets bigger, it is “dilated.” This can make the eyes look glassy. This can be a sign of emotional arousal and may indicate that an animal is feeling threatened, stressed, frightened, or excited. See this [article](#). See also *Whale Eye*.

**Displacement Behavior:** Behaviors that occur when an animal is conflicted in a situation. These behaviors may not appear to serve a function. Examples include scratching, sniffing, and pretending to sleep. See also *Calming Signal*; *Coping*.

**Distance:** When used in training, distance often refers to increasing the space between the animal and trainer while the animal maintains the behavior. Part of the 3 D’s in training (“distance,” “duration,” and “distraction”) that are utilized to help “proof,” or solidify, trained behaviors. See also *Duration*; *Distraction*.

**Distance-decreasing Behavior:** Behaviors that communicate an animal wants less space. These behaviors are usually characterized by affiliative body language or vocalizations. See this [article](#).

**Distance-increasing Behavior:** Behaviors that communicate an animal wants more space. These behaviors are usually characterized by fear/anxiety/stress-related body language or vocalizations. See this [article](#).

**Distraction:** Practicing a behavior when distractions are present. Distractions may include toys, people, other animals, cars, trains, etc. Part of the 3 D’s in training (“distance,” “duration,” and “distraction”). These are used in animal training to help “proof,” or solidify, trained behaviors. See also *Distance*; *Duration*.

**Domestication:** Acclimating a species to live under human care. The process of domesticating wild animals to live with humans takes many generations. See also *Feral*; *Tame*.

**Dominant/Dominance:** This term is commonly misunderstood and misused. Methods of communication vary widely across animal species, and dominance is part of the relationship

between animals of the [same species](#). Dominance is defined as a relationship between individual animals that may be established by force/aggression and submission, or consistent deference even without the presence of aggression, to determine who has priority access to resources such as food, preferred resting spots, and mates. See [article](#). See *Submissive Body Language*.

**Dunbar Bite Scale:** An assessment of the severity of dog biting problems based on an objective evaluation of wound pathology. See [this scale](#).

**Duration:** Duration is the length of time that an animal maintains a behavior. See also *Distance*; *Distraction*. Part of the 3 D's in training ("distance," "duration," and "distraction"). These are used in animal training to help "proof," or solidify, trained behaviors.

**Extinction:** When a previously reinforced behavior is no longer reinforced and the behavior diminishes or ceases altogether. For example, if a dog has previously received attention (reward) for jumping on people, withholding that reward may cause the dog to stop jumping on people, as the behavior is no longer reinforced

**Extinction Burst:** An increase in the intensity of a behavior undergoing extinction. For example, if a dog has previously received attention (reward) for jumping on people, withholding that reward may cause the dog to jump more frequently (or more intensely) before the behavior is extinguished. See [this source](#).

**Fearful:** Feeling afraid; showing fear or anxiety. An emotion characterized by a perception of danger and feeling frightened of the environment, people, and/or animals. See this [poster](#) for dogs and this [poster](#) for cats.

**Fear, Anxiety, and Stress Scale/Assessment** - A system to evaluate fear, anxiety, and stress developed by the Fear Free initiative. Often referred to as "FAS." See this [link](#).

**Feral:** Describes the behavior patterns of wild offspring of domesticated animals that are raised without human contact. Feral cats and dogs remain extremely wary of people and may flee when approached, similar to wildlife. See also *Domestication*; *Tame*.

**Flooding:** Occurs when an animal is exposed to a fear or anxiety-inducing stimulus, without the opportunity to escape or without intervention to reduce the animal's anxiety. This technique is not recommended due to potential behavioral fallout and the harm it causes to animal welfare, such as increasing fear or anxiety toward a stimulus, which can increase the likelihood of undesirable behavior.

**Food Guarding:** Resource guarding of a food/ingestible item like kibble, a bone, or a treat. See also *Resource Guarding*.



**Freeze/Freezing:** A momentary pause or stillness by an animal, characterized by significant tension and rigidity in the body. This behavior occurs when an animal is experiencing fear, anxiety, or stress, but can also occur during play. See also *Calming Signal; Pancake*.

**Frustration:** An emotional state associated with an animal's goal-directed behavior being thwarted/prevented. For example, a dog who wants to greet another dog but is restrained by a leash might feel frustrated.

**Generalization:** When an animal can apply a concept they've learned in one setting or situation to different situations. For example, a dog first learns to sit while the trainer is standing and says, "sit." When they generalize "sit," they sit whether they are in a park, on a crowded street, or when a different person asks them to sit. We can also teach animals to generalize their behavior toward similar types of things, people, or animals. For example, a dog has a positive experience with one dog and learns that meeting other dogs is also a positive experience. See this [article](#).

**Growl:** A guttural vocalization that often occurs as a warning sign when an animal is attempting to increase the distance between themselves and a stimulus. Growling may accompany other displays of aggression. See also *Aggression*.

**Habituation:** The process of an animal becoming accustomed to something when the psychological or emotional response to a frequently repeated stimulus decreases. For example, a companion animal becomes accustomed to the sound of an air conditioning unit or to the presence of a new piece of furniture in the home. Note that this differs from *flooding*. See this [article](#). See also *Desensitization; Counterconditioning*.

**Handling Sensitivity:** When an animal is uncomfortable with being touched or with the anticipation of touch. Animals with handling sensitivity are often uncomfortable when specific parts of the body are touched (e.g., ears, feet) or when touched in specific environments/by particular people (e.g., during a veterinary visit).

**Happy Tail:** An injury to a dog's tail due to wagging their tail repeatedly against a wall or other hard surface while being confined. This injury often results in bleeding and wounds. May rarely require tail amputation if the injury is severe and slow to heal.

**Hard Eye/Stare:** Direct eye contact that is characterized by an intense, fixated, glassy-eyed gaze. The animal often has a stiff/tense body posture. It usually appears in animals displaying fear, stress, or anxiety within an environment.

**Head Butting/Bumping/Bunting:** Common behavior in cats, an intentional push of part of the head into the face or body of another animal, person, or object. It typically occurs during friendly interactions and may be a variation of scent rubbing.



**Herding:** When a dog actively follows, chases, and/or "corrals" or groups a stimulus, which is often another animal(s) or person(s). May include eye tracking, searching, nipping, etc.

**Hiss:** Often a warning noise meant to increase the distance between a cat and a stimulus that is perceived as threatening. Listen to this [audio clip](#).

**House Soiling:** Pet eliminates indoors or outside their designated elimination area. May include litter box avoidance/aversion, house/potty training needs, urine marking, spraying, and defecation. It can co-occur with medical conditions, such as urinary tract infections (UTIs). Often referred to as "inappropriate elimination." See also *Marking (Urine)*; *Spraying (Urine)*.

**Humane Hierarchy:** The [Humane Hierarchy of Behavior Change](#) offers a guide of training strategies to consider when working to change animal behavior. Punishment is reserved as a last step, or most intrusive level, and is "rarely necessary (or suggested by standards of best practice) when one has the requisite knowledge of behavior change and teaching skills." See also [Application of the Humane Hierarchy Position Statement](#).

**Hypervigilant:** A sensory state in which an individual is on high alert and extremely sensitive to surroundings. See also *Anxiety/Anxious*; *Generalized Anxiety*; *Fearful*.

**Impulse Control:** An animal's overall state of emotional self-regulation. It often refers to an animal's ability to willfully stop behaving in a certain way. For example, a dog who jumps repeatedly on someone despite a trained cue to 'sit' may have poor impulse control.

**Isolation Distress:** Fear, anxiety, or stress-related behaviors that occur when an animal is left alone, and the distress stems from the solitude. Often confused with separation anxiety, as the behavioral characteristics are very similar, but is rooted in distress due to a specific person they are attached to not being present. See also *Confinement Distress*; *Anxiety, Separation*.

**Jumpy/Mouthy (Dog):** Informal, "short-hand" terminology that often refers to behaviors associated with energetic, playful, stressed, or anxious dogs. A dog who shows jumpy/mouthy behavior may jump up, put their mouths on people (usually people's arms and legs), clothing, and/or the leash. See also *Arousal*.

**Kneading/Making Biscuits:** When a cat pushes out and pulls in their front paws, often alternating between right and left limbs. Often occurs while the cat is calm or experiencing a positive emotional state.

**Learned Helplessness:** Occurs when an animal learns that they cannot change, control, or improve a situation regardless of their behavior or actions. An animal demonstrating learned helplessness may be unresponsive or minimally responsive to their environment, despite the advanced distress the individual may be experiencing emotionally. See also *Flooding*; *Pancake*; *Impulse Control*.

**Least Intrusive Minimally Aversive (LIMA):** This [principle](#) encourages animal trainers and pet owners to use effective but minimally intrusive tools and techniques, focusing primarily on techniques that reward animals for desired behaviors rather than punish them for undesired behaviors.

**Lip Lick:** A behavior typically displayed when a dog is stressed, uncomfortable, or unsure. See this [video](#) and this [video](#). May also be referred to as a tongue flick.

**Litter Box Avoidance/Aversion:** Cat eliminates outside of their litter box. See *House Soiling; Marking (Urine); Spraying (Urine)*.

**Lure:** A method of guiding a dog through a behavior. For example, a food lure can be used to guide a dog from a sit into a down. This is a common method of teaching more complex behaviors. Lures are usually food, but they may also be toys that the animal desires. Trainers must take care to fade the lure early to avoid them becoming dependent on the lure. See this [article](#). See also *Reinforcement*.

**Marking (Urine):** Typically involves an animal depositing a small amount of urine on a vertical surface rather than emptying their bladder. Marking is used as communication and to convey information (i.e., to signify “I was here”). See this [article](#). See *Spraying (Urine)*.

**Mounting:** Occurs when an animal puts their forelegs on an object, person, or animal and thrusts their pelvis repeatedly toward the target of the behavior. This behavior is normal in animals of all ages and sexes, whether spayed or neutered. This behavior can be directed toward people, other animals, or objects (e.g., pillows). Mounting can be associated with excitement, play, stress, or communication. May also be referred to as humping. See this [article](#).

**Mouthing (Cat):** A cat places their teeth/mouth on a person, typically without breaking the skin. Cat mouthing is complex and can occur in a variety of situations, and may sometimes indicate overstimulation or frustration. This behavior often occurs during social interactions, such as during petting, playing, or attention-seeking, or during licking/grooming. Evaluating the overall [body language](#) of a cat in the context of the mouthing behavior is the best way to assess what may have led to the mouthing. Mouthing in cats is sometimes informally referred to as “love bites.” See also [this article](#). For dogs, see *Jumpy/Mouthy* and *Mouthing (Dog)*.

**Mouthing (Dog):** Occurs when a dog places their mouth/teeth on a person (typically not breaking skin) or item. May occur during moments of high arousal, excitement, or discomfort. See also *Jumpy/Mouthy; Arousal; Impulse Control*.

**Muzzle Punch:** Describes when a dog purposely bumps a person or animal with a closed mouth. This may be done in play or as a warning.

**Noise Sensitivity:** An animal that is fearful or anxious of environmental noise, more typically with loud, sudden, unpredictable noises. See this [link](#).

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** A clinical diagnosis made by a veterinarian. Compulsive behaviors are abnormal and repetitive, may be variable in form, and are often fixated on a goal. They may be exaggerated, sustained, intense, difficult to interrupt, or lack control switching between behaviors. See this [article](#). See also *Compulsive Behavior*; *Repetitive Behavior*; *Stereotypy*; *Coping*.

**Operant Conditioning:** A training and behavior modification technique where we increase or decrease the frequency of behavior by adding or removing something (e.g., food reward, attention). See this [link](#).

**Overstimulation:** A response an animal displays when emotionally aroused, often characterized by behaviors such as excessive vocalizations by dogs or cats; shutting down by dogs or cats; jumping and mouthing for dogs; or swatting for cats, etc. See also *Arousal*; *Jumpy/Mouthy*; *Impulse Control*.

**Pancake:** An informal term to describe when an animal makes themselves as flat to the ground and as still as possible. This behavior is a fear-based, freeze response and can be an example of “shutting down”. See also *Shut Down*; *Learned Helplessness*; *Freeze/Freezing*.

**Pavlovian Conditioning:** Another name for “classical conditioning,” derived from Pavlov’s bell experiment, where a naturally occurring response(i.e., salivating in response to food) and a neutral stimulus (e.g., bell) were paired, and dogs predicted food at the sound of a bell. See also *Classical Conditioning*; *Clicker Training*; *Conditioned Emotional Response (CER)*.

**Phobia:** A phobia is a marked, persistent fear that is irrational and disproportional to a threat and is always maladaptive. See this [article](#).

**Piloerection:** The hair (or “hackles”) raising on the back and/or neck (sometimes even all the way to the base of the tail) when an animal experiences arousal; often interpreted as “aggression,” but it is simply a heightened emotional response.

**Play:** Play behavior includes play bows, running, pouncing, vocalizing (e.g., growling or barking), wrestling, and often includes components of the predatory sequence such as chasing, rolling around, and biting. Play does not involve aggressive intent and can occur between animals of the same species, different species, with humans, or with objects. Play is an indicator of positive affect. Play between animals is usually characterized by switching offensive and defensive roles, or “give-and-take.”

**Play Bow:** In dogs, this body position typically occurs after a brief pause in play, often to reengage play. The dog has their front elbows and forelegs down on the ground and rear end in the air, usually accompanied by relaxed, bouncy movements.

**Predatory Sequence:** The instinctive motivation and motor pattern to orient, stalk, chase, grab/bite, kill/bite, dissect, and/or consume—a series of motor patterns whereby one pattern triggers the next. Animals may display none, some, or all of these behaviors in a predatory sequence and may jump around in order of events. See this [article](#) and this [article](#).

**Prey Drive:** The instinctive motivation to chase, catch, or kill what is perceived as prey.

**Punishment:** A stimulus that the animal does not like or want, and thus will work to avoid. Punishment, as a consequence for a behavior, will decrease the frequency of that behavior. See also *Aversive; Punishment, Negative; and Punishment, Positive*.

**Punishment, Negative:** Removing something the animal wants or likes to reduce the frequency of a behavior. For example, when a dog whines, cries, or barks to get attention, removing attention (by ignoring the dog) may decrease the frequency of the unwanted attention-seeking behavior. See this [article](#).

**Punishment, Positive:** Adding or doing something the animal does not like or want to decrease the frequency of a behavior. For example, spraying a dog with water (something the dog does not want) when the dog jumps on people to decrease the frequency of the dog jumping on people. See this [article](#) and this [article](#).

**Reactivity/Reactive:** When an animal displays one or more behaviors during periods of emotional arousal, such as lunging or vocalizing towards another animal, human, or object—typically one that they are not able to access due to a barrier such as a leash or fence. Animals may behave reactively for various reasons, such as excitement, fear, or frustration.

**Reactivity, Barrier:** An animal displaying barrier reactivity may bark, growl, vocalize, lunge, jump, and/or snap when they see a stimulus (e.g., a person or other animal) from behind a barrier (e.g., a kennel door, fence, gate, or window). This behavior occurs when a barrier is present and may be caused by excitement, emotional arousal, or fear. The behavior observed from behind a barrier may not always occur toward the same stimulus when the barrier is removed. See also *Frustration*.

**Reactivity, Leash:** A dog displaying leash reactivity may bark, growl, vocalize, lunge, jump, and/or snap when they see a specific stimulus (e.g., a person or other animal) while restrained by a leash. This behavior may not occur when the dog is off-leash. This behavior may be caused by frustration, excitement, emotional arousal, fear, or aggression. See also *Reactivity, Barrier; Frustration*.

**Recoil:** When an animal backs away, typically from something they are unsure of or fearful of, sometimes arching their back or making themselves appear smaller in an attempt to reduce a threat or to avoid conflict. See also *Distance-increasing Behavior*; *Appeasement/Appeasement Gesture*.

**Redirect (attention):** To interrupt a dog from what they were focused on and to bring focus back to the handler or other desired stimulus, like a toy. See also *Aggression, Redirected*.

**Reinforcement:** The process of giving a reinforcer to increase the likelihood that a behavior will occur again; strengthening or encouraging a behavior. Reinforcers are things that an animal likes or wants. When a behavior is reinforced (i.e., providing treats), its frequency increases. See also *Reinforcement, Positive*; *Reinforcement, Negative*.

**Reinforcement, Negative:** Taking away or removing something that the animal does not like or want in order to increase the frequency of a behavior. For example, if leash pressure is only removed when a dog walks beside a handler, walking beside a handler is negatively reinforced by the removal of the unpleasant leash pressure. If negative reinforcement occurred, the behavior of walking beside the handler will increase (be reinforced). See this [article](#).

**Reinforcement, Positive:** Adding or doing something the animal likes or wants to increase the frequency of a behavior. For example, giving the animal a treat (something the animal wants) when the animal comes closer increases the frequency of the animal coming closer. See this [article](#).

**Repetitive Behavior:** A behavior, such as jumping, barking, licking, or pacing, which is performed repeatedly. This typically occurs when animals are excited, frustrated, stressed, or anxious. Stereotypic, compulsive, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors are types of repetitive behavior. See this [link](#). See also *Compulsive Behavior*; *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*; *Stereotypy (Stereotypic Behavior)*; *Coping*.

**Resource Guarding:** Barking, growling, posturing, snapping, hissing, spitting, biting, etc., as prompted by a person or another animal approaching while the animal is engaging with an item. Resource guarding can occur with food, a toy, a sleeping place, the owner, or any possession the animal values. Guarding of edible items is also commonly referred to as "food guarding." See this [link](#). See this [article](#).

**Reward Marker:** A signal to an animal that a reward is forthcoming, such as a clicker, verbal marker (e.g., "yes!"), or a hand signal, like a thumbs-up. These indicate that the animal displayed the desired behavior. May also be referred to as a "bridge". See also *Clicker Training*.

**Self-Reinforcing/Automatic Reinforcement:** Behaviors that are inherently pleasurable and provide satisfaction or a reward; therefore, they are reinforced through continued practice of the behavior itself—for example, the act of chewing in dogs.

**Shaping (behavior):** Behavior modification technique using a series of gradual and distinct steps for reinforcement of behaviors that produce progressively closer approximations of the desired behavior. See this [video](#).

**Shut Down:** An informal term often used to describe when an animal is so stressed or anxious that they become unresponsive to their environment, behavior requests, and/or cues. See also *Learned Helplessness*; *Overstimulation*; *Pancake*.

**Slow Blink:** Most relevant for cats, slow blinks are given when an animal is looking into the eyes of another person or animal, indicating friendliness or a non-threatening intent. See [video](#).

**Soft Eye:** When an animal's eye is relaxed and responding normally to light. The rest of the animal's body language is often relaxed, with no tension in the facial muscles or body.

**Spraying (Urine):** Cat communication using urine to convey information; their version of saying "I was here." May be a sign the cat is stressed about something. A cat who is spraying urine typically deposits a small amount of urine on vertical surfaces rather than emptying their full bladder. See this [link](#). See also *Marking (Urine)*.

**[Stereotypy \(Stereotypic Behavior\):](#)** Repetitious, relatively unvaried actions that have no obvious purpose or function, such as vocalizations, movements, or other behavior. Usually derived from normal maintenance behavior such as stalking, chasing, or grooming. These behaviors are abnormal because they interfere with the animal's normal functioning. May be indicative of an underlying clinical condition (medical or behavioral). See also *Repetitive Behavior*; *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*.

**Stimulus:** An event, object, or change in the environment that results in a response from an animal.

**Stimulus, Conditioned:** A previously neutral stimulus results in a specific behavioral response due to pairing with an unconditioned stimulus. See this [link](#). See also *Unconditioned Stimulus*.

**Stimulus, Unconditioned:** A stimulus that leads to an untrained and automatic response (e.g., food is an unconditioned stimulus that causes a dog to salivate). See also *Conditioned Stimulus*. See this [link](#).

**Stress:** A state of mental or emotional strain or tension. Mild stress can be beneficial, helping animals learn to cope with negative experiences. Severe or prolonged stress results in impaired welfare.

**Strike:** When a cat swats at a target (generally a person or another animal) with their paw. The movement is usually quick and forceful, with or without claws extended. This can be part of a defensive or offensive aggressive display. It is meant to create distance from the target stimulus.

**Submissive Body Language:** This term is often used to describe an animal's attempts to communicate to another animal of the same species that they are not a threat, in an attempt to avoid conflict. Behaviors may include lowering and curving the body, ears back, rolling onto the side or back, and tail tucked. These behaviors are dependent on the situation and are not a personality trait. See also *Appeasement/Appeasement Gesture, Dominant/Dominance*.

**Submissive Grin/Smile:** Occurs when an animal is trying to communicate that they are not a threat (i.e., *appeasement behavior*). The dog appears to be smiling/showing their front teeth. Often combined with other appeasement gestures to reduce tension or conflict, and is sometimes part of a dog's greeting behavior. Over time, many dogs learn to display this behavior because it's reinforced/rewarded, and it's no longer an appeasement behavior. This behavior is often misunderstood and mistaken for aggression. See this [video](#). See also *Submissive Body Language; Appeasement/Appeasement Gesture*.

**Tail Carriage:** The way an animal carries their tail. The phrase "tail carriage" may be used to describe specific body language patterns/positions of the tail that may be used to infer the pet's emotional state. See this [link](#) and this [video](#).

**Tail Flick:** When a cat quickly flips their tail side to side. This behavior is associated with increasing levels of agitation and may suggest readiness for conflict.

**Tame:** The process of getting an animal used to the presence of humans and/or human contact. Tame animals may approach humans and/or may not run away from humans, but they may not be friendly. Wild animals can be tame without being domesticated. See also *Domestication; Feral*.

**Teeth Chattering:** A behavior associated with emotional arousal, and occurs due to excitement, fear, anxiety, stress, or frustration. Non-behavioral reasons for teeth chattering include pain and response to cold. See this [article](#).

**Threshold:** The lowest level at which a stimulus will elicit a response in an animal. An animal that is above threshold reacts (e.g., excitement, aggressive behavior) to a stimulus. An animal that is below threshold responds calmly to a stimulus. See this [article](#).

**Time-Out (Exclusionary):** The temporary removal of an animal from an environment as an immediate consequence of an unwanted behavior, aiming to eliminate the possibility of the animal being accidentally rewarded/reinforced by the environment when exhibiting an unwanted behavior. For example, a dog that behaves aggressively toward a human or another animal is put into another room of the house. See also *Punishment, Negative*.

**Time-Out (Non-Exclusionary):** The temporary removal of an object from an animal in an attempt to decrease an unwanted behavior, where the rewarding/reinforcing aspects of an environment



are taken away from the animal as an immediate consequence of an unwanted behavior, without the animal needing to leave the environment entirely. For example, a trainer stops interacting with an animal (pauses training) when the animal displays unwanted behavior. See also *Punishment, Negative*.

**Trainer:** A person who teaches animals how to perform behaviors in response to cues and teaches people how to train animals. Some trainers are credentialed through a reputable certifying organization (e.g., [CCPDT](#), [KPA](#), [CTC](#)), which improves client confidence in the trainer's skills and background. There is currently no regulatory body for all trainers; therefore, practitioners may refer to themselves as trainers without proving their knowledge and skills. See this [article](#). See also *Animal Behaviorist; Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist; Behaviorist; Behavior Consultant; Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist; Trainer; Veterinary Behaviorist*.

**Training:** Teaching animals and/or coaching people how to teach animals to perform behaviors like "sit", "down," or "stay". Training might improve a dog or cat's day-to-day behavior, but can also be a sport and form of enrichment (e.g., agility or nosework). Training does not necessarily seek to actively change an animal's emotional response to a specific stimulus, like behavior modification. Find a [trainer](#) or [behavior consultant](#). See also *Behavior Modification*.

**Trigger:** An event or situation that causes an undesirable emotional response (e.g., stress, fear, anxiety) from an animal. For example, when a dog is reactive to other dogs, triggers might include the sound of the other dog's collar, seeing the dog, etc.

**Trigger Stacking:** The combination of multiple stressful agents or events in a relatively short period of time, leading to an exaggerated reaction to a stimulus. See this [article](#). See also *Trigger; Threshold*.

**Touch Sensitivity:** A term used to describe an animal that is uncomfortable with the sensation of being touched by people or things. Animals who are sensitive to touch may be uncomfortable wearing items such as harnesses or sweaters, or having specific body parts touched, such as ears and paws. See also *Handling Sensitivity*.

**Undersocialized:** An animal that has had no or limited interactions with people, other animals, environments, noises, and other experiences during critical periods of their development. This may result in fear, stress, or anxiety and an inability to adapt to certain environments and interactions. See this [article](#). See also *Unsocial (anti-social); Tame, Domestication, Feral*.

**Unsocial (anti-social):** An informal term to describe a general reluctance to interact with or aversion to humans or other animals due to a lack of experience, previous negative experience, and/or genetics. An unsocial animal might seek to avoid or might demonstrate fearful, anxious, or aggressive behaviors. See this [article](#). See also *Undersocialized; Tame, Domestication, Feral*.

**Veterinary Behaviorist:** A veterinarian who has completed a two to three-year specialty training program in animal behavior, which includes coursework, clinical case management, teaching, and research, and has passed a board certification examination. See also *Animal Behaviorist*; *Associate Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Behavior Consultant*; *Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist*; *Trainer*.

**Whale Eye:** Occurs when the white areas of a dog's eyes (sclera) are increasingly visible, often appearing in a half-moon shape, usually at the inner or outer side of the eye, but sometimes around the entire iris. The dog may avert their head slightly, eyes fixated on an object, another animal, or a person. This is typically a warning signal of fear, anxiety, or distress, and if ignored, could escalate to growling, snapping, and biting. See this [link](#).