

FOSTER & ADOPTER GUIDE

FOR **SURVIVORS OF ANIMAL TESTING**
& OTHER FORMS OF CRUELTY

BEAGLE 
FREEDOM PROJECT



WELCOME!

Thank you for choosing to foster or adopt a survivor of animal testing or another form of cruelty. Welcoming such an animal into your life is a deeply meaningful experience—one that is transformative for both you and the animal you've so generously opened your heart and home to!

The road ahead will likely present challenges, and the process of rehabilitating a survivor is uniquely complex—but it is also incredibly rewarding! With patience, dedication, and compassion, you will help your new fostered or adopted companion heal, thrive, and become the joyful animal they were always meant to be.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMPANION

Before being rescued, survivors of cruelty — particularly survivors of animal testing — were often deprived of the opportunity to develop normal behaviors, coping skills, and natural instincts due to the severe trauma, isolation, and deprivation they endured. As a result, these animals have often:

- Lived in cages for most or all of their lives
- Experienced little or no socialization
- Never experienced the outdoors
- Never seen the sun
- Never walked on grass, carpet, stairs, or tile
- Never worn a leash or harness
- Never been in a car
- Never been handled with care or kindness
- Never experienced toys, beds, or normal home life

Many of your new companion's behaviors that may seem unusual are actually normal responses to trauma and survival. Please be prepared to offer your new companion an abundance of patience, compassion, and love!





WHAT TO EXPECT

Patience is essential when fostering or adopting a survivor of animal testing or another form of cruelty. Life as a “normal” dog will feel completely unfamiliar to your new companion, and **they’ll rely on you heavily for support** as they acclimate to the world around them!

YOUR COMPANION MAY INITIALLY BE FEARFUL OF:

Human touch	Leashes & collars	Confinement
Eye contact	Sudden movement	Loud sounds
New people	Bright lights	Hallways
New animals	Household noises	Closed doors
New environments	Car rides	The outdoors
Flooring changes	Taking a bath	Open spaces

With time, **most survivors of cruelty overcome their initial fears** and blossom into confident and care-free companions!

PREPARING YOUR HOME

Before bringing your new companion home, ensure your space is safe by:

- **Securing toxic substances and medications** behind a locked door or cabinet
- **Removing known choking hazards**
- **Picking up potential hazards** such as cords, food that is unsafe for dogs, and small objects
- **Blocking potentially dangerous areas** with tall dog/baby gates
- Creating a quiet, calm environment

It may sound unconventional, but **crouching down onto your knees so you can view your home from a dog's perspective can help** identify potential dangers that should be addressed or removed!



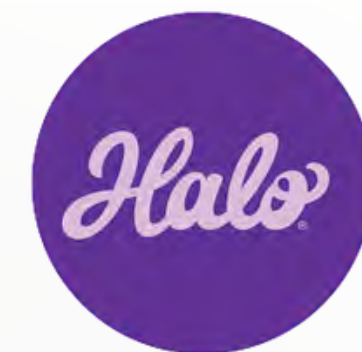
ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES

- **Secure Y-shaped harness**
- **Martingale collar** (use with care; these are a choking hazard and must be removed as SOON as no longer actively attached to a leash!)
- **Standard leash**
- **GPS tracking collar/device** (cruelty survivors are major flight risks!)
- **Rubber or plastic non-skid food & water bowls** (if bowls slide or clink together your companion could get frightened)
- **Potty pads** (ensure your companion does not try to ingest!)
- **Baby/dog gates** (to keep your companion safe & secure!)
- **Bedding** (some cruelty survivors may try to ingest soft/fluffy beds or blankets, so monitor use!)
- **Enrichment items** (edible chew sticks or kong toys filled with frozen peanut butter are ideal, as other toys can be harmful if ingested! More on enrichment soon!)
- **Wet & dry cruelty-free food** (more on this in the next slide!)
- **Cruelty-free cleaning supplies** (potty accidents are likely to happen! Having a supply of cruelty-free cleaning sprays and deodorizers will help with clean up!)
- **Boiled chicken, plain canned pumpkin (NOT pumpkin pie filling!) & steamed white rice** (these foods help with digestive issues caused by GI upset while adjusting to a new diet or stress!)

CRUELTY-FREE FOOD & TREATS

Did you know that many major brands develop dog foods & treats through animal testing studies that severely harm or kill the dogs being used for research? If possible, **please provide your new companion with cruelty-free dog food & treats to help break this cycle of abuse.** Please note that a cruelty-free label simply means that a product was NOT developed through animal testing; it does not mean that a product is vegan. **To make cruelty-free shopping easy, you can download BFP's free app, Cruelty Cutter!**

Some dog food & treat brands that we love include:





THE HOME BASE

There are many aspects of everyday household life that may feel overwhelming to your new companion at first. To help ease their transition, it's important to **introduce them to your home gradually**. Begin by giving them access to just one quiet area of your home where they can safely begin building confidence. This space can be considered your new companion's **“home base.”**

Good home base options include:

- **Guest bedroom**
- **Den**
- **Spacious bathroom**
- **Partitioned section of a room**
- **NOT A CRATE: cruelty survivors who have previously been confined may experience PTSD when crated and begin to behaviorally regress.**

It is highly recommended to use a baby gate or dog gate as a partition between your companion's home base and the rest of your home. Using a gate instead of closing a door can help your companion feel safer (as they can still see or hear you from behind a gate) and may prevent panic behaviors or attempts to scratch or damage the door.

HOME BASE SETUP

When unsupervised, your companion should remain in their home base where they can feel safe, secure, and relaxed — which is why it's so important to make this space as calm, comfortable, and inviting as possible.

Your companion's home base should include:

- **A comfortable bed** (make sure that your companion does not try to chew/eat/ingest their bed! Animals who have never had soft beds or blankets may sometimes try to ingest them)
- **Water** (in a rubber/plastic non-skid bowl)
- **Food** (cruelty-free & in a rubber/plastic non-skid bowl)
- **Enrichment items** (edible or hard-to-chew are best- reference supplies list and always monitor use! Animals who have never had toys before may try to eat inedible items!)
- **A safe potty area** (expect accidents! Setting out potty pads or turf can help with clean up; just make sure that your companion does not try to ingest these items!)
- **Low lighting and minimal noise**



THE DECOMPRESSION PERIOD

A decompression period is your companion's initial adjustment phase to life in your home, during which they are given time, space, and a calm environment to safely recover from trauma and begin healing. Even dogs that appear outwardly confident benefit greatly from a proper decompression period, as stress responses are not always immediately visible.

A successful decompression period should include:

- **Calm routines**
- **Predictable schedules**
- **Minimal visitors**
- **Limited stimulation**
- **Gentle introductions to new experiences**
- **Plenty of rest and quiet time**

A decompression period should ideally last approximately 2-3 weeks, though some companions may require additional time depending on their individual needs.



DURING DECOMPRESSION

Avoid overwhelming your companion during their 2-3 week decompression period. **Even if your companion seems well-adjusted, the security that a proper decompression period provides will set them up for success!**

During decompression:

- Facilitate **mealtimes in the home base** (away from resident animals!)
- **Avoid outings to any public places** (animal supply stores, dog parks, friend's homes, etc.)
- **Limit visitors** (keep their interactions to core members of your household)
- **Keep introductions to your resident animals calm and gradual** (more on this later!)
- Expect that **your companion will be a flight risk!**

There is no harm in proceeding slowly regarding your new companion's exposure to their new life, while ***moving too quickly can increase fear and stress.***



IMMEDIATELY UPON ENTERING YOUR CARE...

Immediately upon entering your care, your new companion may experience anxiety, *even if they appear happy and calm. This could present as:*

Refusing food — To help avoid digestive upset and ease the transition into a new environment, initially feed your companion a mixture of their previous diet and their new diet, gradually acclimating them to unfamiliar foods over time. **Refusing food may be normal for the first 24-48 hours.**

If this continues beyond 24 hours, ensure that you are offering both wet and dry food, using soft non-skid bowls, and providing meals within your companion's calm and quiet home base area. Offering high-value treats by hand may also help encourage eating and build trust.

Refusing water — **this may be normal for up to 24 hours.** If this continues beyond 24 hours, try mixing a dog-safe broth in with the water.

Refusing to potty — **not peeing may be normal for up to 24 hours.**

Not pooping may be normal for up to 48 hours. To combat this, make sure that your companion has plenty of quiet, alone time. Many nervous dogs may not potty unless they are alone.





POTTY TRAINING TIPS

Most cruelty survivors, especially animal testing survivors, have **never learned normal potty habits, so accidents are both normal and expected as your companion acclimates.**

Your companion may initially:

- Potty indoors
- Prefer hard surfaces over grass
- Feel uncomfortable eliminating while leashed
- Need very frequent bathroom breaks

To help set your companion up for success:

- Provide frequent bathroom breaks
- Maintain a consistent potty schedule
- Reward outdoor elimination with praise or treats
- Use turf or potty pads indoors initially if needed
- Supervise closely for 'need-to-go- indicators

Never punish accidents. Punishment increases fear, damages trust, and can worsen potty-training challenges by making your companion permanently afraid to eliminate in your presence.



FEARFUL DOG TIPS

It is incredibly likely that your new companion will feel fearful or anxious upon entering your care, *even if they seem outwardly confident*. **Fearful dogs are constantly assessing whether something feels safe or unsafe.**

Human behaviors that may feel threatening include:

- **Direct eye contact**
- **Leaning over**
- **Sudden movement**
- **Raised voices**
- **Frontal approaches**
- **Unexpected touch**

Learning how to interact gently can dramatically help your companion feel safer. **Allow your companion to approach you at their own pace**, and always respect signs that they may need more space or time to feel comfortable.

FEAR IS NOT A CHOICE: UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Survivors of cruelty often experienced severe trauma, chronic stress, isolation, and a lack of normal socialization during critical developmental periods. As a result, their brains and bodies learned to remain in a constant state of fear, vigilance, or survival. **Trauma and deprivation can impact: brain chemistry, stress responses, learning ability, emotional regulation, confidence and coping skills, perception of what is safe or unsafe.**

Because of this, your companion may react fearfully to seemingly ordinary experiences such as household noises, eye contact, unfamiliar people, certain clothing, touch, doorways, or changes in flooring.

These reactions are not stubbornness or “bad behavior” — they are automatic survival responses rooted in past experiences.

Healing takes patience, consistency, compassion, and positive experiences repeated over time. With safety, understanding, and gentle guidance, many survivors are able to build confidence, learn coping skills, and begin enjoying life as a beloved companion animal.



CANINE PTSD

Many cruelty survivors Canine Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) as a result of prolonged trauma, confinement, isolation, and experimentation. Trauma responses can range from mild to severe and may appear immediately or emerge gradually over time.

Symptoms may include:

- **Severe fear responses**
- **Hypervigilance or constant alertness**
- **Flashbacks or panic episodes**
- **Night terrors**
- **Startle responses**
- **Trembling, hiding, or freezing**

These behaviors are trauma responses — not “bad behavior.” With patience, routine, and supportive care, many dogs improve significantly over time.





NIGHT TERRORS

Animal testing survivors in particular may experience **severe nightmares or night terrors** while sleeping. During these episodes, dogs may bark, scream, growl, thrash, vocalize, or appear panicked while still asleep.

If this occurs:

- **Do NOT abruptly touch or grab the dog**
- Turn on lights if the room is dark
- Speak softly from a distance
- Wake them gradually and gently
- Allow them time to reorient afterward

Sudden physical contact can **trigger defensive reactions**, as many survivors were abruptly handled during traumatic experiences in the past.

FLASHBACKS AND PANIC EPISODES

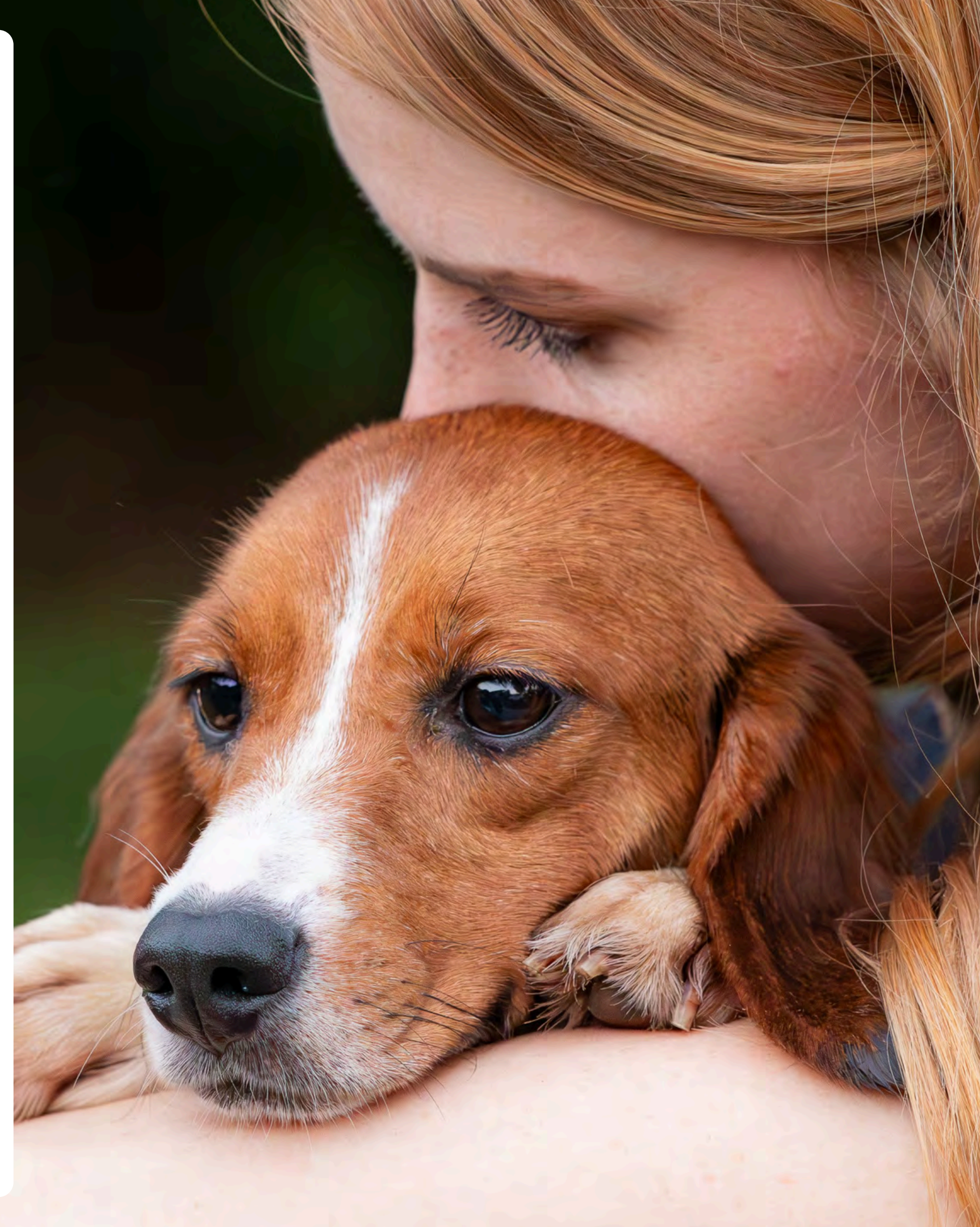
Certain sounds, smells, objects, environments, or experiences may trigger traumatic memories and cause your companion to relive past fear. These episodes can be frightening for both you and your companion, but it is **important to remain calm**.

Signs may include:

- Trembling or shaking
- Freezing or shutting down
- Screaming or vocalizing
- Hiding or attempting to flee
- Excessive drooling or panting
- Urinating or defecating during panic

During an episode:

- Stay calm and avoid panicking yourself
- Give your companion space
- Avoid forcing interaction or restraint
- Allow recovery time in a quiet, safe environment afterwards.



TRIGGER STACKING

Trigger stacking occurs when multiple stressful experiences happen close together, overwhelming your companion's ability to cope. Even small stressors can accumulate and intensify fear responses.

For example, a dog may already feel stressed by:

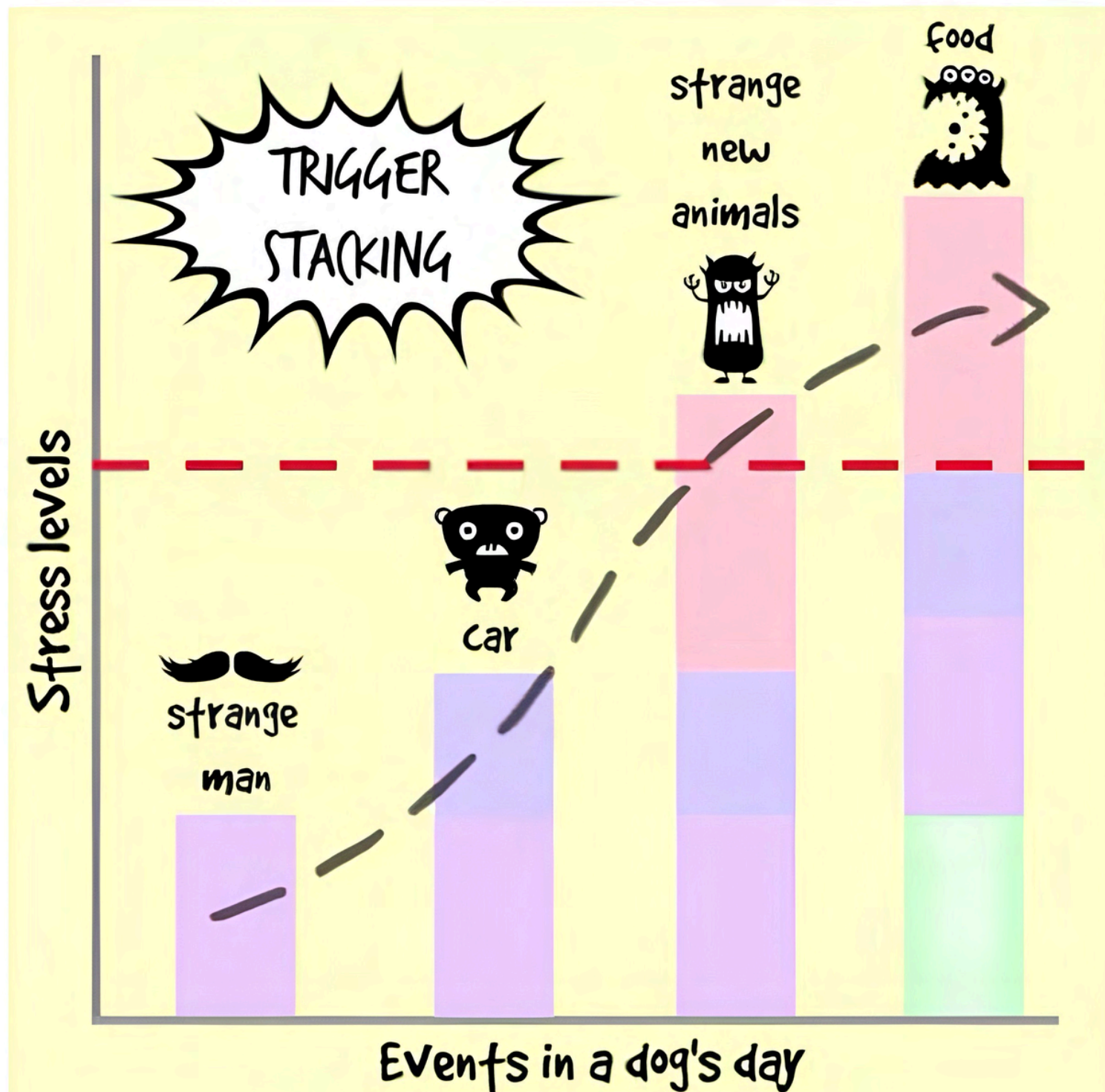
- Loud noises
- Visitors
- Outdoor walks
- New environments
- Separation from a trusted person

When several stressors occur together, your companion may become overwhelmed and display:

- Panic
- Reactivity
- Shutdown behaviors
- Defensive responses
- Increased fear or anxiety



PREVENTING TRIGGER STACKING



Bonglo Freedom Project does not own this image.

You can **help prevent overwhelm** by learning your companion's triggers and moving slowly with new experiences.

Helpful strategies include:

- Identifying and avoiding known triggers when possible
- Increasing distance from stressful situations
- Giving your companion escape routes and space
- Avoiding crowded or overstimulating environments
- Using treats and positive associations during stressful moments
- Introducing new experiences gradually, one at a time

Never “flood” a fearful dog with overwhelming exposure in an attempt to force them to adjust more quickly.

COUNTERCONDITIONING & DESENSITIZATION

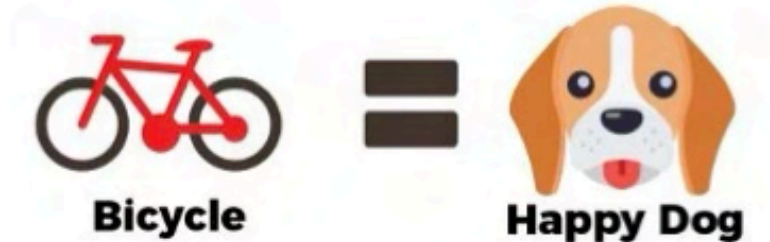
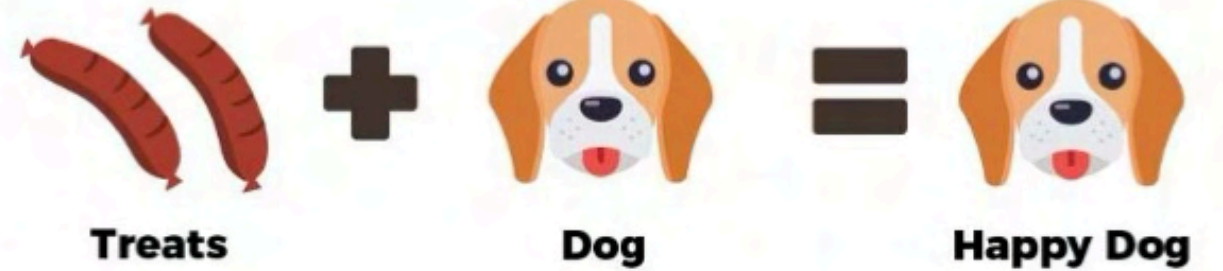
Counterconditioning and desensitization are gentle training techniques that help fearful dogs build positive associations with situations, environments, sounds, or experiences they may perceive as scary. One of the most effective ways to help your companion feel safe is by pairing potentially stressful experiences with high-value food rewards. Helpful tips include:

- **Identify at least 5 high-value foods your companion loves**
- **Reserve the most exciting treats for stressful or unfamiliar situations**
- **Pair new experiences with treats, praise, or other positive rewards**
- **Move slowly and avoid overwhelming your companion**
- **Increase distance from a trigger if your companion becomes too fearful**

If your companion refuses even a high-value treat during a stressful situation, this is often a sign that they are overwhelmed and need either:

- **An even more exciting reward, or**
- **More distance and space from the trigger**

With patience, repetition, and positive experiences over time, many formerly frightening situations can become comfortable and manageable for your companion



SEPARATION & ISOLATION ANXIETY

Many cruelty survivors form extremely strong attachments to one trusted person and may experience distress when separated or left alone.

Signs of this may include:

- Vocalizing or barking excessively
- Panic behaviors
- Destructive behavior
- Pacing or inability to settle

It is incredibly important to note that these behaviors are rooted in fear and emotional distress — not disobedience. You can help your companion by maintaining predictable routines, avoiding sudden long absences, providing safe enrichment activities during alone time, and gradually helping them build confidence and independence in small increments. Many survivors of cruelty experience some level of separation or isolation anxiety initially, but as they settle into their new environment, build trust, and gain confidence, these behaviors often improve significantly over time.



INTRODUCING NEW PEOPLE

Many survivors of cruelty are **fearful of unfamiliar people and may need significant time** to feel safe around strangers.

Allow your companion to observe and approach new people at their own pace.

Helpful introduction strategies include:

- **Allowing distance and choice**
- **Avoiding direct eye contact**
- **Speaking softly and moving slowly**
- **Allowing the dog to approach voluntarily**
- **Pairing introductions with treats or praise**

Never force interaction or physical contact. Watch carefully for signs of stress such as freezing, hiding, growling, panting, avoiding eye contact, or refusing treats.



INTRODUCING OTHER ANIMALS

Introductions to other animals should **always be calm, gradual, and closely supervised**. Initial interactions are often most successful in neutral environments with minimal stimulation.

Helpful introduction strategies include:

- Using neutral outdoor spaces when possible
- Keeping leashes loose and relaxed
- Allowing dogs to observe each other naturally
- Supervising all interactions closely
- Separating animals when unsupervised
- Removing toys, treats, and food initially to prevent tension
- Successful introductions are gradual and may take days or weeks depending on the individual animals involved.





MULTI-DOG HOUSEHOLDS

Many dogs who eventually become the best of friends begin their relationship with some degree of uncertainty, and it is our responsibility to support those early interactions in a healthy, safe, and sustainable way.

Resource guarding is a normal canine behavior in which a dog attempts to protect something they find valuable, such as food, treats, toys, beds, spaces, or even people. These behaviors may range from freezing and stiffening to growling, snarling, lunging, or snapping — **all of which are a dog's way of communicating discomfort and asking for space.**

To help prevent conflict in multi-dog households:

- Feed dogs separately using baby gates (your new companion should have mealtime in their home base)
- Avoid free-feeding (leaving dog food out and about in the home)
- Remove toys and treats during initial introductions
- Supervise interactions closely
- Reintroduce resources gradually after multiple successful interactions
- Give all dogs space; your new companion can initially sleep and decompress in their home base to enjoy their own space and relaxation time



SAFETY

Cruelty survivors are often **significant flight risks** due to fear and unfamiliarity with the outside world. Even calm dogs may panic unexpectedly if startled. Always use:

- A secure, properly fitted Y-shaped harness
- A properly fitted collar
- **A martingale collar (used only when actively leashed as these are choking hazards!)**
- A sturdy leash
- GPS trackers or AirTags
- Identification tags and microchips

Never assume your companion cannot escape your environment. Remaining cautious and prepared is one of the best ways to keep your companion safe. Nervous animals love to attempt to escape through open doors, windows, and often attempt to wriggle out of their harness or collar.

WALKS AND THE OUTDOORS

Animal testing survivors, and the majority of cruelty survivors, **have never walked on a leash or explored the outside world before being rescued.** Outdoor environment, especially while leashed, can initially feel incredibly overwhelming and frightening for your companion, and they may:

- Freeze or refuse to move
- Panic outdoors
- Attempt to flee
- Feel frightened by sounds, movement, or unfamiliar surfaces
- Initially refuse to potty while on leash

Begin slowly by practicing walks indoors or within enclosed outdoor spaces first. Keep walks short, low-pressure, and rewarding, while allowing your companion to move at their own pace.



Two beagles are running in a grassy area next to a green fence. The dog in the foreground is running towards the right, with its mouth open and tongue out. The dog behind it is also running towards the right, looking back over its shoulder. The background is a blurred green fence and foliage.

IF YOUR COMPANION ESCAPES

If your companion escapes your home or manages to run away from you during a walk dogs often flee when frightened, and chasing them can increase panic and drive them farther away. If your companion escapes:

- Do NOT chase after them; this may make them run faster
- Move slowly and avoid sudden movements
- Use calm voices and high-value treats to lure them back to you
- If your companion is lost, look for them at nearby shelters and vet offices
- If your companion is lost, consider contacting a canine recovery team immediately

Preparedness is critical. **Always ensure your companion is wearing proper identification and GPS tracking equipment.** Please note that a microchip is NOT a tracking device, it simply an under-the-skin ID tag.

ENRICHMENT HELPS HEALING

Enrichment activities provide mental stimulation, emotional comfort, and opportunities for natural behaviors, all of which help fearful dogs build confidence and reduce stress.

Benefits of enrichment may include reduced anxiety and boredom, increased confidence, improved relaxation and emotional regulation, encouragement of healthy natural behaviors, improved learning and engagement.

Examples include:

- Snuffle mats (with treats inside)
- Frozen Kongs (with peanutbutter)
- Puzzle toys (with treats inside)
- Gentle play (with various toys)
- Scent work and food searches

Always supervise enrichment activities while your companion learns how to safely interact with new items.



CAR TRAVEL

Many laboratory survivors associate cars with traumatic experiences such as transport to a research facility or, like the majority of cruelty survivors, they have never been inside of a car before. As a result, car rides may initially cause significant stress or nausea.

Signs of stress may include:

- Vomiting
- Excessive drooling
- Trembling or shaking
- Panic or vocalization

Short, calm, positive trips paired with treats or enrichment can help improve comfort over time. Some dogs may also benefit from anti-nausea medication recommended by a veterinarian, ginger cookies for dogs, or licking a frozen kong to curb nausea.



A BEAUTIFUL NEW BEGINNING

In the coming days, weeks, and months, your new companion will begin to heal, grow in confidence, and showcase their true personality — all because of the love, patience, and care you provide along the way.

If you ever have any questions about ways to further support your new companion, please do not hesitate to reach out for guidance, tips, and the extended version of [Beagle Freedom Project's Foster & Adopter Guide for Survivors of Animal Testing & Other Forms of Cruelty](#).

Thank you again for your compassion for some of the world's most vulnerable animals. By fostering or adopting, you are truly changing a life!

