



## Fear Free Insights for You and Your Pet!

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The Standard of  
Veterinary Excellence



# Fear Free Insights for You and Your Pet



Animal health is complex and varied; every year, new data emerges on how to offer our patients the best care. In veterinary medicine, we often use multiple methods to treat or alleviate a problem, such as combining prescriptions, supplements, and diets to provide excellent solutions. Similarly, both veterinary and home care combined are vital to the longevity of our pets' lives.

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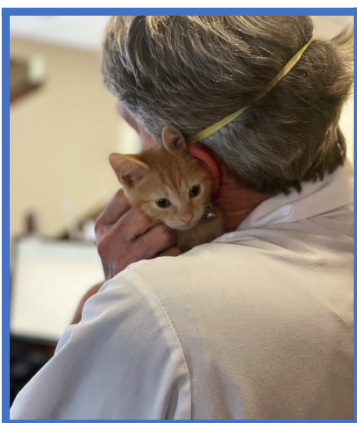
*Tending to their emotional and mental health and physical needs is key to determining the quality of their life.*

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In this booklet, we will provide insight on how to help your dog or cat live their best Fear Free life by discussing sources of anxiety and ways to prevent and relieve them at home and at the vet!

**As a Fear Free Certified Practice<sup>®</sup>, Pet Care Veterinary Hospital is proud to share resources from our training.**

We encourage you to check out [www.fearfreehappyhomes.com](http://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com) for additional content.



## Bringing Your New Dog Home and the Socialization Stage

You have just adopted or purchased a puppy, congratulations! At 8-10 weeks old, they exhibit normal puppy behaviors such as exploring, playing, sniffing, mouthing, and becoming vocal. Ensure your puppy is allowed to display these behaviors, and do not leave them alone for extended periods. Puppies are sponges at this age and are watching you closely as they learn about their new family and surroundings.

Training using positive reinforcement rather than punishment is the best approach to raising a well-behaved dog and forming a solid bond. An example of positive reinforcement is ignoring an undesired behavior and offering a distraction and praise for appropriate behaviors.

Dogs have multiple life stages, with the socialization stage starting at 3-4 weeks and extending through 12-14 weeks. Puppies will be exploring (they naturally use their noses and mouths for this) their surroundings and learning smells, sounds, and normal dog behaviors during this stage. Figuring out how to be a doggo is best learned by playing with other dogs. (Unfortunately, puppies who are not fully vaccinated are susceptible to many illnesses, some extremely serious. You should not take puppies to public areas with unknown dogs, or environments. )

Therefore, we must come up with alternative stimulation to utilize this crucial learning period without exposing them to the risk of infection. Enrichment toys, snuffle mats, lick mats, trick toys, and private play time with fully vaccinated dogs in contained and monitored areas are all ways to achieve this. Also, teaching your pet tricks allows them to learn from you and strengthens your bond. As you train, use praise often and gentle, positive reinforcement correction techniques. If you hire a trainer, do careful research to ensure they do not use force or negative punishment to get desired behaviors.



## Training and Separation Anxiety

Consistency is key with any training. In the case of multiple people in a household, it is a group effort to maintain the schedule and routine for the puppy. The younger the puppy is, the more frequently they will need to be taken outside to eliminate. Give lots of praise (food treats, and words) for going in the yard and not having accidents at home. Crate time should be limited, with the longest period being overnight.

Housetraining can be challenging, depending on the breed of puppy and the age you bring them home. Any time your puppy has an accident in the home, ignore it and clean up the mess with minimal fuss. Then bring the pet outside, encourage them to eliminate, and give them a treat when they do. Be attentive to any signals they may be giving you to indicate their need, such as whimpering, pacing, hovering by the door, etc. Some families have a doggy door or a bell on the knob that the puppy can jostle to indicate needing to go out. A good routine includes taking your puppy out 20 minutes after eating or drinking and as many times during the day as their age in weeks +1. For example, you should take out a 10-week-old puppy about 11 times daily.

Their crate should allow enough space for your puppy to get up, turn around, and lie fully stretched out. There must be room for a water bowl and toys, with bedding and special treats hidden for them to find as entertainment. When your puppy is older and able to stay in for a few hours, consider a frozen kong toy with peanut butter, baby food, or squeeze cheese to keep them busy while you are gone. Playing classical and calming music has been shown to decrease anxiety and provides a distraction. The crate should be introduced as your pet's safe space, and if they go in on their own, do not bother them.

Training your dog to be okay with your absence will decrease separation anxiety as they grow older. Having special treats only for when you are not home, and training periods of gradual desensitization can help your puppy adjust slowly and happily. When you are home, take your keys and shoes and set them out as if you were to leave. Give the puppy a treat and sit down for some snuggle/playtime. Exercising your dog before long periods in the crate increases the chance that they will sleep during their time alone. Use positive reinforcement to teach them their crate is their safe place. Give praise and treats whenever they go in the crate on their own. The more this happens, the less anxiety they have when they are required to be kenneled. Despite best efforts, dogs may develop severe kennel anxiety in some cases—prescription drugs, supplements, and pheromones may be needed to help them adjust.



**Fear Free:** Because every pet *deserves* a life without **fear, anxiety, and stress**

**FEAR FREE  
CERTIFIED**  
Professional

# FEAR FREE PUPPY SOCIALIZATION



## Making Exposure Positive

Use these bingo squares for ideas on how to socialize your puppy. Socialization and exposure are active processes that are most crucial from three to sixteen weeks of age but should continue well beyond this age range. However, it's important to realize that socialization is not simply about exposure—it's about making it fun and positive from the start.

Think of these experiences as a behavioral investment, like placing pennies in a piggy bank. When done properly, your investment will result in a friendly and outgoing dog. Positive, proactive socialization involves liberal use of food treats (or, for some dogs, interactive play with a toy/attention/petting) to help form positive associations.

Fun Visit at Veterinary Hospital	Have visitors to your home	Take your puppy to a friend's or relative's house	Meet at least 5 people using the 'Go-Say-Hi' protocol	See someone carrying something in hand, such as an umbrella
Play with a minimum of 3 food puzzle toys	Fun Visit at a Grooming Salon or with a Groomer	See children playing from a distance	See and/or meet a person in uniform	Hear construction sounds
Hear and/or see household appliances	See or hear a motorcycle or trolley	Go for a ride in a car	See at least 5 other animals from a distance (duck, geese, birds, squirrels, horses, cattle)	Hear and/or see lawn equipment
See or meet an adult dog who is healthy, friendly, and relaxed around puppies	Walk on 3 different safe and sturdy surfaces such as wood, gravel, sand, metal, concrete, rubber, etc	See and/or meet a person with mobility assistance (wheelchair, walker, crutches)	Hear and/or see a large truck, train, or bus from a distance	Explore at least 5 novel objects using the 'Check-It-Out' protocol
Walk, play, and/or swim in water	Be exposed to a recording of fireworks at a low and controlled volume	See and/or meet a cat who is friendly and relaxed around dogs	Hear children screaming and crying	Be exposed to the sound of wind, rain, and thunder



For more information, please visit [www.fearfreehappyhomes.com](http://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com)



## Nail Trim Challenges

Each dog is unique in their reaction to having their nails trimmed: Some dogs do just fine and enjoy the treats while they get their pedicure. Others exhibit obvious signs of anxiety and distress and need assistance to allow the procedure.

If you have a puppy, start playing with their feet from day one and give encouragement and praise every time they allow you to touch their paws without a negative response. Trim a nail or foot at a time, then give it a break or try again another day. Puppies have a limited attention span and may start to wiggle before you finish. If this happens, discontinue, and try again later. Leave the nail trimmers out, so they get used to them as everyday items in the home.

If you have a dog who has never been okay with nail trims, it is imperative not to force it. Some grooming facilities will do it for you, and you can maintain your bond with your pet. However, not all groomers practice Fear Free techniques, which may worsen the problem. So, consider having your pet come for a nail trim at your Fear Free vet. This process may take many tries and involve PVP- pre-visit pharmaceuticals such as Trazodone.

Please bring your pet in hungry, so we can give every treat available! If you have a special one from home, bring that to encourage and calm your pet. Trimmers can be loud, and pressure close to the nail quick is often terrifying for dogs. To alleviate anxiety, the staff will go slow, watch your pet's body language, and stop if your pet has high-stress levels. The veterinary professional may recommend medication for future visits if high FAS is a concern. In that case, it is in the best interest of you and your pet's experience. You should give these medications 1-2 hours before your arrival next time for the best results. Drugs are patient-dependent and may need to be adjusted on your veterinarian's recommendation.



## Other Potential Triggers

We have covered many of the more frequent causes of stress dogs can have, but here are a couple more possible challenges such as bathing, noise aversion, and traveling in the car.

Every dog will need baths on occasion, and some quite frequently. Baths can be scary due to instability and temperature or irritation. Ensure your bathtub floor has traction, and the water is a comfortable warm temperature. Lick mats can be secured to the tub wall via suction, and if peanut butter or squeeze cheese is spread on it, can provide distraction and encouragement for extended periods of time. If your dog is frightened of the tub, practice giving high value treats only in the tub without administering a bath several times in the days prior to bathing, then start with short baths over an area of the body that is least traumatic for your pet. Use a wet washcloth without any soap on the head to prevent irritation to your dogs' eyes and nose.

Depending on where you and your puppy live, sudden noises may be frequent and loud, not to mention unpredictable. Dogs have incredibly heightened senses- hearing, sight, smell- everything is far more impactful to them than us. When startled, redirect by gaining attention, offering a toy or treat when your pet is attentive to you, and then staying nearby to provide comfort. White noise machines or classical music playlists may provide a buffer and drown out novel environmental noises.

Lastly, car travel can be unnerving because of the novel noises and vibrations, the potential for motion sickness and inability to get comfortable or feel safe enough to settle. Limit water and food intake prior to departure to minimize nausea. Securely fasten your dog to a seatbelt in the back row (Avoid letting your dog sit Shotgun because airbags can cause significant damage in the event of a crash). Taking your dog or puppy on short, frequent drives when they are young can help desensitize them to the adventure and build confidence. Do not hesitate to advocate for your dog and call your veterinarian and ask for anti-anxiety and/or anti-nausea medication if needed!

## Interpreting Body Language, Anxiety, and Pain

Because dogs cannot speak, they communicate with us through their body language, actions (or inactions) and vocalizations. Through their cues to us, we can determine their levels of fear, anxiety, and stress, as well as pain. Canine body language can be subtle or obvious depending on the pet and situation.

-Signs that your dog is calm and comfortable: Ears relaxed and expressive, tail up, responding to commands, receiving treats willingly, and exhibiting play behavior.

-Signs of pain or anxiety: Panting or hypersalivating, ears pinned back, eyes wide and pupils dilated, tail tucked, hunched behavior, restlessness, or pacing, refusing treats, freezing, reacting with growling snarling, attempting to bite.

Whenever you bring your dog to us at Pet Care Veterinary Hospital, our top priority is to partner with you to give your dog the very best care, and to look out for their mental and emotional health as well as their physical health. Your team will communicate any signs of fear, anxiety, or stress they see in your

dog, and offer solutions to help in future. We also offer Happy and Victory visits with technicians to allow your dog to learn to trust us through snuggles and treats, and to celebrate all the progress they've made!

**Listed below are tool options you can use to keep your puppy mentally engaged and occupied. Please note, all pets should be monitored when new toys are introduced to ensure they do not pose a risk of ingestion or harm.**



Rubber Lick Mats: Many of these have suction on the back and are great for use during nail trims or baths.



Slow Feeder Puzzle Toys: Great for dogs who eat too fast or get bored quickly.



Snuffle Mats: another great option for dogs who eat too fast, especially hound or hunting breeds that love to scavenge and sniff. Monitor so they do not eat the fringe.



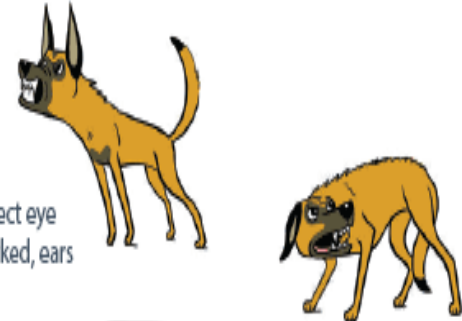
Kong Toy: especially useful when the pet will be left alone for long periods of time- can put treats in such as baby food or peanut butter and freeze overnight



# THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive Aggression - lunging forward, ears forward, tail up, hair may be up on the shoulders, rump, and tail, showing only the front teeth, lip pucker - lips pulled forward, tongue tight and thin, pupils possibly dilated or constricted.
- Defensive Aggression - hair may be up on the back and rump, dilated pupils, direct eye contact, showing all teeth including molars, body crouched and retreating, tail tucked, ears back.



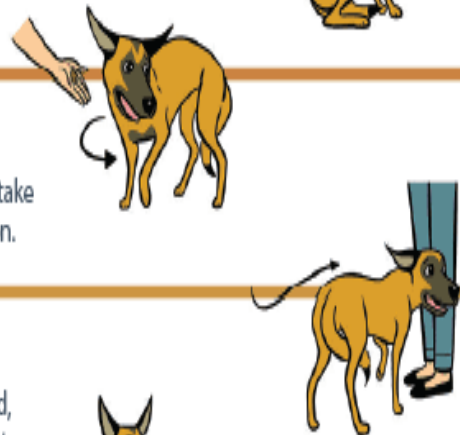
## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight - ears back, tail tucked, actively trying to escape - slinking away or running, mouth closed or excessive panting - tongue tight instead of loose out of mouth, showing whites of eyes, brow furrowed, pupils dilated.
- Freeze/Fret - tonic immobility, pupils dilated, increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tail tucked, body hunched.



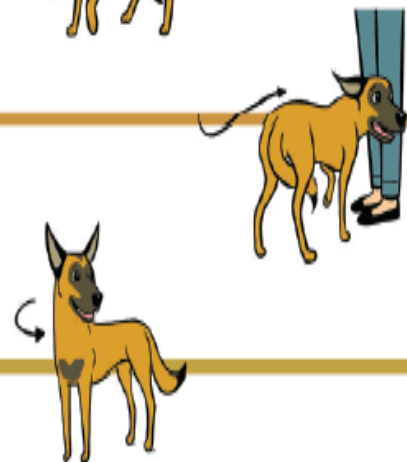
## YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 3)

- Similar to FAS 2 but turning head away, may refuse treats for brief moments or take treats roughly, may be hesitant to interact but not completely avoiding interaction.



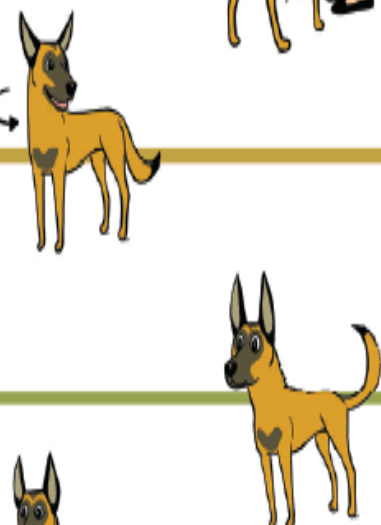
## YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2)

- Ears slightly back or to the side, tail down but not necessarily completely tucked, furrowed brow, slow movements or unable to settle, fidgeting, attention seeking to owner, panting with a tighter mouth, moderate pupil dilation.



## GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Tail up higher, looking directly, mouth closed, eyes more intense, more pupil dilation, brow tense, hair may be just slightly up on the back and tail, may be expectant and excited or highly aroused.



## GREEN: ALERT/EXCITED/ANXIOUS? (FAS 0-1)

- Looking directly but not intensely, tail up slightly, mouth open slightly but lips loose, ears perked forward, slight pupil dilation.



## **Treat Options for your dog:**

- Peanut butter**
- Whip Cream**
- Scrambled egg**
- Hotdog**
- Baby food**
- Goldfish crackers**
- Cheerios**
- Green Beans**
- Blueberries**
- Bananas (small amount)**
- Marshmallows**
- Watermelon**
- Pretzels**

## Welcoming Your New Kitty

Cats get made fun of a lot for being boring or grumpy, but in truth we all know they have strong personalities and can be quite expressive. Cats communicate in many ways, including body language, vocalizations, purring, and play. When you bring a new kitty home, remember it is all strange to them, and there will be many potential stressors.

If there is more than 1 pet in the house, the transition period can take anywhere between a few days to a couple weeks, depending on the household. Find an area of the home that the cat can have all to itself, with new toys, a couple litter boxes, safe spaces to snuggle and hide, and enough room to explore. Your kitty will start to learn the novel smells and begin bonding with you as you devote one on one time and engage in play. Allow the other pets to sniff under the door, as they get information on their new sibling, without being able to make physical contact. Gradually, as your pets adjust, you can slowly introduce them to each other while you monitor their interaction.

As you evaluate your cat's progress, watch for signs of anxiety, stress, and fear, such as vocalizations, clawing to get out or because of boredom, hiding for excessive amounts of time, not eating, or not using the litter box appropriately. Ensure they have lots of time to interact with you and offer a variety of food options and yummy treats as you play. (If your cat refuses treats and a variety of meal options, this may need veterinary intervention.) Windows allow a safe way for the kitty to stay curious and mentally engaged. Automatic water fountains provide white noise and entertainment, and Feliway/Feliway Multicat is a pheromone product for cats that transmit messages of safety and calm and can be used as needed or chronically.

## Behavioral Challenges

Cats can thrive in many different environments, but it is important they are able to express their innate behaviors wherever they are. After your cat has adjusted to their siblings and surroundings, ensure they have adequate access to litter boxes and scratch posts. The leading cause of pet surrender to shelters is for behavioral reasons, most of which are treatable. Though cats are amoral, they can feel fear and sadness and need time to trust you, so please ensure you can handle their needs and potential anxiety and prevent them from further surrenders.

Scratching is a normal and healthy behavior for a cat and should be permitted. Cats scratching on furniture or doorways can be frustrating, so when you see your cat scratching an inappropriate surface, redirect using a high value treat or toy and show your kitty their own scratching post.

Inappropriate urination is another common complaint and can be due to anxiety or physical medical issues and should require a veterinary visit for assessment. A good rule of thumb is to have as many litter boxes as you have cats +1, and to clean them daily. Some cats avoid the litter box simply because of a litter texture change, but it may be deeper than that. When you bring your cat in for his or her vet visit, discuss any changes to the environment, diet, or routine. Urinary tract infections present similarly, so your veterinary team will want to rule that out.

Travel to the vet (or anywhere else) can be stressful and requires planning. The carrier should be placed in the home somewhere in the open, with treats and blankets in it. Spraying Feliway in the inside will help calm your cat during travel. When your pet willingly goes into the carrier, ensure it is on a secure surface in the car. Hold the carrier firmly from the bottom, and elevate the carrier to a chair or bench, and cover with a towel. When you return home, allow your cat plenty of time to adjust and rest.

Note: Carriers that are plastic/firm, with openings from the top as well as the front provide the least stress and most stability for cats- and are easier to sanitize in case of soiling.

### Fear Free Feline Veterinary Visits

Veterinary visits have the potential for stress for owners and their pet(s). For example, a cat waiting in a lobby shared by dogs (after a ride in the car) and then surrounded by novel equipment such as stethoscopes or thermometers, being handled by multiple strangers for varying amounts of time- is not often a calming experience. Therefore, some cats go years without medical assessments until there is a problem and often have associated pain.

We aim to provide thorough medical assessments while monitoring patient anxiety levels and working hard to prevent fear. However, when a feline patient presents with high stress, this can falsely elevate blood work values and vital sign interpretation, making diagnostic imaging more challenging to obtain appropriate results. In this situation, your veterinary team will advocate for your pet to receive medication at the time of visit (if diagnostics are needed the same day) or for you to administer at home before their rescheduled visit.

Before Fear Free handling training, veterinary staff were taught to scruff cats or handle with thick gloves to get the job down without injury- but the truth is, scruffing cats has been debunked, and shown to increase their anxiety rather than comfort, and many employees would still suffer scratches or bites- we do not handle felines in that way at Fear Free Certified Practices. Towels are a great tool to help wrap kitties and all their paws to provide for venipuncture or physical exam without sedation- but we should only use this if your cat is doing well and just needs added support to be still. For venipuncture, we allow your cat to sit in a natural position and numb the area with topical lidocaine cream, so they do not feel the needle. During your visit, your team will make a priority list and plan with you to ensure every question is addressed while not exceeding your pets' precious "kitty minutes".



## Feline Enrichment

Depending on your area, allowing your cat time outdoors may not be feasible or safe. Cars, stray dogs, feral cats, wildlife, or weather can cause danger to your cat. They may pick up fleas, ticks, or heartworms with exposure. (This is why your pet needs prevention year-round). If you have a way to monitor your cat as it explores outside, that can provide excellent mental stimulation and allow them to express natural behaviors. Feline harnesses, netted strollers, translucent cat carrier backpacks, or “catios” can aid their enrichment while protecting them from unnecessary harm.

Other resources you can use to increase mental stimulation for your cat in the home include tall towers with many scratch posts and various toys\* for chasing and catching. Many youtube or streaming platforms have playlists with bird chirping recordings, white noise recordings, and classical music that alleviate stress during their time alone in the home. Window access for sunbathing and empty boxes are a cat’s favorite locations to nap their day away.

\*Use caution with string toys- when used, monitor your pet to ensure they do not ingest it



Collapsible fabric tunnels for hiding and foraging



Rechargeable flop fish- great for hunting and pouncing. Can add Catnip for additional fun.



Interactive ball tower toy



Water fountain for increased hydration and play. Clean frequently to prevent mildew buildup.

# FEAR FREE KITTEN SOCIALIZATION



## Making Exposure Positive

Use these bingo squares for ideas on how to socialize your kitten. Socialization and exposure are active processes that are most crucial from two to seven weeks of age but should be practiced well beyond this age range. However, it's important to realize that socialization is not simply about exposure-it's about making it fun and positive from the start.

Think of these experiences as a behavioral investment, like placing pennies in a piggy bank. When done properly, your investment will result in a friendly and outgoing cat. Positive, proactive socialization involves liberal use of food treats (or, for some kittens, interactive play with a toy/attention/petting) to help form positive associations.

Fun Visit at Veterinary Hospital (and grooming salon)	Have visitors to your home	Take your kitten to a friend's or relative's house for a kitten party	Strive for your kitten to meet at least one new person a day during the first 14 weeks	See someone carrying something in hand, such as an umbrella
Explore a minimum of 5 food puzzle toys	Teach your kitten how to play with you	See children playing from a distance	Pair brushing with getting treats	Introduce your kitten to a variety of sounds in a controlled manner
Allow your kitten to experience a minimum of 5 novel non-toxic and non-noxious scents	Discover your kitten's preference for a scratching post and reward her with a treat or a play for using it	Go for a ride in a car within a secured carrier	Acclimate your kitten to wearing a cat harness and leash	Acclimate your kitten to having a towel placed over her
See or meet an adult dog who is healthy, friendly, and relaxed around cats	Walk on 3 different safe and sturdy surfaces such as wood, gravel, sand, metal, concrete, rubber, etc	See and/or meet a person with mobility assistance (wheelchair, walker, crutches)	Acclimate your kitten to a multilevel cat cage	Allow your kitten to explore at least 5 novel objects at her own pace
Taste at least 5 different types of kitten food and treats (dry and canned varieties)	Be exposed to a recording of fireworks at a low and controlled volume	Teach your kitten to love her travel carrier	Teach your kitten to enjoy taking medication (see Pill Your Pet with Kindness handout)	Touch your kitten on various body parts and give her a treat each time



For more information, please visit [www.fearfreehappyhomes.com](http://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com)



## **Treat Options for your Cat:**

- Canned Tuna or Salmon (low sodium)**
- Churu**
- Baby food**
- Olives (no pits)**
- Artichoke Hearts**
- Canned Pumpkin**
- Friskies**
- Liverwurst**
- Vegemite**
- Sardines (low sodium)**
- Shredded chicken (cooked, no seasoning)**
- Peanut Butter (no xylitol)**
- Cream Cheese (small amounts)**
- Whipped Cream**

# THE SPECTRUM OF FEAR, ANXIETY & STRESS

## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FIGHT/AGGRESSION (FAS 5)

- Offensive aggression - pupils constricted or dilated, cat leaning forward, ears forward, moving forward, whiskers forward, tail is an inverted L (first inch of tail is horizontal with ground then the tail drops down), rump raised higher than front (on tip toes), staring, may be growling.
- Defensive aggression - ears back, pupils dilated, hunkered down, tail tight or tucked or tail thrashing, whiskers back, hissing, lips pulled back, staring, furrowed brow, could be swatting.



## RED: SEVERE SIGNS - FLIGHT/FREEZE/FRET (FAS 4)

- Flight - actively trying to escape, pupils dilated, ears back, whiskers back, tail down and bottle brushed, fleeing, turning to look at stimulus.
- Freeze/Fret - tonic immobility, dilated pupils, body flattened and tense, tail tucked, increased respiratory rate, ears back, staring, whiskers back.



## YELLOW: MODERATE SIGNS (FAS 2-3)

- Ears further to the side, more pupil dilation but not completely dilated, increase in respiratory rate, brow furrowed, looking at stimulus instead of looking away, tail tight to body, possible tip of tail moving some, whiskers back, body crouched and leaning away.



## GREEN: MILD/SUBTLE SIGNS (FAS 1)

- Avoids eye contact, turns head away without moving away, partially dilated pupils, head held just slightly down, slight brow furrowing, whiskers slightly back, ears partially to the side, body shifted slightly away, tail closer to body with possibly some slight flicking.





For further information, guidance, and videos on how to train, do nail trims, or medicate your pets, please visit the Fear Free Happy Homes website: [www.fearfreehappyhomes.com](http://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com) This website also has an entire library of resources-including the bingo games and charts in this booklet-specifically formulated for you.

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*Being a pet owner is a great privilege and a significant responsibility. This guidebook only scratches the surface of ways to bond with your pet and improve their quality of life. By partnering with your Fear Free veterinary team, you will be set up for success!*

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