

How to help a traumatized/stressed dog

Professional advice given by:

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For dog owners/caretakers in critical circumstances:

- **Water is more important than food, share whatever food you have with your dog - it does not have to be dog food**
- **If it is noisy, keep a long line attached to the dog at all times so that they do not attempt to run away**
- **If you cannot go outside, make a toilet area with soil from house plants, paper or a piece of clothing**
- **Provide reassurance**
- **Let the dog choose to hide or be close to you**
- **If the dog is cold, provide a blanket which can help him to rest/sleep**
- **If your dog can sleep, that is the best for the dog**
- **Stay calm, be with your dog**
- **No training or playing in these circumstances**
- **The calmer you are, the calmer your dog will be too**

Dr Amber Batson, BVetMed MRCVS, veterinarian and behaviourist:

1. Provide reassurance. When we are scared we feel better for having others near us and supporting us. This can lessen the stress response. Talk gently, stroke them if they like it, offer gentle massage or grooming as they prefer. Bear in mind things they like normally might not be what they feel like now, and what they don't normally like might be a current preference, so observe, and respond.
2. If it is noisy, consider making a den which you can sit in together, and keep a light weight rope or long line attached to their collar or harness all the time so you can keep them under control should they attempt flight.
3. If you cannot be outside at all, try to encourage them to use a litter tray - find a towel or piece of clothing and use that as a base and cover with thinly shredded paper or natural materials like handfuls of grass, soil or leaves if you can get some, perhaps from a house plant.
4. Water is more important than food. If you have some pet food, offer a small amount once or twice a day- it may need to last some time. If you don't have any, then share a little of your own food. We don't need to eat much in stressful times so don't worry if you have limited resources right now. Resting and avoiding threat and remaining hydrated are the most important things.
5. Many activities we like to do with our pets help them thrive but aren't necessary to survive. Going for a walk, playing, chewing, are positive additions but they are things we can go a long time without. Staying safe physically is the most important thing needed to survive.

*Turid Rugaas, dog trainer and behaviour specialist, author of
"On talking terms with dogs":*

We live in a world where awful things happen - earthquakes, wars, and other catastrophes, and it affects people, but also their dogs. To keep people and animals safe as best we can, will sometimes be difficult and problematic. We worry about our dogs in situations like this.

Things might be very different, depending on what is happening, but the most important things that you can do will always be very simple.

If your dog can be with you:

For your dog it is enough just be there with you. The stress of the situation, and fear of what is going on, are an overload of mental stimulation that will make them physically tired and exhausted. This means that they do not need any exercising or activities. They will need to be with you, have you close, and sleep and rest a lot. No hugging or clinging to the dog, just let them be as close to you as they want. And rest, and sleep, and save energy.

Then they need water, and food. Water is essential, but they can handle scarce food for a while. Dogs can eat anything, which is how they have survived through millions of years, so they will eat whatever is available.

They need to pee and poo, and if there are limitations in where they can do that, you can try to find a spot as far away as possible from where you keep yourselves - in a corner somewhere, on a veranda, a little out of the way if possible. And if you have access to some soil or sand, lay it out on that spot, and the dog will use it in the end if there is no possibility of going out. You can use soil or sand from outdoors, or empty out flower pots and use the soil from them - whatever is available. Let him have time to find out about it, and do not fuss a lot. Stay calm.

If you are somewhere where it is cold, you might try to find blankets or covers to help the dog keep warm. That also helps him sleep. Rest and sleep is very important under conditions like this.

Aside from these practical considerations that must be solved in some way or another, your dogs will only need you to be there. No commands, no training, no activities - just be there. The trauma and stress means you should not and must not demand anything from them. They need to rest and save energy, and they are very good at that. You will also experience that dogs understand the seriousness of the situation, and will adapt in amazing ways.

They should never be in a crate, or left alone in a kennel when they have had a traumatic experience. They must be with you.

Be there for them, be calm and quiet yourself, show that you are your dog's closest family. Dogs look after each other, and after you when they can, but there are times in life when they will need you to look after them. That is all they need and want.

I have myself been running from war zones as a child, and I remember how exhausted I was all the time. I did not feel like playing at all, I just wanted to rest and sleep. Dogs are like us, with the same physiology and emotions. Too much physical activity will make them sick, as the body can not handle it all.

If they are stressed and therefore exhausted, they need you, and besides that, loads and loads of absolutely nothing.

If you have to leave your dog with someone else, or send him away:

**Information for the caretaker of a traumatized and stressed dog
moving to a new home or shelter**

Explain everything above to the caretakers. The dog must not be shut in a kennel or crate, or left by themselves. They need to be with someone.

Water, plenty of food, and also things to chew, as that will help them feel better.

No demands, no commands, no encouragement to play or mental stimulation - just a lot of absolutely nothing. They will be stressed by the changes in their life, and the stress will make them exhausted and more reactive. Rest and sleep will help the body cope, and get them through it in a better way.

Freedom to move around in a safe area, peeing and pooing when they need, and being able to move freely, but only if they choose to do so. Do not make them do anything, just let them choose.

People around them must be calm, move slowly, and not do anything threatening. Let the dogs have time to settle and feel safe. Sit still near them, reading or whatever they want to do, and just be calm.

The worst thing you can do is overstimulate them with exercise or trying to make them do things. A stressed and exhausted body cannot handle it.

It is the same when you take on a re-homed dog. In the beginning, it is only about eating, drinking, relieving themselves, and lots of rest and sleep. Freedom to move when they feel like it, freedom to choose what to do. When they start to be curious, it is the proof that they are moving in the right direction. If they have choices, time to settle, and are able to get the rest they need, they will cope sooner and better in a new environment.

If you are a private dog owner or shelter workers and want further advice please contact free of charge: helpline@nordicdogtrainer.com



This information is translated into several languages and can be found on this website:

www.nordicdogtrainer.com