

Freezing on walks



FOREVER HOUNDS TRUST

Matching greyhounds and lurchers to happy homes

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We often receive requests to help greyhounds who have started to freeze when out on their walk. This is more common in sighthounds than you might think – and there are lots of ways to help you both enjoy your walks again.

Why do some greyhounds freeze on walks?

You're enjoying a leisurely walk with your greyhound and suddenly, they put on the brakes and won't move. It can appear like your dog's paws are superglued to the pavement or that your dog is being 'stubborn' as, no matter what you do, you just can't get them to move.



It can be easy for us to misunderstand why our hounds behave in a certain way however, the reason for freezing is not that your hound is being "stubborn" or "dominant" (both misused and misunderstood terms when it comes to dog behaviour). It is more likely that your dog is scared or worried by something in their environment, and it is the underlying emotion of fear that has caused them to 'apply the brakes'.

You may wonder what your dog has to be afraid of – after all, they're in a comfortable family home, are well-fed and receive plenty of walks, love and attention. However, we need to remind ourselves many retired racing greyhounds' lives previously revolved around life in racing kennels and the routine that goes with it. Exposure to everyday sights and sounds is not something that the average greyhound experiences. The things we take for granted in everyday life are, for some greyhounds, completely alien and scary. Being a family pet is a wonderful opportunity for them to enjoy a lot of new things – but initially these can be quite overwhelming.

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The flight or fight response

Most of us have heard of the '*flight or fight*' response – when faced with a threatening situation we can choose to run away (flight) or resist forcibly (fight). Our dogs have the same response mechanism to things they view as potential threats, but with the addition of the freeze/planting behaviour – being rooted to the spot, in response to a perceived threat.

As our greyhounds are on-lead when they encounter a scary thing, their option to move away (flight) is removed which is why they freeze. They may just freeze/plant for a matter of seconds (which you may not notice), or they may suddenly stop and refuse to move forward.

Overcoming fears and getting moving again

To help our greyhounds adjust to these new experiences and overcome their fears, they need our time, patience, understanding and training using reward-based training methods. The key thing to remember is **not** to force your dog to move towards the thing they fear as this is counterproductive, making it likely for them to be more afraid of walks.

One of the main ways of helping our dogs overcome fears is teaching your dog that the 'scary stuff' isn't scary at all and that it is actually a very good thing, which predicts good stuff happening. This is counterconditioning and systematic desensitisation. It is very important that this is carried out as a very gradual process with repeated pairings of the 'scary stuff' with really good stuff.

Not every technique suits every dog – that is why it is important to speak to a qualified behaviourist about positive ways that you can help your dog to realise that the things they thought were scary are actually absolutely normal.

There are several ways that we can help you to apply these techniques with your dog, if they freeze on walks. It is not complicated and we can help to make a plan that fits with your life and your individual dog. It is important that every dog has help that is tailored for them – appropriate reward-based training will help you both to bond and will build trust to ensure that your relationship goes from strength to strength.

Further help

If your dog continues to freeze on walks please do contact our Post Homing Support Team for help and advice. You can reach the team by emailing: behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org