

PRESS RELEASE

**OVERCOMING RUFF TIMES: BRITS URGED TO “SPEAK MORE DOG”
TO HELP THE NATION’S PETS ADAPT TO BUSIER LIVES**

- Four in ten owners have noticed increased dog anxiety since lockdown eased in April, with puppies bought during lockdown more likely to show distress.
- Over a fifth (23%) unable to confidently spot the tell-tale signs their dog is anxious according to MORE THAN's research
- Animal behaviourist expert Karen Wild teams up with MORE THAN to highlight the benefits of 'dog talk' and easing pets into post-lockdown life.

LONDON, Wednesday 26th May: Pet-loving Brits are being encouraged to get clued up on 'dog language', as experts reveal the benefits of canine communication to tackle growing pet anxiety.

With many of us leading busier work and social lives, pet distress is developing into a major issue. In fact, a survey by MORE THAN insurance shows that four in ten (39%) dog owners have seen their pets become more anxious due to their routines changing since lockdown restrictions have eased, rising to nearly three in five (57%) owners who bought a puppy during the pandemic.

Busier dog walking routes (38%), increased socialising without their pets (32%) and spending more time at work (31%) were the most cited causes for dog anxiety, according to MORE THAN. Of those who reported increased anxiety in their dogs, one in four (25%) said it was due to them welcoming more visitors inside their home and garden.

Clinical animal behaviourist Karen Wild believes that a greater understanding of how our pets communicate, and responding to them in the correct reassuring way, can play a key part in helping them adapt to their new normal.

Karen says: “I'm getting an influx of calls from clients with dog anxiety-related queries, particularly for those dogs in their adolescence, who are having to deal with more visitors in their home – some for the very first time. While there are numerous reasons why a dog barks or makes certain sounds, we can all do more to 'speak more dog' by understanding the body language and visual signs our pets are giving us.

“Without preventative action, pet anxiety can escalate. As professionals, we are keen to help owners to create a plan for helping our dogs to get used to us leading busier lives, along with the support of MORE THAN insurance.”

In response to growing concerns surrounding pet anxiety, MORE THAN has drawn on their expertise to create a comprehensive [guide about how to identify and treat separation anxiety](#). They also advise affected owners to seek guidance from its vefone service, a freephone helpline for its pet insurance customers providing 24/7 access to expert nurses of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Luke Mangion, veterinary surgeon at MORE THAN, added: *“Stress and anxiety not only make your pet unhappy, but they can also contribute to the development of inappropriate toileting behaviour or destructive behaviour. Some anxiety issues can also result in aggressive responses if not handled and approached in the correct manner, which can lead to unfair blame on your struggling pet, so it is important not to force the dog while working on their anxiety. Patience is key or you risk exacerbating the problem.”*

Tell-tale signs of pet anxiety

For Karen, easing pet anxiety is all about spending the time to learn your dog's behaviour and understanding what they're telling you day-to-day. For instance, if your dog is growling around

people, it's often a sign they are feeling under pressure and afraid. It's important for owners to know the steps they can take to address this behaviour before it gets uncontrollable.

"Your dog will 'tell' you much sooner if they are a bit overwhelmed, or agitated, with their body signals", according to Karen. "These early, but tell-tale signs can include frequent yawning (not just when they have awoken) and licking their lips – not just after a meal. Dogs demonstrating feelings of uncertainty can show this by flattening their ears back against their heads, while it's common for their mouths to tighten too.

"When it comes to keeping eye contact, they often look away if you address them or turn their head the other way." Karen also notes that some dogs prefer to just walk off to help calm themselves. These are the times we need to give them space, she says. If you see these signs, it's time to look at what's happening around your dog and see if you can spot anything that might be making them a little agitated.

How to communicate better with your dog

The survey from MORE THAN suggests that owners have a long way to go when it comes to understanding 'dog talk', with over a fifth (23%) unable to confidently spot the tell-tale signs their dog is anxious. Despite the proven benefits of canine communication, over half (58%) have yet to try professionally recommended techniques to ease their dogs' distress.

Karen continues: *"There are lots of things owners can do to help ease their dogs into post-pandemic life and 'speaking more dog' through body language is one of them. It takes time for dogs to adapt, but taking just some of these simple steps can go a long way to help:*

- 1) **Pair the 'bad' with the 'good':** *It's a good idea to pair anything that's proving challenging for your dog, such as meeting new people, with enjoyable events such as toys and tasty food. This will help your dog learn that there are positives involved in the moment, making it more likely to put them at ease on future occasions.*
- 2) **Let them set the pace:** *If your dog is struggling with new surroundings or new faces, then allow your dog to calmly approach the situation when they are ready to do so. Avoid forcing them to meet and greet new people, and instead let them take in new environments at their own speed.*
- 3) **Think about your long-term situation:** *It's important to think about what your 'new normal' looks like and which elements you can start subtly introducing to your dog as part of their daily routine. Gradual changes are the least stressful, which is why I'm advising my clients so start planning now. If your dog shows more extreme signs such as growling, lunging or barking at visitors, contact a clinical animal behaviourist who can help.*

For more information, further advice and to watch Karen's helpful video on how to ease your pet's anxiety, please visit: www.morethan.com/pet-insurance/guides/dog-separation-anxiety/

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

March 2021 research: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from Censuswide. Total sample size was 1,000 dog owners in the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th - 18th May 2021.

For more information or interview requests, please contact the team on MoreThanPR@grayling.com

About MORE THAN

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MORE THAN is a trading style of Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance plc. Established in 2001, the company offers car, home, pet and business insurance.