



# Identifying thresholds

Finding and working through your pet's **point of no return**



# Tipping point

Problematic behaviours usually arise when your pet reaches 'crisis point' emotionally. They feel stressed, fearful, frustrated, or excited to the point this manifests as say, house soiling or aggression. A very important piece of the puzzle is finding out at which point the 'trigger' or thing causing the emotion becomes too intense for them, and tips them over into reacting inappropriately. This is their **threshold**, individual to each pet.





# Moment of truth

You may feel your pet's problematic behaviour arises 'out of the blue'. This is very rare; most behaviours are preceded by subtle signals which, to the untrained eye, are easy to miss. Take a look at our Ladder of Aggression post for canine signals of stress. If such signals are ignored, as your pet gets to their tipping point they display a moment of hesitation. Here, they **weigh up** whether they're able to cope, or need to react.





# Be the help at hand

If your pet hesitates, is tense, alert, and they are focusing on the object of their distress or excitement, they're approaching their tipping point. You should move them away from the trigger and offer a reward. To work on their undesirable behaviour, we need to practice training when they are **below threshold** (before point of reacting) so they're able to learn to relax around the trigger. No learning or relaxing can happen if overwhelmed.



**come,  
Pouglas!**



# Three adjustors

To evoke relaxation around a trigger, training must happen in a place they can see and acknowledge the stimulus, but at a point it does not evoke a negative reaction. Your pet should be able to see it, be calm, and interact with you in its' presence. To do this, we must make the trigger less stressful. How stressful your pet finds the trigger is **controlled by 3 things**: how far away it is, how quickly it's moving, and how 'intense' it is. Imagine these 3 controls on a sliding scale, as below.





# Distance

Distance can make all the difference, whatever the motivational cause is. Imagine you suffer from arachnophobia. If the spider is crawling on your hand, that may be very scary and you will struggle to cope. If the spider is a mile away and you are looking at it through a telescope, it probably wouldn't induce half as much fear. Try to ensure your pet's trigger is a distance away, enabling them to relax, acknowledge it, but not react.





# Movement

**Movement can make a difference, depending on the emotional cause. For example, if your pet is fearful of bikes, if the bike was moving quickly towards them this would increase their fear. Similarly, if caused by frustration (wanting to get to the trigger), if it is moving around this might increase the desire to get over there. Try to ensure the trigger is still, or moves predictably, not toward your pet.**





# Intensity

This adjustor is harder to define, and is specific to the trigger. For example, if your dog were afraid of thunder, the volume of the thunder would depict its' intensity. If your cat was fearful of men with deep voices, the volume of the voice would impact intensity. For our example of Pouglas and the builder, it may be what the dog assumes is 'unusual' clothing that makes him different and scary. So we can remove his hat to lower intensity.



Pets Explained





# Finding balance

These sliding scales can be used as trial and error to find your pet's threshold. Once you know where this line lies, you have the power to avoid situations your pet may become overwhelmed and react unfavourably. Next, **get in touch with a behaviourist** to form a plan to gradually reintroduce the trigger. This must be done carefully to avoid confusing & worsening behaviour, but is very successful.

