



Car travel

Car travel is an important part of life for many dogs. It enables them (and us!) to explore new and exciting places together. However, the sights, sounds, and movements when travelling can be concerning for our dogs. We need to make sure our furry friends are safe and feel confident and relaxed when travelling in the car, no matter where they're going!

Safety first

Rule 57 of the Highway Code states: 'When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so that they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage or dog guard are considered safe ways of restraining animals in cars'.

If using a seat belt harness, make sure your dog is neither behind the driver nor able to reach them. Crates, pet carriers and fitted guards must be securely fixed in place so there is no risk of slipping. Your dog should be able to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably within these secure areas. Thick bedding can help to absorb vibrations during travel.

If you're travelling with more than one dog, ideally separate them so that each dog can have their own space.

Hot temperatures inside cars quickly become fatal, even if it seems cool outside. Measures such as parking in the shade cannot make it safe, so never leave your dog alone in the car, and keep them as cool as possible when travelling.

Planning journeys at cooler times of the day, using sun blinds and air conditioning, or opening the window a little can make the journey much more comfortable.



Dogs cannot cool down as effectively as people, so they might be at greater risk of heat stroke and dehydration. Keep a supply of water in the car and plan where to take regular breaks for toileting, exercise, and replenishing water. Non-slip/non-spill travel water bowls can be very useful!

Dogs shouldn't be allowed to hang their heads out of the window as this could be dangerous for them and distracting for the driver and other road users.

To reduce the risk of travel sickness, make sure your dog has their last meal at least two hours before travelling. If your dog regularly suffers from travel sickness contact your vet for advice.

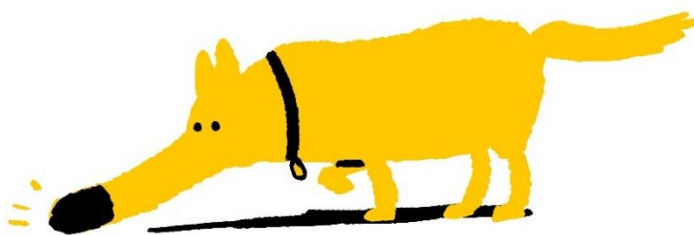
Older dogs, smaller dogs, or those less mobile might benefit from a ramp to help get into and out of the car.

First introduce the ramp completely flat on the ground. Use treats to reward your dog for walking over it so they can get used to how it feels.

Once your dog is comfortable with this, you can find something solid to prop the ramp against at a lower height than your car, and again reward them with treats for investigating and walking up it. This gets your dog used to walking upwards and being higher than the ground before you place the ramp up to your car.

This may take several sessions depending on how confident your dog is. It's important to always go at your dog's pace, and to make it positive and fun by using tasty treats or rewards that your dog really likes.

Supporting your dog



If your dog already shows signs of being frightened about travelling in the car, never force them to travel. This may worry them more and they might feel trapped and panic.

Either find someone to stay with them if you need to travel or avoid the journey/make alternative travel plans if possible. Avoid car journeys completely while you seek the guidance of an experienced behaviourist.

For advice on sourcing a behaviourist please visit:

dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/behaviour/finding-behaviour-and-training-support

If you see a dog in distress in a hot vehicle, please call **999**.

Getting comfortable with the car

It's important to introduce your dog to vehicles in a gradual and positive way.

With the engine off, start by using your dog's favourite treats to reward them for being calm when they're near the car - even just walking around it to begin with!

Open the doors and reward your dog for getting closer. Then reward them for poking their head into the doorways - building this up so that your dog chooses to explore and go inside the car themselves.

Carefully placing some treats or toys might help gain their interest in the car's interior. Encourage your pup and reward them for investigative behaviour, but try to avoid coaxing or luring them into a situation they might find scary.

Once your dog is comfortable getting into the car, spend time sitting inside with them. Use treats to reward your dog for simply being in the car or offer them a long-lasting chew to enjoy. This is so your dog learns that the car is an enjoyable place to be. Keep the engine off and doors open to begin with.

Providing your dog is relaxed, you can progress to closing the doors.

Introducing movement

Your dog also needs to get used to the sound and movement of the car.

It's important to introduce car travel carefully, because for some dogs being in this confined space while it's moving might feel very unusual to begin with, especially if they've never been in a car before.

It's useful to give your dog something enjoyable when there is a change in their environment, so when you turn the engine on, give them a tasty treat. To begin with, simply turn the engine on but don't drive anywhere. Slowly, build up to having the engine on for longer.

Over time, and providing your dog is relaxed, gradually build up to moving the car a short distance. Remember to give your dog something enjoyable, such as a long-lasting chew or favourite toy, to build up positive associations with the car moving.

Start with short, slow and gentle, familiar journeys. Having a friend, who your dog knows well and is comfortable with, accompanying you can be helpful so there is someone to be beside them.

Drive smoothly allowing plenty of time for braking. A jerky or uncomfortable journey might make your dog less willing to travel next time!

Getting in and out **safely**

Ensuring your dog is calm and paying attention to you before they get in or out of the car is important.

If your dog has travelled before and enjoyed it, they might be very excited about jumping into and out of the car when you arrive at the park – but this isn't a good idea as it can put them at risk of injury or accident.

Ask them to sit while you slowly open the door and give them a few treats to keep them sitting as you do. If you do this every time you arrive at the car they'll soon start to sit and wait patiently before you guide them in safely.

Likewise, teach your dog to get out of the car calmly and quietly by slowly opening the door just a little way and waiting for your dog to sit or stay still before you invite them out.

Always reward your dog for their patience with their favourite tasty treat, or two!

Our **Doorways Training** handout provides guidance on teaching a dog to pass through an open door while giving their owner full attention. This teaching can be applied to the car door too!



Contacts for **further support**

We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your **Dogs Trust dog** please email:

postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk

Everyone else can access support by emailing our training and behaviour helpline:

behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:

dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.

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