What should I do now?

C-BARQ scores are only as accurate as the information you provide, and, because they are based on the dog's past behavior, may not predict how he or she will behave in the future. Nevertheless, if your dog received only green or a few yellow bars, it suggests that you are probably enjoying relatively trouble-free companionship. Bear in mind, however, that the color codes are only guidelines. The closer your dog's scores approach the orange and red zones for each subscale, the greater the likelihood that you will find his or her behavior obnoxious, difficult, or unrewarding.

If your dog received orange or red bars, don't panic. Not all temperament traits scored by the C-BARQ are equally problematic. Below you will find some specific information about what the individual subscales mean, and how urgently one may wish to act on the various ratings. We have included the most critical subscales first (aggression, fear and separation-related behavior), followed by those that may be less urgent in terms of the risks they pose.

My dog received red or orange bars for one (or more) of the aggression subscales: Should I be concerned?

In general, red or orange bars for any of the four aggression subscales should be taken most seriously because of the potential risks of bite injuries to yourself, members of your family, other people, and/or other dogs. For obvious reasons, these risks will be greater for medium to large size dogs than for small ones.

My dog received red or orange bars for one (or more) of the fear subscales.

Red or orange bars for any of the three fear subscales should be a cause for concern. Although a fearful dog may be easier to live with than an aggressive one, its quality of life is generally reduced, and a frightened dog is more likely to bite in self-defense than one that is unafraid. This is also likely to be true of the ‘touch sensitivity’ subscale.

My dog received red or orange bars for the separation-related behavior subscale.

While perhaps not as pressing a concern as a dog that receives red/orange bars for aggression or fear, dogs with separation-related problems can present significant challenges—depending on the proximity of neighbors, and the value of your home and furniture—that require urgent solutions. Dogs with separation-related problems can be extremely destructive, may howl, bark or whine excessively, and may have a diminished quality of life.

My dog received red/orange bars for the trainability subscale.

Red/orange bars for trainability may or may not be a concern to a particular owner. Factors that may help to determine whether or not action should be taken include the dog's size and strength, where you live, and the level of obedience you expect from your dog. If you live near a busy street, for example, a dog that fails to come when called may be a significant concern. Similarly, a medium-large breed dog that does not respond to owner commands may require more urgent intervention than a toy breed that scores low on trainability.

My dog received red/orange bars for the predatory chasing subscale.

The significance of red/orange bars for this subscale may depend on where you live and the likelihood of encountering animals to chase. It will also depend on whether this chasing behavior is likely to put your dog or other animals at risk for injury or death (e.g., being struck by an automobile). Chasing is a natural behavior for many dogs, so whether or not it is a significant concern depends upon its relationship to the dog's safety, the individual owner's ability to tolerate and manage this behavior, and whether or not a high 'prey drive' is considered desirable or undesirable.

My dog received red/orange bars for the excitability and/or energy subscales.

Red/orange bars for excitability and energy are a concern if you are finding the dog's behavior to be a serious source of irritation. The nuisance value of hyper-excitability tends to arise from its association with annoying behavior, such as excessive barking or jumping up on people, both of which are readily modified by training. As with people, a dog's energy is strongly influenced by its age, and many owners seem to tolerate or even enjoy very high or very low energy dogs without much problem. The ability to tolerate a dog's particular energy level is largely a matter of individual preference.

My dog received red/orange bars for the attachment and/or attention-seeking subscale.

Very low or high levels of attachment and attention-seeking can be problematic, although for different reasons. Dogs that show unusually low levels of these traits may seem aloof or unaffectionate while those at the higher end of the scale may be overly demanding and intrusive. Whether or not these particular traits are a concern is really a matter of personal preference.

My dog received "moderate" or "serious concern" alerts for an item or items in the 'miscellaneous' category.

High scores for behaviors in the 'miscellaneous' category are less reliable as indicators of problems than the main C-BARQ subscales, and the way in which they are graded reflects this difference. For example, a "moderate concern" alert corresponds to a moderate behavior problem, while "serious concern" indicates that your dog has scored at a level that most experts would consider serious or severe, depending on the particular behavior involved. Furthermore, individual owners vary enormously in their ability or willingness to tolerate and manage these kinds of miscellaneous behaviors, and this will greatly influence the extent to which they are perceived as "problems".

What if my dog has a problem?
The C-BARQ is essentially a diagnostic screening tool. While the C-BARQ Online helps us to identify areas of problem behavior, this site does not offer advice on the most appropriate methods of treating such problems. However, most behavior problems in dogs can be treated successfully, and there are a variety of professional organizations whose members may be able to help you and your dog with a problem.

If you live within driving distance of Philadelphia, PA, you may wish to consider scheduling an appointment with the Behavior Clinic of the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, either by calling 215-898-3347 during office hours, or by emailing: behaviorclinic@vet.upenn.edu.

If you live outside of this area, contact your local veterinarian about obtaining a referral to a behavioral consultant. Alternatively, the following organizations may be able to provide you with guidance on finding a suitably qualified person in your area:

In the USA:
- American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior
- American College of Veterinary Behaviorists
- Animal Behavior Society
- Association of Professional Dog Trainers

In the UK and Europe:
- Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors
- Association for the Study of Animal Behavior
- European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology

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