

DOG ANXIETY

Helping the worrisome canine



As many of you know, I have a border collie named Janie. Jane is an amazing dog, and is smart enough to do my taxes (seriously). As she has gotten older, she has become increasingly anxious of a multitude of things. Thunderstorms, cage dryers, fire in the fireplace, and the washer and dryer in our house. (The last one is my personal favorite. I think she feeds off of my hatred of doing laundry.) Increasing anxiety is very common in the aging canine.

A lot of the time owners do not realize their family pet is having an anxiety issue because they are unaware of what *physical characteristics* to watch for. Anxiety plagues more dogs than owners may realize, and being able to *recognize the physical signs of anxiety* can help address the problem in a timely fashion. By catching it early, a training regimen can be initiated to help address the problem before it becomes out of control. If left unattended, anxiety levels can rise over time making training and rehabilitation that much more difficult.

Physical Signs of Anxiety in Dogs:

- * Panting
- * Dilated Pupils
- * Trembling
- * Excessive Salivation (drooling a lot)
- * Hiding *or* not wanting to leave your side
- * Refusing to eat
- * Reverse sneezing
- * Not responding to commands
- * Not responding to owner
- * Pacing, not able to stay in one spot
- * Ears pulled back, eyes wide
- * Pain threshold goes down (will harm themselves to get away from stressor)
- * Vocalization (crying, whining, barking, etc.)

A multitude of stressors can make dogs anxious. A few obvious things consist of thunderstorms, fireworks, and trips to the veterinarian.

The canine level of anxiety can range a great deal between dogs. It is dependent on the individual dog and the intensity level of the stressor. If we placed 3 dogs in the same room with the same stressor stimulus, the first dog might just present with panting and dilated pupils, the second dog might pace uncontrollably,

and the third dog could be so stressed out it causes harm to itself (jumping through windows, clawing at crates, etc.). The important thing to remember is to *observe your dog*, and when you see signs of anxiety, start addressing it **RIGHT AWAY**.

A few simple exercises and consistent training can turn these stressors into positive experiences for our beloved canine friends. Number one thing to **NOT** do is to *CONSOLE* your dog during this time of stress and anxiety. This is rewarding them for the anxiety, and we do not want to reward unwanted behavior.

When your dog is showing signs of anxiety, figure out what the stressor is. Is there a thunderstorm outside? Is it around the 4th of July? Is it laundry day? =) Remember-dogs hearing is SO MUCH MORE SENSITIVE than ours. Just because we can't hear a thunderstorm on the horizon does not mean the dog can't.

Lets take thunderstorm anxiety for example, as this is the most common phobia we see at the clinic. To help desensitize the dog from thunderstorms, I would have a client purchase a CD with the sound of thunderstorms on it. Place in CD player and play at a *VERY LOW VOLUME*. Once again, remember that dogs hearing is *MUCH* more sensitive than ours! When the CD is playing, engage the dog in play, giving treats, feeding meals, etc. Gradually over time (we're talking months) increase the volume of the CD. Only play the CD during times of happiness for the dog (play, food, treats, etc.) If/when a REAL thunderstorm happens, have a 'safe area' made for the dog. Cover a crate with a blanket to make it nice and dark. Put the crate in a room toward the center of the house to minimize exposure to the flashes of lightning.

Sometimes medicine is needed to calm the dog during the severe times of stress. I'll list a few natural things to try at the end of this article before jumping to actually sedating the dog (although this is sometimes necessary, as it is with my dog).

Remember-positive association training can take a long time to see effects. Stick with it, as it DOES HELP over time. It has helped Janie significantly, although it has not helped the dirty laundry pile go down....

THINGS TO TRY:

Composure Chews –

all natural calming supplement

www.vetriscience.com/composure-soft-dogs-MD-LD.php

Canine Anxiety Wrap-

A stretchy shirt that calms the dog. It works WONDERS! Trust me!!

www.anxietywrap.com

*****There are other things your Veterinarian can offer you. Discuss with them the appropriate protocol for your dog, as it can be patient dependent.*****