



## Noise Aversion and Phobia

Noise aversion is common in dogs and cats. Our pets can be afraid of any sound from electronic sounds to thunderstorms to big trucks. Noise aversion can lead to generalized anxiety or global phobia where the dog or cat is afraid of going outside or coming out into the house. Treatment of noise aversion and phobia should start immediately as soon as you notice any signs of stress in response to sounds such as trembling, panting, pacing, coming to find you, trying to hide, body language of fear (ears back, hiding, tail down) and vocalization. Noise aversion and phobia are both treatable, but often not curable. Depending on the severity of your pet's disorder he may need to be treated with medication temporarily or for life. This disorder is generally under good control in 2-4 months depending on the severity of your pet's reactions and his response to treatment.

### Storms

Storms are unique in that they are completely outside of our control and they often pop up unpredictably. In addition, dogs and cats associate the lightning, rain, darkening of the sky and even the changes in the barometric pressure with the sound of thunder. This leads the pet to consequently become frightened of those things as well. Often, dogs become afraid of the crate as well during this time because it is paired with the storm.

### Dos and Don'ts for noise events (storms, fireworks, garbage day, etc)

#### DO

- Block off the windows by pulling the blinds or blocking your dog out of rooms with windows.
- Send your dog to his sanctuary room space. Stay with him unless you have conditioned him to stay in that space happily. See below.
- Turn on the radio, TV, fan or white noise machine.
- Give your pet something fun to do like a food filled toy or play his favorite game with him.
- Hand your pet 3 toys from the toy box that he hasn't seen in a while.
- Act excited and happy to be playing with him during the noise event.
- Consider day boarding at a noise-proof dog daycare facility on days when big noise events are predicted.
- Interact with him by practicing his favorite tricks.
- Let him sit next to you in his sanctuary space.
- Try the Adaptil or Feliway diffuser in the sanctuary space.
- Bring out his very favorite toy during noise events (storms, fireworks) and put it away immediately afterward.

- Do pet and comfort your dog, especially if all of the above haven't been effective.

### **DON'T**

- Punish your pet for his behavior during a noise event. Punishing him isn't going to make him less scared!
- Ignore your dog. Ignoring him leaves him to endure the event on his own without any help at all.
- Confine your dog in a crate unless he LOVES his crate.
- Close your pets in the sanctuary space unless that helps him calm down or he has to be separated from other pets.

### **Creating a Sanctuary Space**

- Creating a sanctuary space is essential for the management of noise phobic dogs. It provides them with a space where they can feel protected.
- Elements of a perfect sanctuary room:
  - No or few windows.
  - Interior room.
  - A place that your dog already goes when he is frightened.
  - Consistent appearance. The sanctuary space should always look the same if possible. If it is not possible for it to always be the same, it should look the same during noise events.

### **Management**

- Whenever you see your dog relaxing in the sanctuary space, reward him by tossing in a treat or petting him if he likes being petted.
- Toss treats into the sanctuary space daily when your dog so that your dog can find them.
- Getting Your Dog Accustomed to the sanctuary room
- Prepare a food toy with a mix of delicious treats, some kibble and some soft food for dog and dry treats for cats. If your pet doesn't eat out of food toys, you can use other types of toys which don't have food.
- Go the sanctuary room with your pet.
- Place the toy down and sit nearby. If your pet goes to the toy and starts to eat out of it, don't say anything. Just let him play with the toy.
- Stay with your pet until he is done with the toy or the toy is empty.
- Do this a couple of days in a row until when you put the toy down, your pet goes right to it and starts to eat it. Now you are ready to start to leave the room.
- Depending on how independent your pet is, you may be able to progress very quickly with the next part of the training. Some pets will have a difficult time accepting their pet parent's departure. Please be patient and keep at it.
- Stand up and then immediately sit back down. If your pet gets up, don't do or say anything and stand still (you will feel a little funny doing this) until he focuses his attention on his toy again. When he does, sit back down.

- Continue as above until you can stand up and sit back down without your dog paying much attention.
- Next, stand up and take one step away. If your pet stands up, stand still until he is focused on his toy again. When he is, sit back down. In this way, slowly increase the distance that you can walk from your pet without him getting up and following you.
- Progress slowly and end the session when your pet is successful. Just sit back down and let him finish his food toy.
- Gradually increase the amount of time spend out of the room, by adding 1-2 minutes per day. Your goal is to be able to leave your dog in the room for 1 hour. If you need to use multiple food toys to accomplish this goal, please do.