Stress Control FAQs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

- My dog becomes anxious when I have guests over, especially children. Is there anything I can do?
- My dog is fearful of strange noises like thunder or fireworks. How can I help him?
- Are there other things I can do to help my pet lower his anxiety level?
- What is separation anxiety?
- What can I do about separation anxiety?

My dog becomes anxious when I have guests over, especially children. Is there anything I can do?
Children are great big bundles of energy to a dog. Some dogs get anxious about strangers. Dogs that are not used to children or other visitors may either act shy, go into hiding, or even become aggressive. The best way to deal with this is to socialize your dog to children or strangers. Over a period of several weeks, try the following:

First, invite one person that the dog is fond of who does not live with him come to the door and have him distribute a treat and quietly pet the dog. Then bring in several people the dog is familiar with so he'll get used to a group. Add one person that the dog does not know, all the while praising the dog and giving him treats when he shows good behavior with guests. Add a child and then more children until the dog is familiar with a group. Remember to always supervise children with dogs.
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My dog is fearful of strange noises like thunder or fireworks. How can I help him?
Noise phobia may be traced to a particular bad experience of a noise, but often, no triggering event can be ascertained. The owner's attitude can influence the severity of the fear. Similarly, if the owner attempts to overly comfort the animal, the animal interprets it as confirming there really is something to be afraid of. In some cases, the petting or comforting is really positive reinforcement of an undesirable behavior.

Products such as valerian and chamomile Ultra-Calm® Bites and Rescue Remedy have been used with some success. These two therapies take effect within an hour of administration, and should be given prior to the fear-producing event.

For more therapies when your pet is afraid of loud noises, click here >
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Are there other things I can do to help my pet lower his anxiety level?
Having a regular exercise schedule can help with many different types of anxiety and fears. The exercise will help to tire the animal, both mentally and physically, and may make her less responsive to the fearful things. In addition, exercise has the effect of increasing natural serotonin levels, which can act as a sedative.
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What is separation anxiety?
A dog with separation anxiety becomes abnormally anxious when separated from his owner. The severity of the anxiety and behavior the dog exhibits varies from animal to animal. Separation anxiety can result in problematic behaviors such as: whining, pacing, salivation, barking, howling, scratching, chewing, digging, urinating or defecating, or destroying personal items or household objects.
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What can I do about separation anxiety?
If you suspect your dog is suffering from severe separation anxiety - especially if he is harming himself or your property - please consult with your veterinarian to find the best method of treatment. For milder cases, you may want to try one or more of the following tips to help reduce your dog's anxiety:

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- *More exercise* - Go for more walks and throw the ball more often. Tired dogs are naturally less anxious.
- *Soften your departures & returns* - Keep your departures and returns low-keyed and unexciting.
- *Gradually lengthen periods of your absence* - Stage several short departures/arrivals throughout the day, gradually lengthening each absence as your dog adjusts.
- *Non-prescription stress reduction formulas* - A number of non-prescription calming products such as Ultra-Calm® Bites use natural herbal formulas to help calm your pet for short periods of 1-2 hours.
- *Pheromone Plug-In* - Many dog owners have seen a remarkable improvement in their dog's anxiety with a relatively new product, the Adaptil® Happy Home Diffuser. Inserted in any wall outlet, and odorless to humans, it releases Dog Appeasing Pheromones (D.A.P) in the air throughout the entire room. Mimicking a new mother's natural pheromones, it reduces and prevents stress-related behaviors such as barking, whining, chewing, and soiling.

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