

Holidays: Calming Your Stressed-Out Dog

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We are not the only ones who may have some stress during the holiday season - our pets, generally sensitive to our moods and feelings as well as the changes in routine, may also be under some unusual stress. And like us, some animals exhibit stress in the form of fears and phobias. Before the holiday season starts and before guests begin to arrive is a good time to work on some fears and phobias that may manifest themselves during this time.

Fear of different people and/or children

Children are great big bundles of energy to a dog and groups of people at parties are not much different. During the holidays your dog may be encountering both situations quite a lot and you are best off getting your dog used to them before they come around.

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 start getting your dog used to strangers before the holiday season starts.

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.

Fear of noises

The holidays may bring with them a lot of noise. Of course unless you live in certain areas of the country, thunderstorms are not likely to be a problem at this time. But if you have a particularly sensitive dog, even the banging of pots and pans during Thanksgiving can cause anxiety.

A 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. The petting or comforting is really positive reinforcement of an undesirable behavior.

Products such as valerian and chamomile [Ultra-Calm](#) and [Rescue Remedy](#) have been used with some success. These two products should be given about 1 hour prior to a stressful event.

Never underestimate the power of exercise

Your pet should receive vigorous exercise daily. 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.

Whether your pet has fears or not, the holiday season is a time to really pay attention to your pet. It will do you both a world of good.

