

CANINE Anxiety

by Carrie Donahue, DVM

It's a dog's life! How often has this old adage crossed your mind when you feel stressed out? After all, your furry companion doesn't have job responsibilities, bills, or kids to deal with. Yet surprisingly, the family dog has its own set of stressors that can leave him or her feeling anxious. And how we handle their anxiety can either help to ease their apprehension or make it worse.

Dogs live in the moment and can be extremely sensitive to what's going on in their environment. Making matters worse, they can't tell you what's wrong. They can only convey their anxious feelings through their body language—and that can mean acting out in less than desirable ways. Signs of anxiety can include excessively licking their chops, showing the whites of their eyes, panting regardless of the temperature, pacing, barking and retreating, tucking their tail between their legs, and turning their head away.

While any animal can show occasional signs of anxiety, keep an eye out for any of these behaviors that occur on a regular basis. And try to see things from the dog's perspective. Notice it's what *they* find upsetting, not just what you think they should or shouldn't feel is worrisome. So what's worrying your dog? Common stressors include:

- **Not getting adequate rest.**
- **People or animals acting strangely, from the dog's perspective. This may be how your dog views your vet or dog groomer.**
- **Loud or unusual noises like fireworks and thunder.**
- **Out of the ordinary handling, such as rough handling.**
- **Extreme temperatures.**
- **Not getting enough exercise or mental stimulation.**
- **Inappropriate or excessive feeding.**
- **An owner not accepting normal animal behavior—a condition known as anthropomorphizing.**

Do you sense the pattern here? No dog appreciates an environment that is extreme, inadequate, or excessive. Canines like things routine. Since knowing what to expect is what brings them comfort, providing normalcy for your dog is one of the best gifts you can give him or her. Getting the day going at the same time each day, going to bed around the same time, a consistent feeding time, and scheduled exercise all help to make your dog feel safe and secure.

If your dog had their way, you would probably never leave the house without them, take them to the vet, or allow any deviation from a routine! Since that's neither possible nor desirable, here are some tips to help your pet exist in a world of change that can be very disturbing to their senses.



Anthropomorphism and Canine Anxiety

Dogs are dogs, and people are people. But to some people, that statement is not acceptable. While it's a common and endearing tendency to think of your dog as family and attribute uniquely human characteristics to him, it's a practice that can be taken to an extreme. When that happens, it's called anthropomorphism. The consequences of forgetting that your dog is not a child or a human

can lead to a wrong view of canine psychology—and less than desired canine behavior. It can end in a misinterpretation of your dog's intentions and motives, setting your dog up for a life without the limitations, rules, and boundaries that they need to thrive. An example is a dog struggling with separation anxiety. If you baby talk and coddle instead of giving the dog what it needs—a confidence boost with clear boundaries and positive

reinforcement—your dog may never be able to relax when they are alone. Dog owners who forget that dogs should be treated correctly for their species can be at the very root of setting up behavior and anxiety issues. Take a moment to ask yourself if you are moving in the arena of misinterpretation of your dog's motives and emotions. Remember—the goal is always a happy, healthy dog who lives in harmony with your household for years to come.



DOGGONE STATISTICS

DOGS OWNED in the U.S. –
89.7 million

Dogs who
OWN
CLOTHES

31%



Dogs who GO
TO DAYCARE – 2%



Dog owners
who say their
dog RELIEVES
THEIR STRESS

67%

Dog owners who have their
DOGS IN THEIR WILLS – 44%

DOG OWNERS SPEND on
average annually on their dogs
\$3,000 PER YEAR

Dogs who GO
ON VACATION
with their owners

40%



DON'T SEND MIXED SIGNALS

Think you're doing your pet a favor by letting them on the couch "just this once?" You're not. If the rule in your house is no animals on the furniture, your dog will feel confused when he gets yelled at the next time he jumps on the couch. Even training commands need to stay consistent and clear. Any exception you allow to a rule seems chaotic and bewildering to your pet.

GRADUAL IS BEST

It's inevitable that there will be change in your dog's world. The best rule of thumb is to introduce change gradually whenever possible. If multiple changes are necessary, work in one at a time. Remember, it's the stability of a consistent routine and knowing what to expect that enables your dog to occasionally handle a routine break with little or no anxiety.

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

From your dog's point of view, keeping a perfect routine and having you at home 24/7 would be ideal. Of course, that's not the way things work in real life. Fortunately, there's a safe, easy solution that can help to take the edge off your dog's anxiety. Hungarian scientists have discovered that a plant called *Echinacea angustifolia*—when grown under controlled conditions and processed using a special extraction—was able to deliver feelings of calm and reduce the sense of stress in dogs. The plant provides

brain-specific compounds called echinacosides, which are able to bind safely to brain receptors to get the desired effect.

You may know echinacea for its ability to treat the common cold. This isn't quite the same thing. *Echinacea angustifolia* has a unique key compound that reduces anxiety and nervous tension. This formula, available as a tablet, doesn't make dogs sleepy or drowsy, and it works quickly. It's a good daily option for anxiety-prone pets, or for use occasionally if you find your dog in a situation that you know is going to cause less than desirable feelings and behavior, such as a trip to the groomer or a noisy 4th of July celebration.

Paying attention to your dog's day-to-day life, remaining consistent with how you train and nurture your pet, and taking advantage of the natural ways to encourage a calm existence can all add up to the best life for you and your dog—**anxiety-free and full of joy.** ■



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